"IT'S 24-7!":

THE PRODUCTION, MEANING AND MEDIATION OF

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF STRESS

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**"IT'S 24-7!": THE PRODUCTION, MEANING AND MEDIATION OF
STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF STRESS**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

**Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts
Memorial University of Newfoundland**

January 2006

St. John's   Newfoundland

Abstract

This study set out to explore the experiences of stress among upper level sociology students at an Atlantic Canadian University. A qualitative standpoint methodology informed the data collection which used demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with sixteen students and three semi-structured interviews with key informants. The analysis illustrates how various contextual and interactional factors produce and mediate students' experiences of stress. Their stories and comments show that they experience stress physically and emotionally, that the social meanings surrounding stress mediate how they interpret and deal with it and that the social context of education can both produce and mediate stress for students. The study contributes to existing research on student stress by exploring the social context that contributes to the experience of stressors and the use of coping techniques among students transitioning out of a non-professional undergraduate university program into the labour force or further study. Further, this study recognizes that there are social discourses associated with stress that influence how students experience and respond to stress including: the normalization of stress, the individualization of stress, and the personalization of stress. Policy suggestions for universities on how to empower students and make their university experience more supportive conclude the thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

<u>1.1 Introduction</u>

Stress concerns many different interest groups and stakeholders and is a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life. It is part of common parlance as indicated by the frequent use of phrases such as "I'm stressed out" or "I'm burnt." People often use stress to explain their illnesses, or uncharacteristic behavior. For the most part, stress has become an accepted part of day-to-day life in North America and few lay people consider it to be a social or political issue.

While the general public tends to treat stress as a regular part of day-to-day life, researchers tend to problematize it. The issue of stress is garnering attention from many corners of society. Occupational stress, stress leave, and stress related illnesses such as anxiety and other mental health issues have been studied by health researchers, psychologists and more recently by social researchers. Governments, corporations and insurance companies are interested in how stress affects the health and productivity of the work force and the public health system (see Galt 2004; Conrad 1994; Levi & Lunde-Jensen 1996; "Stress Taking,"1998; Jimenez 1998).

Stress is not a new human experience, but the contexts in which we experience stress and the way we think about stress are specific and historically situated. A review of how stress has been conceptualized and studied by various disciplines allows one to appreciate the contribution that a sociological perspective can bring to understanding stress as a socio-historical phenomenon. Sociological thinking lends itself to asking how the experience of stress is shaped by social and cultural considerations, not just an individual's physiological make-up. Stress is about meaning as much as it is about molecules. The questions underlying a sociological approach to stress include: Why is it

so common and so accepted in contemporary western society? What does stress say about how our lives are organized? What are the social meanings we attribute to the stress experience? What do these meanings reveal about the values we utilize as we participate in creating our social world? And how do these values influence one's experience of stress?

This thesis deals with the stress experiences of a particular group: upper-level liberal arts students studying sociology in a medium-sized university in Canada's hinterland. Focusing on students as a subgroup in society provides an opportunity to explore the nature of the academic experience in late 20th-century Canada. Students' self-reports of stress-related experiences offer interesting insights into elements of the educational sphere and how stress operates there.

University students of today are not just future employees. They are also future employers and managers – in short the 'actors in training' associated with what Smith (1990A) refers to as the 'relations of ruling'. Smith understands ruling relations as more than just government, indeed as

> that total complex of activities differentiated into many spheres, by which our kind of society is ruled, managed and administered. It includes what the business world calls management, it includes the professions, it includes government and the activities of those who are selecting, training, and indoctrinating those who will be its governors. The last includes those who provide and elaborate the procedures by which it is governed and develop methods for accounting for how it is done – namely, the business schools, the sociologists, the economists. These are the institutions through which we are ruled and through which we, and I emphasize this we, participate in ruling (Smith 1990A).

Therefore, students are both influenced by the relations of ruling, but also participate in these ruling relations and through the attainment of post-secondary education they are being prepared to increase and diversify their participation. In addition to their capacity

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as students, they also potentially occupy several other social roles including mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, cousin, friend, partner, husband and wife and employee and volunteer. Their experiences with stress in each of these roles can influence how they deal with stress in their other social roles.

This thesis analyzes how students and instructors describe their experiences with stress. It is based on nineteen interviews with sixteen students and three instructors at University X carried out in 2000. All participating students were in their final three semesters of their program. The student interviews consisted of a series of demographic questions that were followed by questions from a semi-structured questionnaire. The student participants were recruited from various sociology classes, where a brief description of the study was given while the professors were absent from the room.

Unfortunately, I was unable to offer an honorarium to the participants though I was thankful for their willingness to participate. I was surprised when most of them thanked me for having listened to their stories and I realized that the topic of students and stress is an issue that people minimize to the point of insignificance. The students were simply reflecting an appreciation for an opportunity to speak about the issue to a listener who considered their experiences to be legitimate.

How students talk about stress illuminates the way(s) social relations compounded by gender and class influence one's education and stress experiences. The student experiences examined in this thesis are those of an ethnically homogeneous group of male and female students preparing to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology. These students' understandings of the social meanings of stress also resonate with certain dominant ideologies of the times; how they talk about and describe the social meanings

of stress reflect the place accorded stress in the wider social world.

Acknowledging the ideological aspects of stress allows one to ask questions about who experiences 'stress' and to look beyond individual psychological and biological variances to social groupings.

The central questions explored in the thesis include:

1) How do these students talk about stress?
2) What are the contexts that influence their comments about stress-related experiences?
3) What can we learn about the social organization of education and its relationship to stress from their stories?

1.2 Thesis Organization

The remainder of this chapter reviews the literature on stress with a particular focus on students, and also lays out the conceptual framework for the thesis. Chapter Two describes the methods used in the study and reviews the reasons for choosing a non-probability sample, using semi-structured interviews, and conducting qualitative data analysis. Chapter Three gives an overview of some of the more salient demographic features of the study participants. Chapter Four discusses the physical and emotional impacts of stress described by the students, as well as the social meanings of stress that they articulated. The social meanings of stress influence how students manage their stress and they have been largely overlooked in the literature. Chapter Five describes the relationships and economic circumstances that both produce and mediate these students' stress. It is the conflation of these various factors, which make stress experiences so complicated. The conclusion reviews the major findings of this research project, suggests areas requiring further research and presents some policy recommendations for students, instructors and university administrators.

1.3 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

An overview of the historical meanings of the term 'stress' reminds the reader that conceptualizations of stress are influenced by discourses created in specific social and historical contexts that change over time. Contemporary definitions of stress are found in the medical, psychological and sociological literature. Some social and health researchers (Young 1980; Pollack 1988; Donnelly & Long 2003) are critical of the concept of stress as it is commonly used and they remind the reader that ideology and discourse play a role in the construction of both the academic and lay conceptualizations of stress.

1.3.1 The Concept of Stress

The meaning of 'stress' has changed over time in accordance with its use in different contexts. Sporadic use of the term has been traced back to the 14th century when it meant "hardship, straights, adversity, affliction" (Lazarus and Lazarus 1994: 220). In the 1600's, the term took on a more technical meaning as it was used in the engineering work of physicist-biologist Robert Hooke. Hooke studied the properties of various metals to determine their most appropriate use. Lazarus and Lazarus suggest "this idea turns out to have practical value for psychologists too, since the ability of metals to withstand loads is like the ability of people to resist stress. In the case of people, we use the word resiliency or its opposite vulnerability" (1994: 220).

Research on stress among people was prompted in part by military interest in the "shell shock" experienced by soldiers in WW1. The military wanted to know how to train troops to cope more effectively with the experiences of war. After WWII, research

continued and stress was found to occur in multiple aspects of life and was deemed to be a "neutral response to life's demands and not all bad" (Lazarus and Lazarus 1994: 221). Several studies cite the work of Han Selye for developing an understanding of stress that combines the biological and psychological (Munson 1984: 20). They also use his definition of stress: "the body's non-specific response to any demand placed on it" (Kramer and Endias 1987: 73). The context for Selye's definition was his work with laboratory animals in which he observed a "generalized physiologic pattern, in response to a wide variety of environmental stimuli" (Dressler 1991: 9). Hence, the concept of stress was initially based on a technical understanding of metal work and the analogy was later adapted to understand human capacity to cope with stress. More recently, researchers have added a social/environmental element to the study of stress. Thus Aldwin (1994: 22) defines stress as, "that quality of experience, produced through a person-environment transaction that, through either over arousal or under arousal, results in psychological or physiological distress". To understand the elements of the stress process, it is necessary for the researcher to contextualize that process. Aldwin (1994) emphasizes the importance of culture. Pearlin (1989) argues social structures must be taken into account. Dressler (1991) urges the researcher to consider the larger social and historical contexts in which the stress process takes place.

Current research looks upon stress as a process involving the interplay of stressors, mediators and outcomes (Lazarus & Lazarus 1994; Pearlin 1989). Dressler suggests the stress process can be understood as an interactive relationship between stressors and coping resources (Dressler, 1991).

Pearlin defines stressors as "the experiential circumstances that give rise to stress" (1989: 243). There are two types of stressors: acute and chronic life events. Three quarters of stress research looks at acute/life events, including natural disasters (Dressler, 1991). Chronic strain refers to "relatively enduring problems, conflicts and threats that many people face in their daily lives" (Pearlin 1989: 245).

Early research associated change in people's lives with stressors and tended to characterize this as negative. Such an approach meant research tended to overlook the ongoing problems in people's lives and the ways in which the social and cultural order influenced day-to-day life. Understanding the context in which the stress process plays out, along with the social and cultural understandings of stress are the basis of a sociological approach. Such an approach is particularly appropriate when one considers that stressors, mediators and outcomes "arise from and are influenced by various structural arrangements in which individuals are embedded" (Pearlin 1989: 241). Pearlin argues the sociological study of stress, "presents an excellent opportunity to observe how deeply well-being is affected by the structured arrangements of people's lives and by the repeated experiences that stem from these arrangements" (1989: 241). Curiously, the social context in which the stress process takes place is a factor often neglected by stress researchers (Dressler 1991).

Although one would expect life events to occur randomly among people, "closer inspection reveals that whether a particular event occurs and the manner in which it occurs is often reflective of cultural beliefs and practices" (Aldwin 1994: 195). Aldwin (1994: 194) points out two ways culture touches an individual's relationship with

stressors. First, she suggests that culture helps to normalize certain life events: "most individuals in a given culture or cultural sub group will experience a particular event at specific times in their lives." Secondly, "by differentially allocating social resources, cultures pattern the types and levels of issues that individuals are likely to experience".

It is not the stressor that is of prime interest to the social researcher, but "how the organization of people's lives may be disrupted in the stress process" (Pearlin 1989: 248). A further question to consider is why people who appear to be exposed to similar stressors do not react in the same way. According to Pearlin, values may play a role: "Values, I believe, regulate the effects of experience by regulating the meaning and the importance of the experience" (Pearlin 1989: 249). This point is discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5 where I explore the students' perceptions of the social values of post-secondary education and how these have influenced their choices and ways of imagining their futures. Values influence an individual's assessment of various stressors, but the impact of other mediating factors, for example, coping and social support help explain differences in the way people respond to stressors (Pearlin 1989: 249-250).

1.3.1. ii Coping Resources

Definitions of coping resources used to concentrate on the individual. For example, "the very definition of coping is the study of individual differences in response to stress" (Aldwin 1994: 192), and "coping refers to the actions that people take in their own behalf as they attempt to avoid or lessen the impact of life problems" (Pearlin & Schooler 1978 in Pearlin 1989: 250). However, coping is also influenced by culture and social dynamics. Pearlin points out that coping behavior can be learned from the groups with which one is involved (1989). Aldwin (1994: 194) identifies four factors that affect

an individual's coping behavior: "the appraisal of stress, the individual's coping resources, the resources provided by the culture and the reactions of others."

Social support and personal coping resources are what Dressler refers to as 'resistant resources'. Social support has two aspects in that it refers both to the "*perceived* availability of help or assistance from other persons during times of felt need" (Dressler 1991:19, italics added), as well as "the resources that one *actually* uses in dealing with life problems" (Pearlin 1989: 250, italics added). Researchers tend to distinguish between two types of personal coping resources. Many deem *active* or problem-focused coping (taking steps to change the situation) to be superior to *emotion-focused* coping (managing one's internal response to a stressor) (Dressler 1991: 21). According to Aldwin,

> Current psychological theories of stress and coping assume that emotions should be controlled and their expression minimized. For example, Pearlin & Schooler (1978) defined coping as "any response to external life strain that serves to prevent, avoid or control emotional response." This viewpoint reflects the attitude of Northern Europeans and the Anglo-Americans toward emotional control (1994: 207).

Aldwin's critique highlights the cultural and class bias inherent in the estimation that emotion-based coping is considered less effective than problem-based coping. This example illustrates how ideology influences the range of options at an individual's disposal as well as how these options are valued as either appropriate or inappropriate for dealing with stress according to those who are in a position of authority.

Social institutions influence what people experience as stressors as well as the ways in which people can respond to stress. Aldwin identifies the dialectical nature of the relationship between culture and the individual when she states: "... it's important to understand not only that culture affects individuals' behaviors but also that individuals'

coping behaviors can affect their culture" (1994: 215). However, individual abilities to affect culture will differ based on differential allocations of resources.

1.4 Gender and Stress

Gender is one example of a social factor that mediates stress exposures, experiences and responses.[1] The study of stress and gender has been an area of growing interest over the past two decades (Pearlin 1989). Aneshensel reviews the literature and has found two approaches to the relationship between stress and gender. On the one hand, approaches that incorporate sex-role theory argue that higher rates of disorder are found among women than men due to gender stratification. On the other hand, Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1976) have argued that this approach does not adequately take into account gender differences across different disorders. Or to put it more clearly, "stress may be a more important etiological factor for women than men for some disorders, but such findings do not necessarily mean that women are more vulnerable to stress than are men" (Aneshensel 1991: 169). In a later article, Aneshensel reaffirms this point, arguing that "unemployment and work-related stress are harmful to both genders, although the manner in which stress is manifested by women and men may differ" (1992:33).

Pearlin lays out four ways gender can influence one's experience of stress. First, gender is a social marker that affects the stressors people are subjected to. Second, even where exposure to stressors is similar, the experience of stress can still be mediated by gender because of the different factors men and women encounter in other roles. For example, even when men and women both work in the same occupation, perhaps nursing, occupational stressors might impact them differently because they are also dealing with

[1]Gender can be understood as "the socially learned behaviors and expectations that are associated with the two sexes" (Anderson 1993:31).

stressors from other gendered social roles such as husband/partner, father, son or wife/partner, mother and daughter. Third, the "personal and social resources" available to an individual might be influenced by gender as well (Pearlin, 243). Gender influences the development of social networks and significantly influences how we interact with the social world. Fourth, "gender is a characteristic that can affect the ways in which stress outcomes are manifested. Thus ... depressive symptomatology may be a more typical expression of stress among women, whereas, drinking and other behaviors may be more typical among men" (1989:243).

1.5 Review of Studies of Students and Stress

This section reviews recent research on stress among university students. Day and Livingstone's (2003) study of gender differences in student perceptions of stress at a Maritime university used scenarios about family, friends, work, relationships and school. In addition to examining stressors, they also looked at how gender influenced the types of coping resources used to deal with stressors. The study set out to test four hypotheses about stress. They contended that when presented with identical situations, women would perceive all situations as more stressful than men. The second hypothesis was that men and women use different sources of social support and that women will report seeking sources of support more than men (75). The third hypothesis was that men and women use "different types of social support" in that men seek out support that is geared to information and is instrumental, while women tend to seek out emotional support. And finally, after controlling for the perception of stress, women will "still seek out all sources of social support" more than men (76).

The study involved 186 students from all levels of psychology classes at a small

Maritime university. They found that women perceived the academic, employment and friend scenarios to be more stressful than men (Day and Livingstone 2003: 80). However, in terms of family and relationship stressors, both men and women felt similar levels of stress (80). Women reported they would turn to friends and family more so than men, but there was no difference in the extent to which men and women would turn to other sources of support listed (co-worker, partner, professor or pet) (80). In terms of type of support, both men and women would seek appraisal, information and instrumental support equally, but women would seek emotional support more so than men, though this difference disappeared when they controlled for stress perception (80). In other words, the findings from this study suggest that gender differences in type and use of social support are rooted in the perception of stressful situations. The assessment of situations as stressful might be influenced by gender socialization (80).

Jacobs and Dodds (2003) explore burnout among college students. Using Maslach and Jackson's (1981) conceptualization of burnout as consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced accomplishment, they explore how the experience is related to personal social support as well as objective and subjective measures of workload (201). Participants consisted of 149 undergraduate students enrolled in various psychology courses at a private mid-western American university. They responded to a questionnaire that included both demographic information and measures for burnout, temperament and perceived social support.

Results suggest that negative temperament is associated with burnout. Jacobs and Dodds (2003) rely on Clark's (1993) definition of negative temperament as "feelings of chronic stress and nervousness, the experience of strong negative emotion and worrying,"

which are "all characteristics that can impair concentration and disrupt sleep" (298). Social support, especially from friends, was found to reduce the risk of burnout, and involvement in extracurricular activities had a positive association with students' sense of accomplishment (298). No relationship was found between academic workload and burnout. This was thought to "underscore the psychological nature of burnout and the subjective experience of work overload" (297).

Jacobs and Dodds (2003) conclude that students experiencing burnout "may have inefficient methods of work and play that place them at a disadvantage academically, socially and psychologically" (301). They also suggest the importance of social support to students should be communicated to parents and university personnel and that counselors and advisors might help students develop "effective time management strategies" (301). The authors recognize that students might think of "burnout as merely an 'occupational hazard' that does not warrant professional intervention or even social support" (302).

Struthers et al. (2000) review Folkman and Lazarus' (1985) work suggesting that students deal with negative moments in three phases: by identifying the situation, assessing possible reactions, and selecting a course of action to respond to the stress (582). Two categories of responding include problem-based coping and emotion-focused coping. Based on questionnaire responses and the grades of 30 undergraduate students, a positive relationship was found between academic stress, motivation and problem-focused coping. The authors contend a relationship exists between motivation and coping style and that problem-focused coping is associated with greater motivation and performance. The authors surmise that such information could be helpful to instructors

who could teach their students effective coping techniques. The authors believe that "the provision of remedial intervention to assist ineffective copers who are at risk would appear to be salient" (590).

Nonis et al. (1998) test the hypothesis that perceived control of time is an important coping strategy among college students and has a positive influence on student outcomes as measured by academic performance, problem-solving and health. The authors used a convenience sample to survey 164 business students (55% male and 45% female) from all courses at all levels. They found a significant relationship between perceived control over time and academic stress and stress outcomes such as health and problem-solving ability. The authors surmise that this confirms the notion that feeling in control of one's time reduces levels of stress while increasing one's sense of wellness and ability to problem solve. However, the authors did not find support for their second hypothesis that the perception of control over time would be positively associated with academic performance (as measured by perception of performance and grade-point average). The authors conclude with policy suggestions for university personnel. They suggest counseling centers develop programming that teaches strategies for time management; instructors develop evaluation methods that are regularly scheduled throughout the term; and major assignments that break down into smaller parts with set deadlines to help students learn time management techniques.

Arthur (1998) looks at how stress, depression and anxiety influence perceptions of stress and coping among university students. Ninety-four first-year students were given four questionnaires on four occasions throughout the year. The findings from this study with students support the view held by Aldwin and Revenson (1987) and Folkman and

Lazarus (1985) that when people experience increased levels of stress, anxiety or depression, they tend to use inappropriate coping strategies (18). Arthur found that certain subgroups' coping styles were more seriously affected by emotional distress. Arthur's findings showed that stress increases throughout the year, and affirmed that age and gender influence coping skills. Female students 20 years of age and older tend to respond to stress using disengagement strategies, whereas female students 25 years of age and older used problem-solving approaches to stress management. Male students who entered post-secondary education immediately following high-school were less likely to use disengagement strategies than older male students.

Arthur (1998) concludes that age and life experience leads to better coping skills. By referring to various 'life experiences' the author chooses a term that subsumes an array of social and economic factors that might contribute to the experience of stress and one's ability to cope. Arthur suggests the development of workshops on relevant topics like problem-solving and effective communication for groups of students with different needs during their time at university. For example, first-year students might have needs geared towards adjusting to university demands, whereas upper-level students might require assistance with job searches, career planning and debt management. These workshops should be held throughout the year, since students experience stress randomly.

Murphy and Archer (1996) attempt to assess how stressors at a university campus have changed over time by replicating a study done in 1985. In that study, 639 undergraduates from various departments and levels completed a two-page questionnaire consisting of seven demographic questions and two open-ended questions. The open-ended questions asked the students to identify two stressful occasions in both their

academic and personal lives. The study found that the top stressors in both areas had not changed between 1985 and 1993. They also identified gender differences in what was stressful and what was not. For example, in 1985 both genders ranked "not having enough time/too many demands" equally. By 1993, females reported this at a higher rate than males (1996:23). Males in 1985 reported "approaching and meeting other students and peer judgments and acceptance more often than did females" but this was not the same in 1993 (1996:23). Murphy and Archer relate the changes in some of the stressors to larger socio-economic factors. More students in 1993 identified writing and essay assignments as a stressor. They argue that educational restructuring means that classes are now larger and the type and number of assignments have changed. As a result, students do not have the opportunity to write and receive feedback as frequently and this creates greater stress for them when they are required to do so.

Damush et al. (1997) looked at the relationship between stressful life events occurring in the past year and health-related quality of life for students. Their sample involved 350 students in an introductory psychology course, where the majority of students were in their first-year. The study confirmed the authors' first hypothesis that stressful life events were related to poor health. They also hypothesized that the association between stressful events and health-related quality of life would vary according to gender, believing they would find more negative associations for females than males. Contrary to their hypothesis, gender was not a factor in the relationship. They suggest that, "the impact of life events on college men and women appears to be similar" (188). They also note that researchers often assume college students are "consumed by their intimate relationships and social development outside the family"

(188). This assumption takes a narrow view of students' lives, overlooking many situations where students continue to be influenced by their family. For example, if students continue living with their family or are close with them, students might be influenced by stressors that are affecting their families such as financial stresses, health concerns or family tensions. These researchers suggest that future research might look at the role that family-related stressors play in students' lives (1997: 188). The study was limited in that the inventory/questionnaire was administered only once to one psychology class.

Santiago-Rivera et al. (1995) looked at how the factors of achievement and challenge appraisal influence coping behavior. They examine two types of coping strategies: "planful problem-solving" and positive reappraisal (375). They defined "planful problem-solving" as when a person makes "an active and deliberate attempt to change the situation" (375). Positive reappraisal refers to reassessing "the situation and find[ing] personal meaning in what has occurred" (375). The study looked for a relationship between students who are achievement-oriented to see if they tend to have a problem-solving coping style. They looked at 105 college students from all levels and found a positive relationship. They found that persons who place value on achievement view stressful occasions as challenges and utilize action-oriented coping mechanisms that may help them resist the negative consequences of stress (379). The authors acknowledge that an appropriate coping strategy might be influenced by other factors including, for example, the value placed on achievement. They conclude that counseling procedures that help students change their responses to stress and that offer a broader array of coping strategies may be of limited help. Rather, they suggest counselors should

identify topics of importance to the student and explore the influence these topics have on the student's life (381).

Some previous research has looked at student stress among university students in Atlantic Canada. Student stress is known to be prevalent at one post-secondary institution in Newfoundland (Gomme & Micucci 1999; the Wellness Centre survey 1997; Gomme, Hall and Murphy 1993 and Murphy 1992). Gomme, Hall and Murphy (1993) found that students were highly committed to completing their programs despite the arduous workloads. The study also found that students were dissatisfied with some aspects of their education and felt they should be receiving better institutional support in return for their tuition rates (18). Discussions with staff of the Wellness Centre and Memorial University's Counseling Centre, an article in Memorial's student newspaper, *the muse*, and general discussions with students, suggest that student stress is expected and normalized by many.

Stressors repeatedly identified by students include those related to: financial concerns, family issues, relationship issues and school demands (See, for example, Arthur 1998; Nonis et al. 1998; Damush et al. 1997; Home 1997; Murphy and Archer 1996; Munson 1984). Student exposures to stressors, their consequences, and coping resources and strategies are mediated by gender, class, discipline and region (Gomme & Micucci 1999; Williams 1998; Aneshensel 1992; Dressler 1991). Thus, students from poorer backgrounds, in regions with higher rates of unemployment, and in disciplines with less clear and positive employment trajectories might be expected to experience higher levels of stress than more wealthy students in prosperous areas and in professional programs with strong, structured labour market demand.

This review of studies on university students and stress suggests the following seven points. First, studies on university students and stress are relatively scant (Nonis et al. 1998). Second, those that exist tend to focus on either entry level students (e.g., Damush et al. 1997; Arthur 1998), or on a cross-section of students (Nonis et al. 1998; Santiago-Rivera 1995; Murphy and Archer 1996). The cross-sectional studies do not specifically focus on senior students to assess how their experiences of the stress process might be different from those of students just entering the system. Third, there are few studies that explore the connections between the larger social context and students' experience of the stress process. Only Murphy and Archer (1996) attempt to link the micro and macro in their analysis, although Arthur (1998) also suggests students' situations may be influenced by factors outside their individual psychological make-up, like family stressors. Fourth, these studies tend to use inventories that while convenient, do not allow students free range to discuss their experiences of stress. Fifth, the majority of the above studies were carried out at American universities that have a different history of state and educational funding than Canadian universities. Changes in economic funding were identified as factors influencing the delivery of education by Murphy and Archer (1996) but the relationship between this and student stress has not yet been explored in Canadian universities. Sixth, the studies suggest that the impact that stress has on men and women in terms of outcomes is similar (Day and Livingstone, 2003; Damush, 1997). These studies suggest that gender differences exist in the perception of different situations as stressful (Day and Livingstone 2003; Murphy & Archer, 1996) and that the type of support and coping mechanisms one uses are influenced by gender socialization and life experiences and the social structures that

shape these factors (Day & Livingstone 2003; Arthur 1998; Murphy & Archer 1996).

Finally, there is a paucity of studies that are grounded in the students' understanding of their day-to-day lives as students and that explore how various aspects of the students' lives, stress experiences, and macro-level forces intertwine. The stress process is multi-dimensional and complex and needs to be explored in a way that allows this complexity to emerge (Damush 1997). Inventories can make it difficult to identify the values and ideas and often contradictory discourses that are associated with the perception of stressors among students and coping resources.

Aneshensel (1992:15) has argued, "that the occurrence of systemic stressors is not necessarily an indication of a social system run amok but may reflect instead the system functioning precisely as it is supposed to function." Although the experience of some stress as a student may be normal, this does not mean that all students experience the same levels of stress, or that stress is desirable, necessary, uniform or uninteresting sociologically. However, it does suggest that the 'norms' of the educational experience should be considered in studies of student stress.

Some critical sociologists of education have suggested that the education system ignores the corporal aspects of students (Corrigan 1988, 1987; O'Brien 1987). In the actual practice of academia students are given the message that the body and personal context are irrelevant to their role as students and to their success or failure. Students and instructors go to classes day-to-day with no reference to personhood or well-being, thus ignoring the struggles that occur *outside and inside* the classroom to maintain healthy selves. Despite clear evidence that such factors as class, gender and family relationships are health determinants, all students are assumed to enter the classroom with the same

degree of well-being and to be equally able to contain any problems from hindering their progress (Schilling 1991). In order for the body to be recognized, students must subject themselves to medicalization.[2] Ignoring and/or medicalizing the student body reinforces the status of students as disembodied and powerless while further confirming the dominance of the education system and the medical system. In addition to denying the body, academia also avoids considering students' debt, the possibility of conflicting work requirements, and ignores students' concerns and anxieties about future employment.

Other practices of academia mean that university students live out several contradictions. First, how many work environments are there in which the labourers do not get remuneration for their work, *and* are required to pay for the experience? Second, the work environment for university students occurs in multiple locations, both on and off campus. Third, the work demands of students are both explicit (e.g., essays, exams, assignments, tuition and degree requirements), and implicit. Implicit demands might include: changing their use of language, both written and spoken; altering their notion of "student" from one who is passive with authority figures to one who is interactive; and renegotiating their relationships with family, friends and community as their identity as "educated" is being established. Students are often expected to balance paid employment, with their university work and their family demands. These implicit and explicit aspects of the university experience suggest it is necessary to look at students' ideas, beliefs and ways of understanding stress as well as the ongoing structuring of the stress experience.

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[2]Medicalization refers to "the process whereby an object or a condition becomes defined by society at large as an illness (either physical or psychological) and is thereby moved into the sphere of control of the medical profession" (Findlay & Miller 1994:267).

Gender mediates student experience and thus stress. Male and female students tend to cluster in different programs, have different classroom experiences, their opportunities for employment and income possibilities vary during and upon graduation and they may have different strategies for dealing with stress. Looking at participation rates, completion rates, and areas of study, suggests the university experience is gendered. Women predominate in the social sciences and the arts and make up over half of undergraduate degrees (Statistics Canada 81-229-XIB 1998). Looking at post-degree employment trends, it appears that the transition to the labour market is also gendered. Men predominate in the higher paying jobs, although in recent years they have also begun moving into lower paying areas of employment previously dominated by women, with male employment opportunities becoming more like women's (Armstrong 1995; Hugh and Lowe 1993). This raises the question of how the gendered experiences of stress are related to the needs of students in their transitional year from university into the labour market with a particular focus on if and how the university addresses the needs of female and male students in a non-professional, non co-op social sciences program.

1.6 Critical Literature on Stress

There is a small but critical literature that looks at how stress is studied and raises questions about the role of ideology and the discourse surrounding the literature on stress and how it is conceptualized. Young (1980) is intrigued by the growing study of 'stress.' He suggests that in the space of a few decades, the related concepts of 'stress' and 'coping' have become part of daily parlance and are a common topic within much lay media (133). He questions the claim by social and behavioral scientists who suggest that since they incorporate various social influences affecting people's wellbeing, they take a

broader view than biomedical researchers. He argues that the process of social science research separates the individual from her social context and in doing so the stress "... discourse banishes the arena of conflicting class and group interests from the real conditions of existence" (133). Young does not dispute the technical facts about stress, however he takes the position that stress is a result of context-dependent 'social relations' and manifest ideological undertones.

Pollack (1988) picks up on Young's critique of how knowledge regarding 'stress' is produced and argues that "stress is not something naturally occurring in the world, but [is] a manufactured concept which has by now become a 'social fact'. As such it has direct implications for the ways in which people perceive their world and act within it" (381). While some researchers (as noted above) have called for a look at the role social factors play in stress, Pollack instead suggests that the notion of stress itself is an ideological concept which organizes/re-enforces particular understandings of the social world and how it should operate. She observes:

> Although much of the attractiveness of the stress theory derives from its seeming to reduce the arbitrariness of suffering, it also carries with it a significant means of organizing a variety of ideas about the social order, relating for example, to ways in which society might be perceived as dangerous, repressive, or pathogenic, or to issues of individual autonomy and responsibility (390).

It is important to tease out what Pollack means by this. It is not the experience of unwellness that people associate with the term 'stress' that is in dispute. Rather, Pollack is questioning the processes through which those feelings come to be understood as 'stress' and how the term 'stress' has certain ideological discourses that are implicit within it. These discourses in turn carry with them certain assumptions about the social world and one's place in it.

Pierret (1993) writes more generally about the interplay between discourses about

the social determinants of health and believes that health discourses "can be analyzed as systems of interpretation" (12). She reviews the shifts in the health and illness literature in sociology and notes "the need to link discourses and behavioral determinants, the micro and macro levels" (10). Her study, based on in-depth interviews with people from three different geographic areas in France, looked at health beliefs and observes that "talk about health entailed telling about one's self and about others - about one's relations with others and with society" (14). She concludes that a person's discourses around health "are organized around logics, or rationales, involving: the person's sense of time, the private/public dimension of life at home and life on the job, and the ideas of risk and security as well as of production and consumption" (23). Acknowledging this allows the social researcher to ask broader questions about the stress experience and to focus questions on the individual's interplay with the social order.

Donnelly & Long (2003) acknowledge that the questions raised by Young (1983), Pollack (1988) and Peirret (1993) regarding the production of a discourse of stress address a more specific origin for the stress discourse. They suggest that

> [p]opular psychosocial theories of stress and coping are based on an empiricist paradigm and a Western biomedical framework that reflects Western ideologies and values about health and illness. Problems associated with this discourse lie mainly in the ideologies that emphasize naturalism, individualism, rationalism and objectivity. We suggest that stress and coping theory should be concerned with the ways in which power relations and social institutions produce the meaning of stress. The inclusion of alternative discourses that attend to the micro and macro social and historical factors is necessary for the further development of stress and coping theory and practice (Donnelly & Long, 397).

How should this be done? With reference to Foucault's concept of discourse, they begin from the following position:

> Given the dominant discourse around stress appears "natural," the purpose of this paper is to analyze this discourse critically in order to deepen our understanding of how the meanings of stress are produced – to explore the social organizations and relations that underlie the development of stress theory and practices (Ibid: 397-8).

Following Donnelly and Long's (2003) point about the importance of establishing what the stress discourse refers to, chapter four describes the multiple meanings of stress evident in the students' interview transcripts and chapter five illuminates how different social relations contribute to the production and mediation of student stress. To help orient the analysis in terms of social organization, I will discuss some relevant aspects of the work of Dorothy Smith in chapter two.

1.7 Conclusion

Stress is a complex process involving stressors and coping resources. The perception of stressors and coping resources can be influenced by social values, cultural beliefs and ideas. Therefore, the social researcher should consider these factors in her attempt to understand stress. Additionally, stressors and coping resources are also influenced by structural, economic and historical factors. The risk of stress, stress experiences and responses to stress can be influenced by the allocation of resources, i.e., these are different for people in various social locations, which lend a material aspect to the study of the stress process. One example of how one's social identity influences one's experience of stress is gender. Gender differences in the experience and manifestation of stress are complex and connected to larger issues such as gender stratification and gender socialization.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines my research objectives and the methodological assumptions informing my research design and its implementation during the multi-faceted, imperfect and ever-changing rigors of data collection and analysis. The vantage point of completion enables one to reflect on both the theoretical and practical shortcomings of a given task and to consider how it might be improved in the future. These matters are addressed at the end of this chapter and will be discussed further in the thesis conclusion.

2.2 Research Objectives

I designed my research with several questions in mind. Inspired in part by C.W. Mills (1959) writings on the 'sociological imagination', I chose to problematize the phenomenon of 'student stress'; a topic about which I have personal knowledge and understanding. I was curious about the shared experience of stress among students and the notion that I/we seem to normalize it as part of the student 'role', and cope with it individually, rather than collectively. The aim of this study was to explore how upper-level sociology students experience stress. While I wanted to begin from the standpoint of students, I also wanted to identify professors' interpretations of student stress and consider the interplay between the various discourses on students' stress held by both students and professors.

Taking my cue from the work of Dorothy Smith, I was curious to understand how these experiences are socially organized. To what extent do various sociological factors

such as class, age, gender and regional background influence the experience of stress in the lives of upper-level sociology students? Questions exploring ideological components of stress, and examining it at micro and macro levels as a manifestation of ongoing social organization are marginal in the stress literature. These questions suggest that the use of an exploratory, qualitative, feminist methodology is both applicable and appropriate. Multiple methods of research were incorporated into the study: in-depth interviews with students, demographic questionnaires with these students, key informant interviews with professors and textual analysis of various government, university and public documents on stress, education and work. Analysis was influenced by using a triangulated approach. Mason defines triangulation simply as "multiple methods" noting that it "encourages the researcher to approach their [sic] research questions from different angles, and to explore their intellectual puzzles in a rounded and multi-faceted way" (1996:149). Interviews with students, professors and administrators at various stages of the study, coupled with the review of various institutional and government reports on the status of students highlight various aspects of students' experience of stress. These documents include but are not limited to Statistics Canada (2005: May 6; 2004:Sept.2), Government of Newfoundland (1999) and Government of Nova Scotia (2000).

2.3 Methodological Positions

2.3.1 Exploratory

Some social researchers prefer an inductive approach, and often find exploratory research helpful and vital in their quest to familiarize themselves with a social phenomenon. Inductive research attempts to generate theory as an integral aspect of the research

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process and provide a new understanding about the phenomenon under study, with the data coming from those who are closest to the phenomenon (Palys 1997: 78-79). From this perspective, the meanings and experiences of stress are subjective, interpretive and cannot be pre-determined. As such, research on the meaning of stress is complimented by the use of an exploratory research design. A sociological study of stress beginning from the standpoint of university students is a relatively novel strategy that benefits from a more open-ended research style and this is the approach I have taken.

Exploratory research is characterized by curiosity, flexibility and a desire to gain more understanding and familiarity with a new phenomenon (Mason 1996; Berg 1995). Since there are very few sociological studies on student stress, an approach that opens up avenues for understanding and incorporating the subjective into analysis is desirable. The major shortcoming of such an approach is the use of a non-representative sampling procedure. Thus the social researcher forgoes the option of being able to generalize her findings to the larger population. The results of exploratory research are seen as tentative rather than definitive and for some social scientists this is unsatisfactory (Babbie 1998: 91). This desire for generalizability is especially strong for those who prefer the traditional hypo-deductive model of research.

2.3.2 Standpoint Theory and Students' Experiences of Stress

This thesis uses a theoretical and methodological approach that explores the contradiction between the common experience of stress among students and the implicit social expectation from family, friends, employers, co-workers as well as university personnel that these experiences be negated or normalized. The different ways in which

stress is experienced and dealt with due to differences in social location (i.e., class and gender) are recognized as the result of ongoing social processes. The socialist feminist framework of Dorothy Smith is highly compatible with these aims.

Smith (1972) conceptualizes the world in two spheres, the public and the private. Each is replete with its own forms of knowledge and practices. Traditionally, the public sphere has been the domain of men. It is the sphere that has been and continues to be responsible for the management of society: "It includes professions. It includes of course government, more conventionally defined and also the activities of those who are selecting, training, and indoctrinating those who will be its governors" (1972: 8). The private sphere, or the domestic sphere, has traditionally been seen as women's domain. It is where the day-to-day personal and pragmatic aspects of living are dealt with. The importance of conceptualizing the world in this manner is that it draws attention to the fact that these two worlds are unequal. They are unequal in at least two ways. First, the social value placed on the public world is greater than that placed on the domestic world. Second, because of this, the public world is able to "impose the concepts and terms in which women must think about their world. Hence, women are alienated from their experience" (Smith 1972: 7). Smith writes:

> At almost every point, women mediate for men, the relation between the conceptual mode of action and the actual concrete forms in which it is and must be realized, and the actual material conditions upon which it depends. ... The simplest formulation of alienation posits a relation between the work an individual does and an external order which oppresses her, such that the harder she works the more she strengthens the order which oppresses her (1972: 10).

The experience of all students is somewhat like that of women in general in that they are

expected to mediate their personal experience, physicality and emotions in ways that enable the education system to ignore these aspects. In the process, students are potentially alienated from themselves and from the university. The manner and extent to which students do this is influenced in part by social class and gender. In order to understand this dynamic and its relationship to stress, the social researcher must begin with the activities as the subjects know and understand them to happen in their day-to-day life, and then move beyond this to explore the modes of thinking and organizing, which occur in a different domain from that which the subject experiences first hand.

Smith conceptualizes feminist standpoint[i] theory as a form of inquiry that begins with active subjects located in a particular historical setting. Smith insists these subjects are experts in knowing what they accomplish on a day-to-day basis in this particular setting. However, this knowledge is limited to the subjects' immediate experience. They are often unaware of the ways in which their activities are connected with extended social relations. The goal of standpoint inquiry is to expand the subjects' understanding of how their experiences of the world are influenced by larger social forces. In short, it attempts to understand how their daily organization of the world is linked to abstract forms of social relations. Standpoint theory was originally conceived as possible due to women's exclusion from the meaning-making aspects of ruling.

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Feminist standpoint is often referred to as "standpoint theory"; however, Smith resists the abstraction of her work as a "totalizing theory," and argues it should be understood as a "method of inquiry" (1992: 88; 1987: 107). I intend to use it as a theoretical base to explore and analyze the problem of gender, students and stress, and as the methodology informing my data collection.

Historically, women have been excluded from positions in society where dominant discourses, ideas and ideology have been constructed. These modes of thought have been used in the ruling of society, for example in bureaucratic organizations such as government and education. Smith (1990B: 2) defines ruling apparatus as "those institutions of administration, management, and professional authority, and of intellectual and cultural discourses, which organize, regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies."

Women have traditionally been located outside these positions of power, but their everyday life is influenced by them. Others have also been excluded from these power positions on the basis of class, race, age and sexual identity. This is not an exclusive list. Various other differences at different times and locations throughout history have also been cause for "Othering", for example religion and culture. Smith (1987: 107) suggests that "from different standpoints different aspects of the ruling apparatus and of class come into view". It is both the exclusion from meaning making and the grounding of inquiry in local activities that enable critique of the ruling apparatus.

A student in the course of a semester comes into contact with the registrar's office, the cashier's office, their instructors, the library staff, the custodial staff, campus security, perhaps the food court, and various other administrative personnel on campus. Students' understanding of these people and places is based largely on their experience with them. They come to understand what they are expected to do in relation to each of these areas, but they do not understand why the relationship is structured the way it is. For the most part, they are unaware of the academic structure of the university and its

governing bodies, and the provincial and the federal governments that, to varying degrees, set up the conditions that shape their experience. An example would be the extension of the class withdrawal date at University X. Students were informed of this decision through an article in the student newspaper X (Power 1999), after the fact. The decision was made at a level of organization removed from them, but it nonetheless impacted their day-to-day lives as students. Students had different structures to deal with as they carried out their activities as students, but they were not privy to the establishment of that structure, nor would most be aware of how it came to be changed. The same could be said of educational funding and student loans, the setting of entrance requirements and program structures.

Smith provides a framework from which one can begin to understand students' experiences of stress, and how those experiences are mediated by social location and the social organization of the public and private spheres. It is through language that people are able to convey their experiences to others. Through the stories they tell and the way they tell them, students reveal how gender, class, discipline and region interact within their lives to shape their stress-related experiences as they complete their studies and prepare for graduation and a transition to the labour market or to further education. The manner in which students, faculty, sessional instructors and administrators discuss student stress can reveal the context within which students negotiate (and are expected to negotiate) the implicit and explicit demands of their university education and transition into the job market or another educational program.

2.3.3 Qualitative vs. Quantitative

Qualitative research subsumes an array of philosophical and methodological positions; choosing a single, adequate definition can be an arduous and futile task. A basic, though not particularly illuminating definition is: "data not easily reduced to numbers" (Babbie 1998: 37). A more effective explanation suggests a qualitative approach encourages studies of a person's life, anecdotes, conduct, and also the workings of organizations, social campaigns, or interactional relationships (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This fails to enunciate, however, the essence of qualitative research captured in the following quote: "interpretivist, flexible, and sensitive to social contexts, incorporates understandings of complexity/detail and context" (Mason 1996: 3). These are important qualities that the qualitative researcher must bring to her task.

The traits of qualitative research making it desirable to some social researchers are seen as its drawbacks by others. Positivists argue that interpretation is impossible, and flexibility hints at a lack of rigor in research endeavors. Furthermore, the sampling procedures incorporated in qualitative research can mean that it is difficult to generalize to the larger population.

Various research questions require different methods and have distinctive demands of that method. If I had been interested in using a specific definition of stress to measure how many students experience stress, then generalizability and random sampling would have been essential. While this is a worthwhile question, I was interested in learning how at least some students understood and defined their experiences of stress. How does their understanding influence the way(s) they dealt with it? And what are the

implicit social meanings associated with self-identifying as 'stressed'? Qualitative

research is inductive, phenomenological and theory generating (Palys 1997:423). These

traits were necessary for my methodology, given my interests.

2.3.4 Considerations of Feminist Methodology

Feminist methodology is a concept found in the academic literature since (at least) the

late 1960's and has generated vital questions about the methodological practices of social

researchers (for example, see Smith 1987; DeVault 1996; Tong 1989). It is useful to re-

iterate Harding's (1989) distinction between 'feminist methods', specific research tools

and 'feminist methodology' the theory behind research practice. DeVault points out that

feminist methodology emerges from feminist analysis and inventiveness (DeVault

1996:31).

There is an extensive literature regarding feminist methodology and a single

definition or 'form' of feminist methodology is elusive, and in some respects undesirable.

However, most feminist methodologies do share the following qualities: 1) a shift in

focus from men's concerns to look for the situations and viewpoints of all women; 2) a

desire to minimize the potential harm of the social research and to share control

throughout the research process; and 3) practical research useful to women, which can

encourage positive social changes or actions which will benefit women (DeVault 1996).

I was guided by various feminist, critical, and qualitative methodologists who

raised issues regarding the role of the researcher, reflexivity, objectivity and subjectivity,

power dynamics in the research process, the issue of voice, conceptual baggage, and

accountability (See Kirby and McKenna 1989; Reinharz 1992; Macguire 1987; Smith

1990A; 1990B; 1987; Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In the design and practice of this research project, I consciously tried to address these issues. As I write this thesis, I realize that the demands of a "thesis" and academia compromise the extent to which these considerations can be practiced.

There are varying degrees of participatory research, but in the end academic protocol demands one author for the thesis, and it is the name of that person alone upon which status is conferred. While I take full responsibility for the final product as a piece of academic work, as an example of equitable, collaborative social research, this thesis falls short (see Khanlou & Peter 2005; Kirby & McKenna 1989). I am the one who made the decisions about what to include and how the work would be focused. In the end, I accept the constraints under which the research was carried out, and remember the responses of those who participated in the interviews. The students expressed a general relief and gratitude for the opportunity to express themselves, and they conveyed the hope that their stories would be channeled in a format that might be "heard" by a larger, influential audience.

2.4 Data Collection

2.4.1 Recruitment

The interviews upon which this thesis is based were carried out in 2000. A non-probability, convenience/snowball sample was used. Three stages of sampling occurred. First, an advertisement outlining the study and requesting volunteers was created. The ad asked interested volunteers to phone (my direct home phone number) or e-mail me. Upon receiving permission from the appropriate administrative bodies, the ad was

displayed in sociology classrooms and around University X.

Shortly after posting this ad, I asked professors who taught third- and fourth-year sociology courses for permission to announce the study in their classes. After asking the professor to leave the room, I announced the study and handed out copies of the ad to students. Attached to the ad was a form which students were asked to return to me at the end of their class. I emphasized that the research was being conducted independently of the sociology department and that they were not under any obligation to participate. If they wished to abstain, they could simply hand in the sheet blank. The form asked them to write down their first name and telephone number, and a convenient time for me to phone them if they were interested in participating. I asked them to hand in the sheet to me, not the professor. The shape and intention of my study were determined by the responses of the students.

The advertisements posted around the university did not generate any responses. Fortunately, there was a stronger response to my personal request for participants in the classrooms. I made appeals to classes held in the mornings, afternoons and evenings, covering all days of the week, and a variety of substantive areas. Based on these appeals, I received the names of 22 students. After making contact with them and negotiating schedules, 15 agreed to meet me for an interview, and 14 did so. One student agreed to an interview twice, and twice did not show up. Perhaps this was to be expected given the topic was student stress.

Two other participants were found through unintentional means. During the semester of data collection, I participated in a teaching program for graduate students,

which requires students to teach at least three classes. I taught five classes on qualitative methods to the third-year research and design course, and I referred to my research and the research of several other graduate students as examples during my lectures. I purposefully did not elicit participation from this class because I felt it would be an unfair influence, although I was not responsible for any of their grading. However, two students approached me at the end of the semester and asked if it they could still participate in the study. Their participation brought the total number of students interviewed to 16.

2.4.2 Pre-Tests

I conducted two mock interviews with other graduate students. This exercise helped me to realize the importance of waiting for students to consider what I was asking and giving them ample time to respond before I rushed on to the next question. The pre-test also helped me determine how long the interview might take, allowing me to give potential participants an estimate of the time commitment needed. Finally, these practice sessions helped me see the effectiveness of the questions and drew my attention to any awkward phrasing that needed to be changed.

2.4.3 Interviews and Questions

Data collection was multi-method and included semi-structured interviews and questionnaires done with students; key informant interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were the main source of data. There are three reasons for this choice of method. First, semi-structured interviews allow a degree of flexibility. The researcher can pursue issues that may have been initially overlooked or not conceived as significant, but which come up in the course of the interviews (Berg 1995: 33). This is

compatible with an inductive approach to research. Secondly, I agree with the assumption made by Smith regarding the use of interviews in social research. She believes that:

> ... the social organization and relations of the ongoing concerting of our daily activities are continually expressed in the ordinary ways in which we speak of them, at least when we speak of them concretely. How people speak of the forms of life in which they are implicated is determined by those forms of life (Smith 1987: 188).

Meaning can be found in what people do not say in their interviews; silences can also be revealing. Third, given the interest in analyzing the experiences of students, open-ended interviews encouraged students to speak of the patterns of life in which they are involved.

Two interview schedules were used during data collection, one for student participants and one for key informants. The student interview schedule had two components: a demographic questionnaire followed by semi-structured questions. The latter was organized around various themes suggested by both the literature review and my conceptual baggage. Based on my own experiences as a student, I began this study with certain assumptions about students' experiences of stress. My assumptions included the belief that students were not lazy and did genuinely want to do well, but that there was often a range of reasons why this did not happen (these might range from family obligations to feelings of discomfort in an academic setting, which it can be argued is a result of a lack of social and cultural capital). After sharing a term paper on student stress with classmates, I also assumed that stress was common among students but that students tended to view it as an individual flaw. A third assumption that I held was that the functioning of the university, and professor-student interactions are established in

complex and subtle ways that leave student stress largely unacknowledged and unproblematized at the university.

I conducted five key informant interviews. Prior to my interviews with students, two were done to elicit an understanding of the stressors that were often discussed among students with student support and administrative personnel at the university. The other three key informant interviews were done when most of the student interviews were completed. These interviews asked for the faculty members' perceptions regarding their own workload, how they went about designing and conducting their courses, their perceptions of students' stress, the student/professor relationship and their view of what a liberal arts education should involve and mean, as well as about their knowledge of the workings of the university. These interviews were conducted at the university and in private residences and ranged from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half in length.

2.4.4 Textual Analysis

Documents relevant to this study included federal, provincial, university and departmental documents that provided demographic information on student enrollment, and graduation, student loans, and other funding considerations as well as policy papers from the federal and provincial governments regarding education. Documents and key informant interviews were chosen based on their ability to extend understanding of students' experiences as conveyed in their interviews and to highlight the larger social, political and economic context in which their stories are conveyed.

2.5 Ethical Issues and Procedures

The proposal for this research project received ethical approval from the

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University in 2000.

2.5.1 Informed Consent

All interviewees were asked to sign an interviewee release form before the interview proceeded. The form outlined who I was, the topic of research and the degree of confidentiality I could ensure. It also detailed the choices the participants had with regard to the use and disposal of the transcripts and cassette tapes from their respective interview. The voluntary nature of their participation was also emphasized in the consent form. I discussed this point with the interviewees during initial contact, and again verbally before the interview began, thus ensuring informed consent. I emphasized that they could request the tape recorder be turned off at any time, that they had the right to refuse to answer individual questions and still remain in the study, and they could end the interview whenever they wished to do so. There was a second consent form used for those who agreed to have their interviews recorded.

2.5.2 Accountability to the Participants

I offered to copy both consent forms and give one copy to the participants. Both forms had the names and numbers of persons to contact should the interviewee wish to lodge a complaint regarding the manner in which the interview was carried out. In addition, I explained to the participants that when the thesis was finished they would be able to access a copy in the main office of the sociology department and in the library. I also extended the option of receiving an executive summary of the findings of the thesis to the participants.

2.5.3 Confidentiality

The names, addresses and phone numbers of participants do not appear anywhere in the thesis, nor were they made known to anyone. I assured them no one would know how they personally answered any of the questions. Confidentiality of the interview content was guaranteed and I promised not to disclose their participation to anyone. In the case of sessional instructors and fulltime faculty, I have chosen simply to refer to them as "instructors" in the thesis when quoting.

2.5.4 Minimizing Harm to the Participants

The ethics review committee felt there was a possibility that in the process of telling their stories of stress, some students might find the interview to be overwhelming and distressing. The committee suggested I inform the participants of this possibility in the interviewee release form. My intent as a researcher was to act as a sounding board for these students and the research schedule was designed to be as sensitive as possible. Before the student interview ended, I left the interviewee with a list of resource names and numbers, e.g., the counseling centre, the Wellness centre, the career development office, etc., in an effort to minimize their stress and provide potentially useful resources for them.

Two students displayed signs of distress (pauses in their responses, teary eyes and a faltering voice) during parts of the interview when they were talking about experiences that were particularly stressful and personal. When offered the chance to end the interview or move to another topic, they chose to continue and they conveyed relief at having been able to express their experiences when we finished talking. Ironically, several of the students mentioned that reading the disclaimer itself had been the most stress-inducing part of the interview. The gentle warning triggered worries that they would be asked particularly prying or personal questions. After the first two interviewees

conveyed this to me, I began offering the students the opportunity to read over the interview schedule after they had read the interviewee release form. I hoped this would counter any anxiety they felt and made the interview process as transparent as possible.

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1 Transcribing

The cassettes from the interviews were numbered and labeled with the corresponding interview code (Int. A1, B2, C3 for student interviews, and KI#1 for key informant interviews). I worked with a master list consisting of the participants' names and corresponding code numbers given to their interview. A pseudonym chosen by the participants is used in the thesis when quoting them.

After completing three quarters of the interviews, I began transcribing. The transcription process was long and arduous. Six of the student interviews were transcribed verbatim, in their entirety. The transcribing rules listed in appendix H were used. At this stage it became apparent that verbatim transcription of all interviews in their entirety was inappropriate due to time constraints and because by this stage it became evident that the interview schedule had been overly ambitious and generated a great deal of data. I had also begun to decide what aspects of the data I wanted to focus on and where in the interviews I would find the relevant information.

The remainder of the transcription proceeded in a three-part manner. First, because of the nature of 15 out of the 16 student interviews, the interviews were transcribed according to the interview schedule headings, leaving out my questions and response. This allowed me to get the student's viewpoints into a textual format more

quickly and encouraged familiarity with the material. After listening to the tapes and reading the material several times, I chose 6 interviews to transcribe verbatim. I went through the material again, listening to the tapes and re-reading the transcripts ensuring they reflected not only the content of the interviewees' spoken words, but also the pauses, pitch and pace of what the students and I said. After listening to the tapes and reading the material several times, I went back to **all** the interviews and transcribed the sections and themes from the other 10 student interviews that I felt I would concentrate on for the thesis. When this was done, I went through the material again, ensuring that my voice was present in the transcribed sections.

While all the interviews were not fully transcribed, their content was noted and listened to several times. One of my supervisors listened to one audiotape and read the transcript to ensure that the transcription was adequate. For this purpose, a tape was selected from a student who stated he or she did not know my supervisor.

2.6.2 Coding

Coding followed a 'cross-coding' method in that it was approached in two different ways. First, because the interviews largely followed the order of the interview schedule, I was able to code according to the 'pre-ordained' themes of the interview schedule. While this was useful in terms of being able to see patterns and themes regarding questions that I had at the beginning of the research process, I was leery of ignoring larger patterns that occurred across these themes. So for each interview I also paid attention to recurring ideas, phrases, etc. that came up several times throughout each interview. As the volume of data grew, I followed the suggestion of a professor who suggested I go through each

interview and select two or three quotes that seemed particularly illustrative. Once I did this, the amount of material I had to deal with became much more manageable. I then coded each quote into a category and grouped similar quotes together. In this way I was able to discern the main themes which I would work with to form my data analysis chapters.

<u>2.7 Shortcomings</u>

<u>2.7.1 Ethics Committee</u>

Going before the ethics review committee was a frustrating and time-consuming endeavor, largely due to the research happening in 2000, at the time when the ICEHR was being newly created. The transition period from the old, known system to the new one was not streamlined. At that time, it was difficult to find information about both the process of ethics review and the contact persons. The committee's recommendation that I inform the students of potential distress as a result of participating in the study may have been made with the well-being of the students as their prime concern; however, in practice their reading of this warning proved to be more anxiety inducing for the students rather than soothing. It has been pointed out to me that it may have helped ease the situation by including the beneficial notion that some students might ease their stress by having the opportunity to discuss it.

<u>2.7.2 Interview Schedule</u>

In retrospect, I can identify the marks of a nervous, first time researcher in my interview schedule (see appendix E). My fears that I would not have enough material; that I might miss something of particular interest; and that I might forget to ask something crucial,

combined with my desire for the students to participate in the direction of the interview, resulted in the creation of an exhaustive interview schedule. By the midway point of data collection, I was sufficiently comfortable with the process to discuss the topic of stress without strict adherence to the schedule.

2.7.3 Timing and Bias

A key informant expressed concern over the timing of the student interviews. It was suggested that the interviews might be distorted because mid-term exams were being returned to the students at the time I met with the classes, and students in some classes would have done poorly. The key informant reasoned that because of their poor exam results, some students might use the interview to vent and exaggerate the poor quality of their experiences with their professors.

This is probably a non-issue for this study. Practically speaking, the interviews were actually conducted much later in the semester, presumably allowing students to "regain perspective." Theoretically, the issue of bias can be viewed in another way. The interview schedule was designed to elicit as much information as possible about the students' everyday life, as well as offer opportunities to discuss larger, more persistent issues. The point of the study was to identify both types of stressors. I would argue that receiving a poor grade is one event in the lives of many students and therefore their response to the event is of interest to the study. Another point to consider in the discussion of bias is this: the key informant assumed that the poor exam would be the only recent stressor in the lives of these students which might 'bias' the results. Following this logic, why not leave out students who had done well on exams? Or leave

out students who were working two jobs? Or students who concentrated only on school? Based on this type of logic I could easily decide that students who have children or other family responsibilities were not eligible either. The theoretical position underlying this thesis demanded that a range of students with the diverse social experiences be included. Indeed it is both the variety and ordinariness of these experiences that provide us with the opportunity to understand how student stress is experienced, perceived, and dealt with.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter sought to accomplish three tasks. First, it aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of the particular methodological requirements of the chosen topic of study. In this case, a focus on the everyday experience and meaning of stress in the lives of upper-level sociology students was consistent with a qualitative, exploratory approach. The second objective was to explain in a clear and straightforward manner the research process from conceptualization, to design, to the gathering of information, analysis and subsequent understanding of the data. The third goal was to acknowledge any shortcomings with the design and to suggest ways in which the process could be improved for those who follow a similar research path in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

The Study Participants

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the most salient demographic characteristics of the study group and, where applicable information was obtainable, compares their profiles to those of other Canadian undergraduate students. Information regarding gender, regional background, financial considerations such as employment and loans, living arrangements, experience(s) of family, volunteer work, and student status are presented to illustrate the social context in which these students experience and understand stress. The chapter concludes with a summary of these traits and a brief description of the key informants.

3.2 Demographic Profile of the Study Participants

Gender

The student sample (N=16) consisted of ten women and six men, an accurate reflection of the gender break down of sociology students at University X and across the country. Almost two thirds of sociology majors from University X are female as the following chart illustrates.

Table 3-1: Gender Breakdown of Sociology Majors at University X

	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994
Female	80	103	115	108	96	82	58
Male	23	33	38	35	24	27	22

Statistics Canada data from 1992 to 1996 show a similar gender ratio among students graduating with a sociology degree within Canada as a whole during this time period.

Table 3-2 Gender of Sociology Majors Nationally

	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992[1]
Female	4, 428	4, 379	4, 087	3, 731	3, 439
Male	1, 482	1, 453	1, 454	1, 300	1, 194

Age

The students in my sample ranged in age from 21 to 31 years of age. The mean average age for the female students is 23.3 and 23 years old for the males. The median average age is 22 for the female students and 23 years old for the males.

Regional Background

Most of the participants (12) were born in the capital city of the province and the city where the university is located. Of the remaining students, one female and one male were born in other areas of the province, and two women were born outside the province. Slightly more than half the students (9) grew up in the provincial capital area. All but one of the rest (6) grew up outside of the capital city. The remaining student grew up in other parts of Canada, in the rural part of the province and in the provincial capital.

Table 3-3: Place of Residence Before University

Residence Before University	M	F	Total
Provincial Capital	5	4	9
Rural Area of the Province	1	5	6
X-country, Rural and Capital City		1	1

[1]Statistics Catalogue no.81-229 Education in Canada, 1998 page 139

Employment

The students were interviewed at various stages of their last year in the program; some were in their last semester, others in their second or third last semester.

Slightly over half of the sixteen students (9) were employed at the time of the interview. Of those employed, almost half (4) held two jobs. Of the women, half (5) were employed and worked on average between 14.4 and 17.5 hours per week. A majority of the men (4) were employed and worked on average between 18.5 and 22.2 hours per week. Two of the five women held two jobs as did two of the four men.

Table 3-4: Employment Among Students Interviewed

Students (N=16)	Female (N=10)	Male (N=6)
Employed	5	4
Not Employed	5	2
Total	10	6

Table 3-5: Number of Jobs Held By Students

Employed Students	Female	Male	Total
1 job	3	2	5
2 jobs	2	2	4
Average Hours	14.4 - 17.5	18.5 - 22.2	N/A

<u>Loans</u>

A majority of the students (14) had student loans. Of the two students who did not have loans, one was a woman originally from outside the Capital City; the other was a man from the Capital City area still living with his family. Upon first glance, it appears there is no gender discrepancy in terms of loans. However, a closer look suggests different pictures for these male and female students. At the time of the interview, the loan debt for these women ranged from $10,000 to more than $40,000. Over three-quarters of the women (8) in the study will graduate with a debt load higher than $20,000. The debt for half of these women will be greater than $30,000. Only half of the men with loans anticipated a debt load higher than $20,000. There was also a greater range of debt load among the men. A couple of male students (2) had relatively low loans totaling under $10,000, while the others (2) anticipated their student loans peaking between $30,000 and $34,999. One might argue that more of the women interviewed came from outside the Capital City and therefore the apparent gender difference in loans was the result of region or origin rather than gender. However, after comparing the loans of the men who grew up in the Capital City (4) with those of the women from the Capital City (5) we still see a clear difference in expected loans upon graduation. These women will owe on average between $24,000 and $27,999 whereas these men will owe between $16,999 and $19,000. That said, male and female students from rural backgrounds were more likely to have larger students loans. Students from the capital city area with loans expected to have an average debt between $22,875 and $27,874. Students from rural areas anticipated an average debt between $31,000 and $42, 999.

Table 3-6: Current Student Loans According to Gender

Current Loans	Female[2]	Male	Total
$0	1	1	2
$1-19,999	2	3	5
$20,000-39,999	6	2	8
< $40,000	0	0	0
Total	9	6	15

Table 3-7: Expected Student Loans at Graduation According to Gender

Expected Loans	Female (10)	Male (6)	Total
$0	1	1	2
>$19,999	1	2	3
$20,000-39,000	6	3	9
<$40,000	2	0	2
Total	10	6	16

When we compare the sample group with their peers as reported by a Department of Education (1999) publication looking at the employment experiences and earnings of recent graduates from one Atlantic Canadian province we see that the loan amounts of

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[2] One of the women participants stated she had a loan but did not pinpoint the current amount.

these students were comparable to those of other sociology graduates in the mid-late 1990's. Of the students who graduated with a sociology degree in 1996, 71.9 % had student loans compared with the university average of 63.4%. The average amount of those loans was $22, 902 compared to the university average of $18, 266 (Government of Newfoundland & Labrador, Department of Education, 1999). According to this report, sociology students were more likely to have student loans and to have higher than average student loans. Unfortunately, there was no gender analysis of student debt in this report.

Information about debt load according to discipline from other Atlantic Canadian provinces could not be found. However, when we compare the rate of students with loans in Newfoundland and Labrador to those in Nova Scotia we find that in 1997-98, 43% of post-secondary students had loans and this increased to 53% the following year (Government of Nova Scotia Council on Higher Education, 2000). While they do not give an exact total, they refer to a 12 fold increase in the number of students with more than $25,000 student debt between 1994-1995 and 1998-9 (18). When we look at the average level of student debt across the country, we see that one in seven bachelor graduates owes $25,000 or more (Statistics Canada, 2004). This suggests that, on the whole, students participating in this study tended to have higher levels of student debt than the average Canadian student.

Living Arrangements

Three of the students lived common-law, one of whom was to be married within a month of the interview. The remaining 13 students identified themselves as single, although 7

made passing reference to a current girlfriend/boyfriend. In terms of living arrangements, the majority of students (5) who grew up in the Capital City continued to live in the parental home. Again a gender difference emerges, with 40% of the women and 80% of the men residing in a parental home. Of the remaining Capital City students, two lived common-law, one lived with her child, and the other lived by herself. Of the six students who grew up in rural areas of the province, two lived in homes owned by their parents. In both cases, these students lived with siblings and cousins. Two lived with roommates who were not relatives or spouses. Another student lived common-law, and one other lived with her daughter.

Experience(s) of Family

A few of the students (3) had children; two were single-parent mothers. They each had one child and their children ranged in age from three to eight years of age. The third student was living common-law and was to be married imminently.

Half of the students participating in the study indicated there was someone in their (extended) family who had completed a university degree. Three-quarters of the men (4) had other family members who had completed university; however, only one-third of the women (4) indicated they had family members who had completed degrees.

Gomme and Micucci (1999) documented the socio-economic and regional background of undergraduate students and found "equality of opportunity has not been achieved in the Canadian province of Newfoundland. There are significant differences among students in their capacity to benefit from the opportunities they are offered" (1999:264). They also concluded that students from rural parts of Newfoundland and

Labrador were more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background (SEB). They found that the experiences of stress among these students were different in nature from those of students from a higher SEB.

> Compared to students from more advantaged backgrounds, they are more highly stressed in a variety of dimensions including meeting living expenses, locating suitable accommodation and living comfortably. Given these tendencies, it is hardly surprising that lower SEB students demonstrate more modest levels of academic achievement while simultaneously experiencing higher levels of stress in meeting the university's academic standards (1999:265).

In an article based on the same data set Gomme, Hall and Murphy (1993) found 31% of the students identified their parents' total income in excess of $60,000, while 18% of the students reported their parents' incomes as less than $25, 000 (1993:23). Over a quarter of the students would have student loans over $20,000 when they graduated (1993:32). As shown earlier, over 50% of the participants in this study will have loans between $20,000 and $39,000. In terms of parental income, two of the students I interviewed said their parents' income was below $30,000 and six of them stated their parents' income was over $50,000. Curiously, four of the students stated they did not know where to place their parents' income.

Volunteer Work

Several (6) of the participants did volunteer work, three female and three male. The breakdown according to gender indicates half the men (3) and a third of the women (4) spent time volunteering.

Student Status

All of the students interviewed were taking at least three courses, and were thus

considered full-time students. The range in the number of courses taken that semester varied from three to six. Three of the students were sociology/anthropology majors and the other thirteen were sociology majors.

Summary

The demographic profile of the students participating in this study suggests a diversity of experiences and backgrounds. The demographics clearly suggest the following about these students:

* Women students, regardless of their regional background, have higher debt loads than male students.

* On average, some discrepancies exist between the amount and type of home support available to these female and male students.

* The male students in this sample who have paid employment tend to work longer hours than the female students.

* A strong majority of the men had someone in their family who had successfully completed university. A strong majority of women had no one in their family who had finished university.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informants included members of the sessional staff and tenured faculty within the department (3). Informal discussions with representatives of the counseling center (1) and administration (1) were also done. Key informants were chosen on the basis of their varied length of time at University X, and the positions they held at the university. Most of the interviews were conducted on campus and one was conducted in a private residence. The three formal interviews were approximately two hours in length and the informal interviews were approximately half an hour.

3.3 Conclusion

Information about the students' financial, educational, familial and employment backgrounds gives us some sense of the variability among these students, demographic patterns within the sample and allows us to compare, somewhat, these students backgrounds to those of other students in the region and across the country. The use of regional and national data offers a comparison point that illustrates how national, provincial, and institutional policies on student aid programs, educational funding and tuition fees vary. This comparison also highlights the concrete influences that these various policies have upon students as individuals and upon various groups of students.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Meaning(s) of Stress in the Everyday Lives of Students

4.1 Introduction

As illustrated in the literature review, stress is difficult to define because it involves the personal, the physical, the emotional, the social and the ideological. How we understand and define the stress experience also shapes how we respond to it personally and publicly. Despite the diverse aspects of the students' personal experiences, analysis suggests their experiences have shared qualities that illustrate how social values and practices combine to shape their experiences. This chapter describes students' understandings and perceptions of stress and illuminates some of the social and ideological values influencing the stress experience of these post-secondary students in late-twentieth-century Canada. The students' ways of talking about stress reinforce the findings in the work by Donnelly and Long (2003) that stress has particular discourses. This chapter concludes by exploring some of the ways the students coped with their stress.

4.2 Students' Descriptions of Stress

The definitions and descriptions of stress that were identified by students easily fall into three categories: 1) physical sensations, 2) emotional responses and 3) social meanings. While they will be discussed as analytically distinct, it is important to remember that many of the students discussed them holistically, describing how they experienced these components of stress simultaneously. An understanding of stress involving social connotations and social meaning(s) is implicit in all the students' interviews. Curiously, the social meaning attached to the experience of

stress is sparsely addressed in the literature. The analysis of the social meanings of stress focuses on 1) students' normalization of stress; 2) students' individualization of stress; and 3) students' personalization of stress.

The following table provides an overview of the students' descriptions of stress. These have been grouped under the headings of physical, emotional and social meanings of stress. Many of the quotes below are in response to the questions; "What is your definition of stress?", or "What does stress feel like for you?"; others are quotes from the stories the students told.

Table 4.1 Students' Descriptions of Stress

Stressor Type	Examples	Student Pseudonym
Physical	"I have irritable bowel syndrome and right now it's extremely acted up, the past couple of weeks. And after exams and stuff like that. That's my body's response to stress."	Grace
	"Headaches (laugh). Yeah, really bad headaches."	Elizabeth
	"Feel more tired, I like to sleep more and I feel more hungry. Physically, I just want to sleep."	Nicole
	"Worry lines. You get worry lines and when the worry lines are there all day long, that's when you're stressed."	Sophia
	"…that feeling in your gut, that you're all tight and you just want to scream but don't."	Beth
Emotional	"I guess it's just a feeling of - a lot of different feelings associated with it, some of helplessness, pressure, a lot of worry, being nervous, unsure, un-certain of things."	Morris
	"Pressure is what I think of. I just feel like everything's closing in on me. I try to avoid that of course just like everybody does. But yeah that's about it. The pressure is the big thing. It almost feels physically, the pressure in my head. I don't know if that's normal, but that's the way it	Kyle

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	feels. Confusion. Can't think straight."		
	"I know I'm more cranky and I'm really crooked and agitated and irritable and it's so like really dominant and you can really tell."	Claire	
	"… that feeling you get that it's all closing in on you. You know? It's like panic yes, stress ha that's what I would equate it with a lot of times. 'Cause as soon as you start to panic you feel the pressure, you feel the stress. You're going to explode and then you get a headache and then you pass out or you do whatever. You got nuts."	Leslie	
Social	"I've got a list, my computer is always on. And I have a list of stuff that … I've got to do this and this and this and I've got a lot of stuff that I should be doing"	Sean	
	"Stress is where you totally lose it, can't put anything in order and you can't understand why it's put on you and how they even expect you to get it all done at this time. And it's too… you can't look at … people can't look at it objectively right."	Elizabeth	
	"And I'll tell my parents or I'll tell my boyfriend like I'm just in a bad mood. Just leave me alone."	Claire	
	"Like anything that agitates you beyond the point that keeps you more or less from… I don't know… operating in your normal activities."	Popsicle	
	"Stress for me usually means a deadline."	Morris	
	"It's like you're overworked. There's too much to do and no time to do it and all this responsibility and all this time …"	Kate	
	"Money. Money equals stress. … ubiquitous and immediate and irreconcilable concerns."	Alex	
Physical and Emotional and Social	"Stress is a lot of rushing. … if you're someone like myself then you're rushing around trying to get everything done. … And I think it's the same for other people too. Like a lot of time pressure. Basically I guess just a feeling that you have so much to do and especially when you run into obstacles, for instance when my car breaks down."	Nicole	
	"On a train – no control. Life is out of control."	Sean	

Physical and Emotional and Social Continued	"Oh I would define it in an emotional way. I suppose I could provide a physical way too. But it's just the way um… lots of tension up and down the side of the back, sickening, emotionally a basket case. … Um stress causes that, it does cause depression with me because I have no way of letting, of releasing it. … I can't talk to my parents very much."	Anna
	"Stress to me is that feeling that you're not exactly sure what is going to come next, or that's not really what I'm thinking of. Just the everyday stressors in your life that makes life just a little more difficult, and give you butterflies in your stomach, sometimes cause medical problems."	Grace
	"This time last year, my hair would have been falling out. I would have been … my heart rate would have been twice what it is now 'cause I just had to function. I had a pile of different things going on this time last year."	Frank

These quotes ground the reader in both the students' experiences and perceptions of stress; however, they do not entirely capture the extent or the manner in which stress is intricately woven into their lives. To explore this, I would like to look more closely at stress as described by some students beginning with the physicality of the experience.

4.3 Physical Experiences of Stress

4.3.1 Stress and medical conditions:

A small group of students described how stress exacerbated other medical conditions. Two participants suggested stress had triggered episodes of depression. A third student with sensitive eyes described how long hours studying in the library and stress-induced sleep deprivation aggravated this sensitivity. A fourth student revealed that in her second year of university, she had battled anorexia. She believed stress had been a factor then and noted that she now had different coping mechanisms when

she became stressed. Grace describes her physical response to stress:

> Um well I have irritable bowel syndrome and right now it's extremely
> acted up now the past couple of weeks. And after exams and stuff like
> that. That's my body's response to stress. It gets pretty bad
> sometimes. Sometimes I ... freak out. (Laugh) Don't come past my
> room! – You know? Sometimes, I don't know I'm under stress until
> something actually happened and then I blow up. And I have done
> that several times. And I don't like doing that but you know, I can't
> even remember just being in so much rage and then I look back and oh
> there's a big hole in the wall. (Laugh) That's happened before.

For Grace, stress contributes to the onset of the condition, which then exacerbates her

stress. These students understood stress had a physical component in part because

they had sought medical assistance for compounding conditions. However, other

students who did not have other medical issues that were complicated by stress also

spoke of the physicality of stress in very specific ways.

4.3.2 General Physical Experiences of Stress: Symptoms and Activities

Schooling molds or disciplines our bodies in certain ways, while ignoring and

sometimes even denying the corporeal aspects of its constituents (see Grant 1997,

Corrigan 1987; 1988). This section draws attention to the obvious - that people in

general, and students in particular, experience stress as physical feelings of un-

wellness. The students readily responded to queries about how stress feels. Listed

below are the general physical responses mentioned by the students, male and female,

from all regions and income levels.

4.3.2.1 Physical Symptoms:

Sleep - Some students reported an inability to sleep or troubled sleep patterns.
Other students reported that they felt more tired and had a stronger
desire to sleep when they were under stress.

Appetite - Stress either triggered hunger, or dampened appetites, often for
days at a time.

Headaches and tension - By far the most common complaint was the presence
of headaches and general body tension especially in the head, jaw,
neck and shoulders.

Upset stomach/nerves - Students stated they experienced upset stomachs,
butterflies and nerves when they felt stressed.

The above symptoms are not unusual and are experienced by many segments of the
population. They are interesting because the interviews suggested they were common
among these students who associated these feelings with their experiences of stress.
Descriptions of physical un-wellness by the students suggest there may be aspects of
student life that contribute to these feelings of discomfort and do so in a systematic
way. For example, students identified particular periods of time during the semester
that were high stress periods, such as periods for mid-terms and finals; periods where
they were expected to perform well in exams, papers and presentations. While these
times are particularly identifiable as stressful, the rest of the semester is not stress
free. Indeed, for many of the students interviewed, stress was more a chronic state
than an episodic experience.

4.3.2.2 Physical Activity

Students described the physicality demanded of them in their student roles.
Unlike professors or other staff at the university, students have no designated office
or workspace of their own at the university. They walk from class to class, often
crisscrossing campus multiple times a day. Students are expected to carry their books
and materials with them as they wander over campus. They constantly transition and
re-position themselves. They work in settings (classrooms, libraries and hallways)
where they have no control over their environment (i.e., heat, lighting, or seating).

There are limited spaces for them to sit and wait between classes. Their bodies are expected to conform to the environment set out by the university according to the funding allowed by the government. In terms of their food intake, they have the option of either packing in their own food or purchasing food from the cafeteria. While some students were satisfied with the cafeteria selection, others felt it was too expensive and /or there were not enough healthy choices available.

The above points remind the reader of the implicit physicality demanded of student life. Students are kept on the move and are always slightly uncomfortable. While this is not an intentional product of university design it is, nevertheless, the way that students interact with the institutional aspect of the university on a day-to-day basis. Many of the students preferred to work at home rather than at the university because it was simply more comfortable for them to do so. The consequence of this choice is the subtle way that it shapes the students' relationship to the university and their professors. Students, even the most involved, are temporary members of the university who are passing through for a limited time. The physical environment is such that it subtly discourages them from becoming too comfortable in the setting, thus usurping some of their energy just to meet the physical demands of their education.[*]

The following quote illustrates both the physical feelings associated with stress as well as the social expectation of the appropriate way to deal with student stress.

Beth: I don't know - first thing I think of is that feeling you get in

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[*] None of the students in this study lived in residence. Thus, I cannot comment on how the physicality of residence living impacts students.

your gut that's all tight. You want to scream but you don't. You're gritting your teeth and you're all tense. Just pure muscle spasm. That is stress for me.

Beth vividly describes for us what stress feels like for her. Feelings like this may be easily forgotten when one is not stressed, or is able to cope well with stressors. Students' responses to stress, particularly physical responses, were experienced internally and as such would not have been easy for others to discern. Beth's quote also suggests that one is expected to maintain this invisibility and she does this by silencing evidence of her stress by not screaming.

The students describe these physical sensations of stress as commonly occurring. They also understand that they are expected to find ways of dealing with their stress that do not interfere with their schooling. Instead of re-assessing the education system and the format of their education that produces and normalizes these feelings of stress, several students tended to remain silent or understand their stress as their own problem (For example, Nicole, Sean, Popsicle). The issue of how stress influences students' pedagogical experiences also deserves attention. As the upcoming quotes and stories reveal experiences of stress are intricately linked with one's pedagogical experiences at the university.

Nicole shows us that students often drew linkages between the physical and emotional experiences of stress.

Nicole: I feel more tired, I like to sleep more, feel more hungry. Psychologically, I can't enjoy life, feel depressed. Don't have any money. If I can't buy a coke I get really depressed. Money accounts for stress. Around finals or midterms if I have two papers due at one time, I can't stop to smell the roses so to speak. I have tunnel vision and I'm so uptight. I'm doing coffee all the time, so I'm not in a good mental state at all and physically, I just want to sleep.

The stories of Beth, Grace and Nicole provide vivid images of people whose bodies bear the brunt of student life and student stress. Their comments suggest that the physical and emotional experience of stress overlap and are overwhelming. Education is ideally associated with opportunities for personal growth and development as well as offering a means to pursue particular career paths or job opportunities. Yet, the students' comments suggest that the pursuit of an education requires a level of physical and emotional stamina that is largely unrecognized by university policies and is only minimally referred to in the education literature.

The shared corporal experience among upper-level students facing a transition point in their lives suggests that part of their experience as upper-level students involves shaping their lives to accommodate stress. Some critical education theorists would contend that the physical sensation of stress in students is a result of their being disciplined in certain ways through their relationship with the academic system (Grant 1997; Corrigan 1988; 1987). From this point of view, the experience of physical un-wellness serves to remind them that they are not in positions of power.

4.4 Emotional Experiences of Stress

As illustrated by both Grace and Nicole's quotes above, stress is also associated with emotions. The themes of pressure, frustration, lack and loss of control, and panic emerged from the student interviews. Kyle, a 23 year old student living with his family, with no student loans and no outside employment obligations, observed that "... emotional pressure is what I think of. I feel like everything's just closing in on me. ... Pressure is the big thing. It almost feels physically the pressure in my head. I don't know if that's normal, but that's the way it feels. Confusion."

Leslie, a 21 year old student who lives with her mother and younger siblings, commented:

> [stress is] a feeling you get that it's all closing in on you. You know?
> It's like panic. Yeah stress and panic ... That's what I would I think
> equate it with. 'Cause as soon as you start to panic, you feel the
> pressure. You feel the stress. You're going to explode. Then you get
> the headaches. Then you pass out or you do what ever, you go nuts.
> And then finally then you calm down maybe and then you can actually
> look at everything rationally. – That's my life!

Both Kyle and Leslie use the phrase "closing in" to describe a feeling of diminishing options or choice; of feeling trapped with no way out. Leslie feels that relief comes after the physical sensation passes and that she is then in a position to think through the situation. But before he reaches that moment Kyle observes that the pressure triggers a feeling "Almost like a need to overwork yourself even though you know it's not going to work. But you still do it anyway." Sophia, a 26 year old student who lives with her child in a basement suite said, "I always see a clenched fist but I don't know why. ... Yeah stuff breaking."

Sean is a 24 year old student who lives with his common-law partner and their two year old child.

> Sean: And like I said, I find I feel like I don't have any control over
> my life. It's like I'm in this niche right now where I have no control
> over my life. If I quit *University X* today what would I do tomorrow?
> So I'm basically, I guess basically I feel I'm, I'm on a train going on a
> track and I can't go off the track.

The quotes show that students are frustrated, overwhelmed and panicked when experiencing stress. Complimenting this is Sean's analogy to being on a track that he cannot get off. It is evident that some of these students (for example, Nicole, Beth, Sean and Grace) feel their capacities to be self-directed actors are constrained. They

have a diminished sense of empowerment in terms of themselves and their ability to navigate through stressful situations. They also feel overwhelmed with the emotions that accompany this and appear to have limited outlets for expressing these emotions.

<u>4.5 Students' Experiences with the Social Meanings of Stress</u>

In a general sense, discourse can be understood as the discussion of ideas through speech (Webster 1994). Among social scientists, discourse has a more peculiar usage. I was introduced to the concept in the following manner. In response to hearing a word such as 'cancer' or 'wrestling', one records all the thoughts and images which come to mind without self-censorship, and recognizes the social meanings and or/social baggage that are associated with either 'cancer' or 'wrestling'. These images or words do not necessarily reflect one's actual views or opinions, nor do they necessarily accurately reflect or explain either cancer or wrestling; however, they can play a role in shaping our attitudes. Lewis and Simon (1986) suggest that discourses can influence our agency by favoring some actions while closing off other options. As they explain:

> Discourse refers to particular ways of organizing meaning-making practices. Discourse as a mode of governance delimits the range of possible practices under its authority and organizes the articulation of these practices within time and space although differently and often unequally for different people. Such governance delimits fields of relevance and definitions of legitimate perspectives and fixes norms for concept elaboration and the expression of experience (457-458).

The previous sections illustrate the tension, discomfort, panic and frustration that students experience as part of academic life. For many of them, the stress is constant; for others it is more episodic in nature. Before exploring this point of divergence, I would like to conclude this chapter by exploring the social meanings and discourses that are evident in the data.

Emily Martin, a medical/cultural anthropologist, looked at how the language describing the reproduction process and the role of the sperm and egg carry gender messages that are social in origin rather than strictly deduced from scientific observation. The sperm are denoted as 'active' and 'strong' while the egg is described as 'passive' and is not actualized until 'penetration' by the sperm (1991). The language used to describe the process of union is laden with gender stereotypes, which filter how we choose to describe the process. Her work suggested to me a way of looking at the way(s) students describe stress to see if meaning-making was happening in regard to how stress was conceptualized (see Martin 1991; 1997; 1994).

When I began this research, I had not realized that stress as a concept has its own discourses that people use to make sense of it. As I read over the interviews I was fascinated with the many implicit social messages embedded in the words of the students. These social meanings/discourses help illuminate various social values which, in turn, influence social practices both individually and on a broader social level.

4.5.1 Students' Normalization of Stress

Analysis of the interviews suggests that student stress is not only common, but is also normalized. Students viewed stress as a part of life which one had to cope with; a natural, normal event [see quotes from Nicole (p.85/6) and Kyle (p.75)]. This view was pervasive and taken by them as fact. At one level, this is certainly common sense. Students lead busy lives and try to make deadlines and respond to varied demands. There *is* a certain amount of stress to being a student - it is normal.

Michael Apple (1997) reminds us, however, that what is understood as 'common sense' is often actually the result of successful campaigning by dominant groups who gain from having certain practices being perceived as natural and inevitable. The advantage is the effective limiting of or seeking of alternatives.

Recalling Aldwin's (1994) quote regarding a cultural mandate which sees various groups being subjected to stress at particular life stages suggests that students are one such group. That stress is accepted among students as a normal and inevitable part of their student experience suggests that stress has a hegemonic quality to it. This is not to suggest that a conspiracy exists that keeps students in a state of suffering. Rather I'm suggesting that, because of the way education and educational funding are organized, students are in social positions of little power. Couple this with the premise of Donnelly and Long (2003) that the meanings of stress are produced through social organization and social relations and it becomes evident how stress experiences might come to be seen as completely natural or neutral in origin.

Students are in the process of attaining more social capital through their education and are learning about how their world is organized. This process of transition discourages them questioning why they experience their education in the way they do. The discouragement from questioning is subtle and not unusual. Transition is a time of shifting roles, changing responsibilities and struggles to adapt to ever increasing demands. Students have a sense of the general norms for being a student but not of specific norms for any given stage of their education. One is only a first year student once. What an individual experiences as a first year student is assumed to be the norm. This also applies to second, third and fourth year students. There is an expectation that work gets more demanding. However students do not have a point of comparison that would encourage them to question the way they experience their education. They do not sense that there are alternatives. There is an adherence to the dominant social values of late-twentieth-century North America, namely independence and a strong work ethic. Emily Martin (1994) suggests the work ethic of the post-modern economy demands its workforce be 'flexible'. Students accept their stress as part of student life and in doing this they enact the

normalization of stress. In their relations with each other, with their family, and with their professors stress is normalized and accepted. And this is what they will anticipate when they enter the workforce.

4.5.2 Students' Individualization of Stress

Another discourse present in the interviews was that stress is an individual responsibility. When asked if they would consider asking their friends for assistance when they were stressed, most students said they preferred to deal with it on their own, or to simply endure it. And only three of the students indicated they had used the counseling center, while the other 13 had not. Upon further discussion, the students suggested the counseling center was for people who had 'real' problems. While some students held the notion that seeking out counseling was a drastic step, they supported counseling as an option for others. They also worried that by utilizing the service themselves, they would be taking resources away from those people who 'really' needed it.

Downplaying stress as an insignificant problem hints at the degree to which students had normalized the experience of stress. These responses strongly suggest an adherence to the cultural value placed on independence and individualism. The students acknowledged being stressed and identified this in terms of physical tension, emotional frustration and lack of control; they also accepted the discourses of individualism and saw virtue in not asking for help. These appear to be the implicit social lessons being absorbed by many students while pursuing their education.

The discourse of individualism was also present in the way students represented themselves in their stories of coping. Frank, for example, explained how he had experienced more stress the previous year but had learned how to deal with it. In telling his story, Frank described the aid he received from his parents (he lived at

home rent free and his mother cooked for him). He worked a significant amount of hours at two jobs, and he said that his employers understood the demands his work and school schedules. His small student loan allowed him to pay off his debts at a lower interest rate. His friend allowed him to come over and use his computer whenever he needed it. He exercised regularly and managed to go out socially a couple of times a week with his girlfriend and friends. It was evident from the interview that while Frank was managing to maintain a sense of balance in his life, he also had many social resources and networks that were available to support him.

Yet throughout his interview, he did not attribute his successful coping to these social resources. Instead, he talked about how 'he' had learned to cope and deal with stress without any assistance from his professors, the university or his social network. He saw stress as an individual issue and as something he had learned to manage on his own. Frank had learned how to deal with stress by managing his time, and diversifying his activities, strategies that research suggests help to mitigate stress. What appears to be less visible to him and perhaps to others is the role that his social resources and social network has played in his stress experience. Like Frank, other students did not always recognize their use of social resources to help them cope. Morris, Popsicle and Kyle, for example, also lived at home with their respective families and were supported in terms of food and lodging. This saved them money and granted them more discretionary time than many of their peers. Frank and Morris also had jobs, which allowed them to enjoy the benefits of extra income that, in turn, meant they had other resources to help offset their stress by giving them greater ability to purchase leisure activities unavailable to poorer students. Sometimes family

or friends helped students in practical matters as well, as illustrated by Frank.

Students who live on their own and go to university generally face many more financial strains, and will be dealing with them for a longer time. Those in the situation where they have to borrow large sums of money to pay for tuition and living expenses find that student loans cannot be taken lightly or come as a relief. For Frank an $8,000 loan allows him to live a higher quality of life and he is confident he is in a position to deal with it. Some students were more conscious than Frank that their ability to deal with stress was in part due to the role of personal connections. Elizabeth, for example, acknowledges that she is able to rely on the financial aid of her parents to help her deal with the debt she has acquired in the pursuit of her degree. She points out, "my parents said they're gonna help me out paying it. You know there's always ways around it." Knowing that she will have assistance in the repayment of her student debt reduces the pressure that Elizabeth feels and allows her to concentrate on more pro-active ways of dealing with her future.

For students like Frank, who had a variety of social resources and networks to draw on and managed stress well, the idea that they dealt with their problems on their own added to their sense of accomplishment and competence. However, when the social resources utilized by these students are not recognized both personally and socially, students who have more limited social resources at their disposal may also tend to believe that individual strengths and strategies are sufficient for stress reduction. This also means that they are less likely to search for solutions outside themselves in order to alleviate their stress.

4.5.3 Students' Personalization of Stress

The previous section describes how the discourse of individualism influences students' understanding of stress, both theirs and others, especially in terms of their use of social coping resources. This section explores they ways that students understand their own stress as a personal experience. Self-blame and self-identification with stress and the social meanings of stress were predominant themes in the students' interviews. The tendency to personalize stress presented itself in particular ways. For instance, when stressed, students felt unable to be objective or rational, something they saw as desirable. The emotional turmoil they associated with stress was not a feeling they trusted as a legitimate form of knowledge. Morris, a 23 year old, single student who lived at home with his family and worked part-time, articulates the array of feelings associated with stress very clearly.

> ...... I guess it's just a feeling of - a lot of different feelings associated with it, some of helplessness, pressure, a lot of worry, being nervous, unsure, uncertain of things ... I guess it depends on what is your stress. I mean you have financial stress, you have to go to work; or if you have a deadline, or if you're having social problems, problems with your girlfriend. Uhm it's really broad, but it's usually just a feeling of uncomfortableness. Just unhappiness really.

Morris' description of stress situates the experience as "just a feeling" or a compilation of negative feelings. He identifies various social situations associated with these negative feelings, but he sees them as episodic or temporary.

> I: Uh now everyone experiences stress in a different way. But for you what does stress feel like? ... Or how do you know when you're stressed out?
>
> Morris: Usually frustration is the big thing for me. Ah ... stress comes in episodes right? It has something to do with, ... for awhile you'll seem so frustrated with something that ... you don't want to do it but you have to. You go and do it. You'll be stressed for awhile because

you know you have to do this and you know that you've got something
riding on it. Like you need this to pass a course or you know you
don't have the money or you just got dumped or something. But
usually after a while, after the episode passes, you usually feel relieved
once you pass in a paper or you get back a mark and you did half
decent, it usually ends the stress.

Morris situates stress as a result of temporary, negative personal situations and he

accepts these situations and the corresponding stress as inevitable. Accepting these

experiences as normal and temporary means there is no need to ask: why am I

stressed? Are other people stressed? Why or why not? When no questions are raised

about the origin of stress, there is little chance that comparisons with others'

experiences will occur. There is no hint here that stress experiences could be

understood as more than an individual experience, that stress could be understood as a

social or political issue.

Elizabeth, a 22 year old student originally from a rural part of the province,

lived with roommates and did not work outside of school. Here she describes what

being stressed means to her:

It just means that I've obviously had not everything organized because
there must be a possible way to do it all and usually there is but you
just can't put it in perspective. And I feel really agitated and irritable.
Blood pressure rises. (Laugh)

She questions herself and her competence to accomplish her set tasks and

responsibilities by suggesting that stress is due to her failure to find a way to do this.

The issue is not framed with a focus on the number or manner of stressors she is

encountering but rather she focuses on her personal shortcomings, specifically her

inability to calmly, rationally and logically do everything. The fault lies with her

'losing it', 'not seeing it objectively' and for responding emotionally. Like Elizabeth,

many students (Nicole, Sean, Leslie and Morris) clearly state that stress is debilitating precisely because it is a state where one is rendered emotional and is therefore perceived as irrational. Elizabeth continues,

> Stress is ... where you totally lose it, can't put anything in order and you can't understand why it's put on you and how they even expect you to get it all done at this time. And it's too... you can't look at it... and so oh this isn't going to get this paper. People can't look at it objectively right. Get outside of the state you're in. You just lose it, you're all out of whack cause you can't think straight. Can't focus. You need to go for a walk or go to bed or take a rest.

She begins to question the situation when she asks how can 'they expect you to get it all done on time?' However, this point was rarely raised by the students. Instead, they accepted their experience of stress as not only normal, but also legitimate.

Nicole had recently moved out of the family home into her own apartment. She attended school part-time and worked at a gas bar. Her family and co-workers had questioned her decision to go to university and declared the pursuit was a waste of money and time. Below she describes what she thinks of when she hears the word 'stress':

> I picture someone with their eyeballs buggy, like going around with like a tub of coffee, (laugh) like oh god, their hair all frazzled and everything (laugh). But you know what I mean? But really I think stress is like, um I think it's a lot of rushing. I do, like if you're someone like myself you're rushing around trying to get everything done.

Nicole provides us with the exterior aesthetic description of someone stressed; 'eyeballs buggy', 'hair all frazzled'. The opposite can be inferred - the non-stressed person would appear calm and smooth with plenty of time to spare. The non-stressed person would have a 'finished' or polished look about him or her. They are in control of themselves and are not fazed by their surroundings. Would the non-stressed

person 'drink coffee by the tub'? The implication is no. The stressed individual is always in process, never ready, and is unkempt. Her description helps us see that while being stressed might be a physical response to stimuli, there are social and cultural meanings ascribed to this state of being as well. Questions of competence and aesthetics come into view in a way that obscures the roles of class and gender. While Nicole captures a subtle cultural reading of stress, her reading also has inherent social assumptions to it. A person who is 'finished' and 'competent' is socially associated with those who are economically well off and have the means to achieve a 'polished' appearance. Canadian society still has a gender gap in terms of income in that women are most likely to dominate lower income levels. Therefore, those most likely to achieve the look of the non-stressed are likely to be socially successful men who are able to access social resources to help them deal with stress. Nicole's comments suggest that to acknowledge stress is to be incompetent and unsuccessful.

> And this feeling, overwhelming feeling, that you're feeling time pressures um and demands from you know, time pressure I think is a lot of what is stress. Um and I'm a procrastinator big time so that's not you know. And I think that's the same for other people too like a lot of time pressure um, um basically I guess just a feeling that have so much to do and especially, also when you run into obstacles um for instance when my car breaks down. 'Cause I mean I need it to get to school. So if my car breaks down then I have to get to school so I can do research then I'm stressed out. And probably just like life, like little things that can happen in a day. Like you know just little tiny things like you know you're walking and you fall (laugh). It happens right? And I find even though it sounds silly in and of itself it's not because I find that if you have anything on your mind at all or if you're on your way to do something or you're on your way to class and you just totally lose it.

This association between stress and incompetence invalidates real social differences between people and the abilities and resources they have at hand to help them cope. Notice that Nicole describes stressors as those aspects of everyday life that can build

up and be overwhelming if one has limited resources to deal with them. The image of the stressed person is not flattering and might contribute to the reasons why many students prefer to deal with their stress on their own.

For many of these students, to acknowledge stress was to suggest that one was incapable of managing one's responsibilities. This is particularly pertinent to understanding university students' relationship to stress more generally. The demographic characteristics of the student body are changing as greater numbers of mature students enter post-secondary studies; however, the majority of students are still in their late teens and early twenties - and as such are still in a transitional phase of life. And while these students are legally adults, they are still in the process of learning how to navigate in the adult world. They believe that to be successful, they need a university education. For many students, university is their first experience where all their peers are also adults. And to varying degrees they are also beginning to deal with the responsibilities of adulthood. Some students see a connection between their ability to be competitive and do well in university and their future success in the job world (Claire, Elizabeth, Popsicle, Kate). Since stress is part of adulthood, students might have reservations about acknowledging stress or seeking out assistance as that might suggest incompetence or failure in their new role as adults.

Sean was in a common-law relationship and was to marry within weeks of the interview. His partner worked full-time and Sean acted as the primary caregiver to their two-year-old child while he attended school full-time and worked part-time. Sean extends Nicole's observation that being stressed is linked with issues of

competence, though he frames stress as helping him become more disciplined:

> Sean: It was ... like I have, I guess it's a bad way of saying it. I have,
> don't have a temper, I don't uh throw things or get violent or anything.
> But I'm just always up tight. I guess what stress has done to me is
> make me control myself. I think it's because I no longer get excited
> about things where I just have so much all the time. I guess that's why
> I have a bad memory. Like all the time I have a million things that I
> got to do this and I got to do that. Um ... I'll want to do this or I'll start
> day dreaming ... that's why I got a bad memory 'cause my mind is just
> not there. It's like there; it's all over the place. It's branching out ...
> basically yeah ... I mean I'm not a drinker, I don't do drugs so I don't
> like physically or biologically. I think it's just psychologically that's
> where it is. In my mind, just like I have wicked coordination. I play
> instruments and stuff and uh and my mind where I record ... I can do
> ten things at once I can be thinking about one thing and do something
> else. And I'm really good at that because I've said, I can be doing a
> research paper and talking to someone on the phone and be taking care
> of Jordan all at the same time. That's the way I look at it. I guess it's
> why ... repeat the question? [I: Just sort of how you experience
> stress?] That's basically it, sort of mutual like; like distant I guess is
> the word. ... You know what I mean? I just take everything, one day at
> a time I suppose.

While Sean says that stress has made him control himself, one is left to question whether it is really 'control' that Sean is experiencing. He talks about 'being numb', 'no longer getting excited about things,' a 'bad memory,' 'daydreaming'. On the one hand, Sean knows that his responsibilities mean that he has to multitask and he sees himself as 'good' at it. His inability to remember the question (this happened at least three times throughout the interview) coupled with his self-described state of being suggest his experience was less one of control than one of struggling to cope. He is acting in several non-traditional roles: a student who is a parent and spouse, and also a male as the primary care-giver and homemaker. He experiences multiple stressors with each role, and he must also contend with issues of gender roles and competence. For these reasons we can surmise that Sean prefers to see himself as someone who

deals well with stress. To admit otherwise draws into question his capability in multiple social roles.

The students did not uniformly look at stress as a normal, negative experience. There was one student who described how stress in a particular situation was positive. Claire explains:

> I think there's good stress and bad stress. But when you think of stress in general it's usually bad and I know myself I don't think, I don't think I have any physical symptoms. I know I'm more, I'm really cranky and I'm really crooked and agitated and irritable … And I'll tell my parents or I'll tell my boyfriend like I'm just in a bad mood leave me alone. … But there is also good stress ... like ... I know that I can't relate it to school as much, but I row in the regatta. [I: Oh do you?] Yeah. So that's a good stress because like there's so many people watching and stuff that I really enjoy it. So I mean you go out and you get a good work out and I'm going to do well so it's a good stress. Like even though I'm really nervous and stuff but it's good. But yeah, I think school's more related to bad stress because you're always worried well, I need to do well, and I have to pass, and you know there's just constant competition between your other students and, you know, and you want to do well cause these are going to be your competitors in the future so ….

In stark contrast to how the other students described their experience of stress, Claire was the only one to suggest and give an example of how stress can also be positive. However, she makes a clear distinction between the stress experienced in association with her role as a student and the activity of education, and that experienced as a rower in the local regatta. There are three points to note from Claire's comments comparing stress in different contexts. One, the line "I'm going to get a good workout and I'm going to do well" suggests she knew she would be challenged, immersed in an activity and feel success from meeting the challenge when rowing. She was certain she would do well. Rowing engendered Claire's confidence and getting a good workout was something she valued. Her comments imply that her

experience as a student did not have the same benefits. Further, Claire contrasts that while she 'will do well' at the Regatta, she 'needs to do well' at university. The competition at university is set against a much larger backdrop - success in life. The school and the workforce are competitive situations with no support, only peers who are also her competitors. Claire clearly believes that the primary message underpinning her educational experience is individual success as measured by grades.

4.6 Students' Ways of Managing Stress

The data analysis up to now has shown how students tend to normalize, individualize and personalize stress related to being a student. While students are certainly active in their social worlds, these worlds are constructed in ways that discourage or limit how they participate. Students' abilities to participate are influenced by their abilities to utilize knowledge in the creation and direction of their lives. Nevertheless, students are not completely passive in their lives. They do make efforts to offset or manage stress. As previously mentioned, the literature refers to managing stress primarily through active or emotional coping strategies. After reviewing their interviews, it became evident that the students used both approaches. They utilized emotional coping strategies by minimizing their experience or by redirecting their feelings of stress. Problem-solving or active stress management was also illustrated by the way some students dealt with sources of stress through the use of social networks. For example, Sean and Anna both utilized their sibling's vehicles when the need arose and Frank utilized his friend's computer when necessary. The students' perception of stress as an individual issue was reflected in their strategies.

The students who coped with stress by minimizing their emotional experience

of it did so by attempting to endure it. For example, Claire felt she had no control

over her situation, so she simply endured it.

> Claire: mmm .... feelings of frustration. Like you want to get it over
> and done with but you can't make ... like you can't make the hours go
> faster you can't make the days go by any faster. You've just got to
> live with it and it's because you've got to live with it you're just like,
> you know, you just want to separate yourself from everyone else and
> just like get everything done. Get it all over with and then just like, be
> able to go on with your life type thing. Yeah it's almost like a feeling
> of isolation type thing. Like you don't want to be bothered by anyone
> else you just want to do it and get it over with type thing.

The feeling of not wanting to "be bothered by anyone else" can be interpreted in two

possible ways. First, it suggests that when Claire felt stressed, she was not in a

position to either raise questions about her experience, or to be pro-active about her

stress. Secondly, it implies that she is not disposed to act as a social resource for

anyone else either.

The students' comments echo the findings of Nonis et al. (1998) who reported

that feeling in control of one's time reduced stress and increased one's ability to

problem solve and one's sense of well-being. Arthur (1998) corroborates the

students' feelings that the stress they feel paralyzes them by noting that emotional

responses to stress can impair the way that one chooses to cope.

Another way of minimizing stress was to understand it as a relative

experience. For example, Elizabeth worries over how she will repay her loans, but

she gains perspective on her own situation by comparing it with that of her

roommates.

> [Stress is] always on my mind. Always thinking about my debts and
> how I'm going to pay it off. But I see people in worse situations than
> myself, like my roommates, four years of university and nothing to
> show for it and student loans each time. And she's just starting

engineering and she's got six years of it. I thank my lucky stars
because if I was in that situation I don't know how I'd deal with it.
Total bottom of the debt list and that's not so bad right.

Elizabeth took solace in the fact that, unlike her roommate, she will soon have her

degree. She recognizes that while she owes money, she could owe more. She feels

better about her situation after comparing it with those who are worse off. Instead of

questioning her student debt, and looking at it as a political issue, or raising questions,

she tells herself her situation is comparatively good.

Sometimes, students coped by finding outlets that re-directed their feelings of

stress, either in terms of physical expression (Frank, Kyle, and Elizabeth), through

emotional expression (Kelly, Leslie), or sometimes both (Sophie, Grace and Morris).

The process of finding effective and healthy ways of dealing with stress was

sometimes a source of frustration in itself. Sophie, a single parent, describes her

efforts to find a stress release:

A friend who does this Reiki healing, I went and tried that - I've tried
different things, and it was worse when I didn't do anything, but I'm
just stressed about being stressed out. I'm not able to turn off all the
thoughts in my head. I find that housecleaning helps, really, really
scrubbing the bathtub. (Laugh) ... now when I mop the floor it feels
really, really good. I'm proud of myself. It seems so dorky but it's
true. So a really clean floor, yay! I'm understanding all the women in
the commercials. But it's gross, um but mostly I just kind of breathe.

Sophie finds that doing household chores helps alleviate the physical feelings of

stress but the housework also provides something else: the momentary feeling of

accomplishment. Unlike student work, housework allows Sophie to quickly discern

she has done a good job and that her effort has resulted in something better, which

affords her a feeling of "pride". There is a hint of embarrassment about this though.

She is aware that she is enacting certain social stereotypes about women and the

apparent satisfaction they get from housekeeping as portrayed in the advertisements for cleaning products.

While housework helps to relieve the physical feelings, Sophie sometimes used other methods to release her stress, as she describes below:

> Every now and again, I send my daughter outside so I can go into my room and scream (laugh). Time for mommy to yell now, I need a time out, go outside and bye-bye for two minutes and I'll come and getcha (Laugh). So I go ahead and yell and scream and pound the pillow and um, but I mean that has only happened a bit. It will probably happen more. Um that was about it. I used to smoke actually that was a big part of coping but then that comes with a whole other bunch of stress in itself. Um that would be about it.

Sophie knows that finding effective forms of coping with stress is important and she also feels the pressure to model appropriate behaviour for her daughter. This means occasionally taking a couple of minutes for herself and releasing her frustration into a pillow. Sophie is careful to suggest this only happens occasionally and positions this as better than smoking. Students often tend to use quick, individual expressions of stress which give them a temporary release from their immediate situation. These examples illustrate how the students rely on themselves and their ingenuity to deal with their stress.

The manner in which the students coped was influenced by their acceptance of the social discourse of stress as an individual issue. In some circumstances, this may have been the most appropriate response. However, even if students on some level recognized that their stress may have been rooted in a mismatch between personal circumstances and structural organization, their options for coping would not have been that different. None of the students I spoke with felt they had the ability to access or influence larger society. They felt powerless to change the student loan

system and tuition rates. On a more micro level, several of the students spoke of the desire to get together with other students but lacked the time or know-how to start up a student society. Consequently, their social discourses of stress were strengthened and confirmed by the students' ways of coping. And the social forces influencing their stress were never held accountable or put in a position where they might have to consider changes.

4.7 Conclusion

When students spoke about stress, they identified physical discomfort, emotional frustration and an experience of the social world that left them feeling a lack of control in their lives. Different social discourses surround stress, making it seem normal, individual and an issue of competence rather than about access to social resources. Students adhere to the idea that stress is normal and should be dealt with individually, though they showed compassionate tendencies towards others, by wanting help to be available to those who 'really' needed it. Some of the social meanings implicit in acknowledging stress have also been identified as possible reasons why students are reluctant to seek out help. To acknowledge that one is experiencing stress and unable to cope suggests emotional instability, incompetence, a lack of personal mastery and low social status. Issues of identity and self-concept are woven into one's decision to cope silently, often to the detriment of students. The next chapter offers some answers to the question of what types of social circumstances contribute to these experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Production and Mediation of Stress in Students' Day-to-Day Lives

5.1 Introduction

The stress literature suggests that stress is in part an individual response to stimuli, but recognizes that there are social influences especially in terms of coping mechanisms. The last chapter illustrated the experience of stress as a state involving physical, emotional and social discomfort either separately or concurrently. Discourses associated with student stress were identified and their roles in shaping the stress experiences of students were explored. While discourses of stress play a role in the stress experience they are only one factor. The context in which stress is produced and mediated is multi-dimensional as this chapter will illustrate. Relationships with family, friends, co-workers and professors are an integral part of students' lives and combine with the economics of student life to influence both stress and coping. Students have multiple financial concerns that span their past, present and future. In addition to monetary issues, various social relationships associated with diverse degrees of responsibility, obligation and support are constant factors in students' lives. How men and women go about fulfilling their multiple financial and social obligations while pursuing their university education is integral to student work. University actors generally assume that students should accomplish the work associated with other areas of their lives in ways that do not interfere with their role as student. These implicit demands are reflected in some of the ways that both professors and students talk about student stress, about professor-student dynamics and about their respective roles.

<u>5.2 Students' Financial Context and the Production of Stress</u>

<u>5.2.1 Long- and Short-Term Financial Stressors</u>

Despite variance among participating students in terms of their personal income, parental

income and student debt, they shared many financial concerns. One common sentiment

expressed by the students was the feeling that the decision to pursue a university

education had both immediate- and long-term financial consequences. Foremost among

these was the discrepancy they saw between the perceived financial rewards of a

university education and their current fiscal situation.

As illustrated earlier, most students had believed that a university education

would give them access to a higher-income bracket, better social status and social

security than they could expect without going to university when they began their

programs. Many alluded to this point as a motivating factor for initially pursuing their

degrees. In the interviews, several students expressed sentiments of bitterness and

bewilderment at finding themselves nearing the end of their program with a large debt

and the perception that they faced a bleak labour market after graduating. When asked if

stress was something he thought about all the time, Popsicle [a self-chosen pseudonym]

replied:

> I don't know, lately actually, yes. I guess it is all you ... I mean
> everybody, every day there is going to be a certain amount of stress in
> everybody's lives. No matter what you are doing. It's like, school and
> money and stuff like that and thinking about the student [loans] and not
> having money to do the things I want to right now and at 23, I figure ...
> when I was younger I was figuring I would have a good job by now ... I'm
> not working but ... I mean now these days like a B.A. is not really going to
> get you much ... you have got to do something else. I don't know, like
> $30,000 or $35,000 and I have an undergraduate degree which is going to
> ... I mean I am going to have to do something else. Get into law school I

suppose ... that's way more money. By the time I actually do get out working, you know, I will owe like $60,000 or $70,000 and that's a pretty big stress. Which is always on my mind so that's ah ... like money in general is actually almost stressing me out that much lately that it's almost getting to the point that it's affecting me ... like I don't even want to be here almost now ... even though I know I got to ... there is no sense in giving it up but ... that affects me in school a lot.

Popsicle expresses the common sense view that stress is an inevitable part of life for everyone. The stress literature corroborates that stress is inevitable, and a normal part of nature. It is simply a response to stimuli. However, unlike other animals, humans have the capacity to create forms of social organization that buffer biological impulses. While stressors and responses to stress may be inevitable, both of these can be either minimized or exacerbated by social dictates and therefore are not solely physical responses to natural stimuli.

Popsicle's way of relativizing his stress allows him to affirm that he is part of the 'norm'. However, when he quickly goes on to talk about the stressors in his life, he highlights the socially contingent nature of the stressors. These include structural factors like his student loans and the apparent lack of freedom that comes with no discretionary income. And then there are the more subtle self-perceptions influenced by his socialization, namely that the idealized image he had of himself as an adult is at odds with the reality of his situation. Instead of being independent and well employed at the age of 23, Popsicle finds he is still living at home, carrying a debt over $30,000 and is convinced that his education will not translate into a 'good' job unless he incurs more debt by doing another professional degree. These thoughts occupy his mind 'constantly' and are strongly associated with his studies. He contrasts his own experience with that of

some of his friends who made different choices.

> I've got a lot of friends that are working on the rigs since they were, like, 18 making, like, $60,000 grand a year for God's sakes. You know, like, they are living good and stuff and here I am like ... and stuff and I am in here which is supposed to be the thing to do if you want to get a good job ... whatever a good job is.

Popsicle feels stuck in school, uninspired, and appears to have little sense of accomplishment or possibility. He feels compelled to continue with school while questioning the immediate consequences of the decision and how his original decision to go to university has limited his options.

Like Popsicle, many of the students indicated they had believed that 'education' (meaning a university degree) would lead them directly to a middle-class job, allowing them to lead a lifestyle of independence and freedom through greater consumer power. What they did not anticipate was that the immediate consequence of getting their degree would be considerable debt and that they might not be able to find a good job when they finished. This debt load contributes to feelings of immobility both academically and socially. They do not have the cash flow to participate in social activities like their friends who chose different career paths. They experience constant anxiety and uncertainty about their future, both in terms of covering their basic living expenses as well as the repayments on their debt. These debts also add to the feeling that since they have started their degrees, they must continue because it is a viable way to postpone the repayment of their student debt, even though continuing often means increasing their debt loads.

Popsicle and other students refer to unmet self-expectations or images of how

they thought they would experience life at their respective ages. They perceive their current quality of life as poor and anxiety inducing. The gap between where they imagined they would be and the reality of where they are acts as a constant and painful reference point which suggests failure. Nicole observes: "I always pictured myself living comfortably but I don't see myself with that because I won't be able to get a job like that with just a BA". Throughout their lives they listened to the advice of teachers, counselors, politicians and family, friends and neighbors who in one way or another intoned the advice 'you need an education to make it in today's world'. For rural students, this belief was further compounded by the close of the cod fishery.

The realization that a rural way of life was no longer an option had led some students from rural areas to place greater hope and belief in both the necessity and the rewards of a university education. Popsicle, like over half the students I interviewed, was the first in his immediate family to pursue a degree. Some were also the first in their extended family to do so. Like others, his current situation sees him in debt, owing tens of thousands of dollars, with no professional designation or clear career trajectory. While studies (Allen 1998) illustrate the long-term benefits of a university education in the job market, not all degree holders benefit equally. The confidence they might derive from the long-term potential of a degree is muted by their immediate needs and realities as students. Most begin to feel these pressures by the end of their third year and wonder how they will manage.

When asked if the university should provide more career information, Popsicle responds:

No. I think the university, I think they do a good job to ... and certain people you can talk to and most of the profs are pretty good if you want to talk to them....I mean...usually they will help you out a bit and stuff. I mean they have people in there all the time in the Arts Faculty you know coming in ... like lawyers and stuff and talking about how to do this and what way they went about it. So I think they ... I think they do what they can. But it's just... tuition!

He has no complaint about the flow of information and he accepts the possibility that he will need to take further schooling to specialize while incurring a greater debt load. His hope is that obtaining specific credentials will translate into a high paying job enabling payment of his debt. What he would like to see is a lower tuition rate now. This request might seem minuscule in the context of a $30,000 debt but it would immediately release more discretionary money for him to use now and offset the feeling of being left behind by his peers allegedly making $60,000 on the rigs.

Popsicle's feeling that he will need another degree to find a job was shared by other interviewees.

Kate: I'd have to leave to go to law school, eventually, I'm damn well sure that I'm going to law school. I don't care if it takes me ten years.

Grace: I think if you decide to go to grad school then it opens up a lot more doors for you. But just a bachelor's degree, I don't really know how much, you know, how many job opportunities there are for us. I mean I think before someone decided to do sociology they should be really stressed that you just can not do sociology. You have to go on and do something else too.

Students also spoke about needing to get high grades and to do volunteer work to help them get into other programs that have a clearer job trajectory. Only two students had career plans that did not involve further education. One hoped to work in a social service job with youth in another province that did not require a Bachelor of Social Work degree. The other planned to try and get a job as a car salesperson.

Money concerns were major stressors for students regardless of their

backgrounds. In terms of family income, parental education and future goals, Grace was the most comfortably middle-class student I interviewed. She came to University X from a small, coastal community to attend university. She lived with her sister, her cousin and another female renter in a home owned by her parents. She was not obliged to pay rent that semester because she was not employed, though in previous semesters she had worked part-time and contributed rent money. At the time of the interview, she wanted to concentrate on school and visit her parents every few weekends since one of them had been in ill health the previous term.

When asked, "Some people say they don't worry about money. Other people say they don't worry about anything but money. Where would you put yourself?" Grace said:

> When you say don't worry about anything but money, does that mean in the long run, or just right now? [Joanne: Right now I guess, yeah.] Well, right now I don't have any. (Laugh). So I guess I really can't worry about it. No, like I find it a lot more stressful this semester when it comes to money because I'm not working. And mom and dad give me on average about ... $350 a month for, and like that's just spending money. And I don't have rent or, but then I have to buy groceries. I have to buy bus passes. I have life insurance that I have to pay for and ... you know so it's like ... and everyone's like you know 'Grace what do you with all of your money?' You've got no money again?! But you know when you sit down and you add up everything, you haven't wasted it. It's just gone in necessities. And so it's like, everyone's like, "What did you do with all that money?" You know $400 a month but ... it goes. Like I had a cheque yesterday for $174, I have twenty-five left in my wallet. That's it. I only spent twenty last night at the [student pub]. But then I bought 50 dollars worth of groceries yesterday. I had to buy a bus pass. I owed my sister 30 dollars. You know, it's so easy to go. And it's pretty stressful because then I was disappointed when my friends are going out and I can't because I don't have the money to go out. But when I was working I was getting double that 'cause you know I was making an extra $300 a month for myself, and I never did without anything. I could always go and do what I wanted whenever I wanted. So, it makes a big difference. So I'm going to try and get a job. You know I'd like the relaxation of this semester but it's on, you know, I'd rather have money than …

In her comments about money, Grace distinguished between the present and the 'long run'. She defined her current situation as stressful and disappointing. Like Popsicle and other students, her apparent lack of freedom due to limited discretionary income and dependence on others bothered her. A job would give her more financial and social freedom but would increase her time pressure. Like Popsicle and Nicole, Grace is very clear about the value she places on money in her future.

> And in the long run, it's very important for me to have money. I don't want to ... it may sound materialistic or whatever but ... I don't want to give my children any less than what my parents gave me. And I've had just about everything I've ever wanted ... Not whatever I wanted but, you know, I never did without anything. So I just think I'd need to be able to give my children what my parents gave me and it's important for me to be able to make, you know $40 - $45,000 a year is what I'm looking for. My mom makes 44 - 45 a year and my Dad makes like 60.

Grace has a very specific financial standard in mind, and she is confident she will attain this. Note that it is not what she 'would like', or 'hopes for' or 'imagines'; it is her goal and what she expects. This confidence is notable for its rarity among the participating students and might be influenced by her background and having grown up with both parents who worked middle-class jobs.

Grace's situation seems fairly comfortable and stable when contrasted with that of other students. For example, Anna is a single parent with one child. Anna returned to post-secondary education because she, too, believed it would lead to a career that would enable her to provide well for her child. At the time of the interview, Anna and her child lived in a social housing complex where they witnessed violence and did not always feel safe. When I asked her the same question I posed to Grace, Anna spoke at length about how the issue of money affected her day-to-day life. She said:

I know, let's put it this way. I said to my mother several times, "If I won two million on lotto 649 I wouldn't have a worry in the world (laugh). I'd say to hell with everybody (laugh)." If you want to look at it that way, money's my main concern um ... because ... I'm a very um I raise my [child] and everything is expensive. To play hockey this year it cost me $600 um for the year. So what I had to do was take this child tax credit and make monthly payments in order to have [child] in um I paid. I go to social services as little as possible because it's very demeaning. Um they're going to give me not even $500 a month, give me that to live on. Um so, um so somehow I've managed to get all the stuff with I guess I'm good at budgeting my money.

Many of the students described how they budget their money and the need to monitor their spending. Explaining their budgeting revealed the social discrepancy among the students as well as their resilience and determination. Anna continues:

Like let's see I need a washer to wash clothes. Because it was hard to be walking outside ... [Joanne: Yeah] So what I did was, I walked around the university in one pair of pants for a year. That was it, one pair of jeans everyday (laugh) like some profs (laugh). But anyways that's me right? So what I did was I got a washer and I paid it off right and I got that paid off right. So I kind of need a dryer too now right. So you know like my child is never without, but I am. So I have just about everything now that I need so I'm working on my own now. Now I need no basic necessities now right.

While her basic necessities were covered, there were always new costs for her to deal with. None of these new costs seem extravagant, but they all compelled Anna to carefully weigh her use of money, especially so that she could avoid going on welfare where she would have to justify her need(s) to others.

Anna: But so money's a big thing with me. [Joanne: Yeah]: Um because if I had lots of money I wouldn't have to worry about tomorrow. I wouldn't have to worry about 'ok how am I going to get this for J. this week? [Child] really needs it.' Ok so I have to go out and buy a pair of swimming trunks which is only like $10, but I really needed that $10 for something else. But [child] really needs that and we have to get that right or you know. I really, I never went to social services for things I was

capable of. I think it was going to cost me $68 but I paid it so I don't have to think about it. So I'm continuously trying to figure out what I'm going to pay for this, this month that could be paid for next month. [Joanne: Yeah] Right and uh like you know I got a bed for my [child] too, a new bed right. And I never went to social services for that either. ... Right? I paid it off myself.

Anna prides herself on her independence; however, she acknowledges the support she gets from her informal social network. For example, her sibling allows her to purchase items with his/her credit card, which Anna pays off and loans Anna a car for errands.

If I didn't have [sibling] I'd be at a loss so like it's kinda like a give and take right [Joanne: Yeah] So that helps me right. So money's a big thing with me it's a big thing um on a balance ... (sigh) I'd have to say it's the most important (laugh) right? (laugh) As long as you have love your going to be all right! (laugh) How does that song that Cher sings go? Love isn't ... love won't pay your bills! I, there's not a day when I don't go and think about it, that I don't have enough right? So yeah, it's a major influence, right.

Like Popsicle and Grace, Anna feels that her life would improve dramatically if she had more income available.

To varying degrees, students utilized student loans to help pay tuition, day-to-day living expenses and for social activities and it is in variations related to this use that it is possible to see how stressors manifest differently for students. Anna felt the need to justify her expenses and purchases. Why? Perhaps Anna was aware of the discourses surrounding single mothers and welfare. She worked very hard to maintain her sense of independence, autonomy and self-confidence. Anna's situation was complicated by her responsibilities as a single parent in ways that most students do not face. While Anna attended university with the expectation of future benefits, the process towards achieving this goal was made more arduous by a difficult social context she was expected to deal with largely on her own.

Despite their differences, students shared similar positions in relation to money

and finances. The need to pay for tuition and living expenses, while having little or no income, and limited time for paid employment, forced most students to use the student loan system or to get personal lines of credit. Both resources are designed to cover a minimal standard of living for the duration of a semester and not a day longer. Many students leave university with their degree as well as significant debts. In the meantime, there are many concerns such as: day-to-day bills, finding a job upon completion, and a job that will allow them to repay their student loans. Concerns about how to support themselves during the transition period between graduation and employment loom while they are in class, at home, at work or trying to relax.

For some students (Anna, Sophia, Sean, Nicole and Kelly) money concerns were about more than themselves. Like Anna, Sophia was a single parent and Sean and his partner were also parents. All three students worked to ensure that the basic needs of their families were met but they had different resources to draw upon. Sophia was able to count on her child's father for some degree of child support in addition to her student loans. Sean's partner worked full-time and he worked part-time while attending university. Other students found themselves in the position of having to provide support to other family members. Nicole recently moved into her own place, worked part-time just outside of town and would often give her mom some cash when she went to visit. Her mother did not ask for this assistance, but did not decline it either. Kelly and her partner (who worked as a retail clerk) found themselves deeply in debt and with limited cash flow; however, they were still expected to entertain her partner's parents when they came to town. His parents believed that as university students Kelly and her partner were in a position to host his parents with meals out and drinks when they came to town.

<u>5.2.2 Should I Stay or Should I Go?</u>

Atlantic Canada has particular qualities that create unique issues for students. One such issue is the frequent requirement to move away for work. Anyone who has spent any time in Atlantic Canada will undoubtedly learn that almost every family living in the region has a member who has moved "away" (out of the region) to find a job. The issue of out-migration is part of the collective consciousness of the place. It was something that was weighing on the minds of many of those who were in their final year of their degree. And it was an issue that they felt conflicted about. Leslie was well aware that her future student loan payments would be high and of how they would affect her life:

> I mean it's hard to be that when you start off right off the bat you know, right off the bat. Five hundred, six hundred dollars. And I mean then what is it? You miss one loan payment and you're in default and then you know, that doesn't look good. [I: Yeah] So ...it's a bit scary. I haven't even, you know. Like, I'm thinking about maybe having to move away. Well I got my loan payments. I got to get all that swept away before I moves so I can – so I don't have to worry about being half ways across the world and half to try to you know, it's nuts. [I: Yeah .. it is.] It's pretty sad when your only option is move to Japan. In a foreign country, foreign language, just to be able to survive. It's really sad. And you can't even make a living in your own country let alone your own province. So I mean it's scary. [I: Yeah it is.] (Laugh) Hold on now I'll wipe away my tears! (Laugh)

Kate is from a small, remote community. At the time of the interview, she was going to be the first person in her family to attain a degree. Her story best illustrates the complexities associated with the decision to leave the province for work and how factors such as family, students' changing self-identity, the pressure to succeed and local economies are intricately woven together. When asked if being a student was an isolating experience, Kate told the following

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story.

I guess in my house it is 'cause I mean my [sibling] is a hairdresser. My roommate – is a, she's doing school but it's not the type, same type thing that. She's doing aesthetics, which has to do with the nails, the skin, the body and what not. My [other sibling]'s doing therapeutic recreation and ___ just got a job doing home care. My other roommate downstairs is doing hairdressing at [vocational college] so she hardly ever goes to school. My [sibling]'s boyfriend just got a job at [large retail store]. So I mean there's nobody really in my family that's going to university, [Joanne: Mmm] So yah it's, it's pretty much me, it's me trying to get through this. A lot of times, it's just, all my roommate has to say to me is well you don't study, you don't do this, and you don't do that. She doesn't really get the type of, ... like I may not be actively doing anything but I mean like, it's always there type thing.

Kate's immediate social circle cannot identify with her experience of being a university student. She does not have people she can look to for advice and suggestions. The interview continues:

Joanne: Yeah, yeah, yeah it's a very constant and it demands a certain sorta lifestyle, [Kate: Yeah] Like you can't just ... go off.

Kate: It's like my friend is trying to convince me to move to a, I'm not sure if it's in [Atlantic Province] or [Atlantic Province] with her in August, and I was starting to consider it, but I don't really know. Do I really want to move? 'Cause that's the same problem all over again, what do I do with a job? You know?

Joanne: Do you feel the pressure, the idea that you, that you're going to have to leave [the province] to get a job?

Kate: Um when it comes to just general jobs, well not really, well even, I'd have to leave to go to law school, eventually I'm damn well sure that I'm going to university, one of these days, I'm going to law school. I don't care if it takes me ten years. But, I'm not going to have it, to leave it to get a job if I want it'll, it will be my choice.

Kate accepts that when it is time for her to go to law school, she will have to move again. And she is willing and determined to do so one day. However, she also insists

that if she leaves, it will be her choice. She goes on to describe her options if she

chooses to live in her home province after she graduates.

> But I, I can get a job here, just doing whatever, but I can go home and get
> seven or eight dollars an hour working at a crab plant. I didn't go to
> university for five years to work at a crab plant. I already did that, I've,
> that's a lot of the reason why I'm in school. Like my mother, she always
> told me like, "If you don't go to school, if you don't do good, you're going to
> end up in the crab plant." And I remember she got me out of bed one
> night, and I was about six years old or something. And she got me
> downstairs to show me like she, we had, she was cooking crab or
> something, I can't stand crab. And she showed me what she does at work.
> She said, "If you don't do good, this is what you're going to be doing for a
> living". My mother's really strong, and she really stressed that point, like
> "if you don't do good in school, this is what you're going to do".

The opportunity to get a job slightly above minimum wage is perceived as a good

opportunity; however, the job itself is understood as a backward step after going to

university. Kate's motivation and belief in education has been with her since childhood.

Kate, and other students, felt frustrated at the prospect of graduating with the same job

prospects they would have had if they did not have their degrees. The perception that

there are no other jobs for her was shared by her family.

> Now it's come to the point, I'm having my degree, my father's starting to
> say to me, "well now you're going to have to go home and work in the
> plant, 'cause it's the only damn job with money". It's like, I don't even
> want to consider it. I'd be happier working at (fast food restaurant) for
> minimum wage than going out there and working at eight bucks an hour.
> It's good money, it's really good money. It's not fit to work in and it kills
> your health but, it's money. And I mean what the hell do you do? It's like
> my friend M. is whose trying to get money for [another Atlantic Canadian
> University]. And it's what she's contemplating having to do is go out
> there, live with her parents and work basically around the clock trying to
> get some money. [Joanne: hmm] That's another thing that's always on
> the back of my mind, my mother's … hanging around in that plant again,
> with a B.A. when I was there before and didn't want to be there. I think
> part of the factor, is not wanting to go back out, it's, it's like the

humiliation factor. It's like you went to school and spent all this money and you're still here? I can hear people saying that now.

Joanne: That's a big pressure. [Kate: Yeah] the expectation

Kate: Yeah, you went to university. Well what did you get out of it? Nothing!

Joanne: Yeah, um..... Do you feel pressure from your parents to um.... like your Dad kinda says come back to the crab plant. Does your Mom still want you to ah,

Kate: They don't want me to, type of thing, it's just the fact that the finances, it's the money issue. They can't support me, I mean I know that. I mean I'm too old to be supported by my parents. And they don't want me to be living basically at minimum wage whatever. But ... it's sort of the situation like my Mother doesn't like the crab plant herself. She opened up her own business. So that she wouldn't have to go back there. [Joanne: Mmm] So she's not telling me to go back and work in the crab plant. My Dad's from, my Dad's practical. He's looking at the financial aspects of it. If you don't have a job then you come back here and get a job. Go in to work, you'll have money. He knows I don't want to, but he says it's not what you want to do it's what you got to do. ... So ... it's hard cause the guy who is one of the, it's a family owned business and they're all millionaires 'cause I mean there's a lot of money in crab. And one of the guys whose father is a partner in this place, I went to high school with. And he's one of the ones who basically, actually runs this place. ... And it's like I don't want to go work for X.X.

Joanne: Would you find it ... um difficult or different moving back, like after having lived in [larger city]?

Kate: Oh that is another big thing. 'Cause it's, it's like this tiny little community like 500 people living with your parents with nobody out there, the nearest club's like half an hour away. And it's not great anyway. ... Any way it's just that there's nowhere to go, there's nothing to do. And ... none of my friends live out there. I have family but that's about it. I'd go crazy if I moved back there now. I worked out there, not the summer past, but the summer before. Wasn't so bad 'cause I was working a lot. So like I was stuck type of thing, there's nothing to do and nowhere to go. And it's like what's the, there's no one to do it with. ... So, I mean, I'd go crazy.

Joanne: So like way in the future do you ever see yourself going back there to live or?

Kate: No. ... No, not if I can help it no.

In this instance, Kate is not expected to help her parents out financially, but she knew she could not expect or rely on their continued support. She is the oldest child and there are other siblings to support. Kate behaved as she was told, as her parents hoped she would: she went to university. The story of being woken at night as a girl and shown her mom's work clothes with the admonishment that she should get an education can be understood in a couple of ways. It is evident that her parents, especially her mother, wanted her to pursue education as a means to a better job and life. It can be inferred that they understood this would mean Kate would not live in their community with them as an adult. Early on, Kate learned the implicit message that migration, education and social mobility were intertwined.

As the story continues to the present and we learn more about Kate's situation, we find her being counseled by her father to return to the community and work in the plant because she needs a job, the wages are good, and it seems to be the only practical answer for her. Before she has even finished her degree and had a chance to look for degree-related employment, she and her parents believe that her degree is not translatable to a reasonable wage. She did not feel ready to leave the province, and yet she was not confident about job prospects upon graduation, either minimum wage, service sector jobs, or better paying, professional types of employment if she stayed. She did not want to return home either, since returning home after attending university would be understood by herself, her family, and the community as failure. Therefore, Kate found herself with few choices; she could not go back home without stigma and yet she did not know how to successfully move forward. Future research should explore whether students with similar backgrounds and facing similar situations might also experience stigma and challenges in

planning their post-graduation lives.

The stories of Popsicle, Grace, Anna, Nicole and Kate have illustrated some of the ways that financial concerns played a prevalent role in producing students' stress. The stories suggest that worry about their lack of money, both now and in the future, was constant. The students did not have a sense that they were in control of their lives. They worried about meeting their current financial obligations. They worried about their post graduation obligations, both their day-to-day living expenses as well as the re-payment of student loans. As students approached the completion of their degrees, they also felt compelled to consider whether to stay in their home province or to go abroad, as well as whether to remain in the provincial capital or return to their home communities. There are two points to consider in regard to stress. First, studies have shown that the perception of being in control of one's time, of self-efficacy reduce one's experience of stress and anxiety (Nonis et al. 1998). The second point is to consider how students cope with these feelings. Other studies have suggested that when stressed, people do not make the best decisions about effective coping (Arthur 1998). As illustrated in the preceding chapter, most students tried to endure or vent their stress. The cause of their financial stress is largely structural and beyond the scope of their individual coping strategies; therefore, their only response is to find an emotional outlet for their frustration.

<u>5.3 Being a Student and the Production of Stress</u>

Identity and perceptions of time and time management have been cited as factors that can contribute to stress (Jacobs & Dodds, 2003; Struthers et al., 2000; Nonis et al., 1998). This section looks at what it means to be a student, and how identity and the nature of work interact to contribute to student stress. Juliet B. Shor studies the decline of leisure time in North America. Her book, <u>The Overworked American</u> (1991), explodes conventional wisdom that the current era is the most leisurely in history. Despite the

advances in technology and production, North American society has chosen to produce more products, rather than share more time. Shor's definition of work is either paid employment or household labour (Schor, 1991:13). According to this definition, only students on scholarships may be understood to be 'working'. If what students do, does not constitute work, then how should it be conceptualized? What does this imply about how society views the role of students?

When asked if they considered what they did to be work, the students had varying responses. Some believed what they did to be work in the sense that it was not pleasurable. Others suggested that because they were not remunerated for their studies, it was not work. However, the majority were emphatic that what they did was definitely a form of work. Not only was their predominant activity work, it was work with a particular quality to it; it was omnipresent. Kate was aware that some people did not view student life as work and she explained the nature of student work by contrasting it with her paid employment.

> Not doing anything. My friend's father would say that we're all right irresponsible and we have no sense and yada yada yada, he's an asshole! (Laugh) And she, she can't stand her own father so I mean. But ah I think it's a lot of work 'cause I mean there's so much you have to do. You have to go to class; you have to sit through class; you have to pay attention; you have to, you're supposed to read all your reading. You have to do all this work for papers and tests and whatnot, and then you have to go crazy for a couple of days waiting for exams and then you have to wait and get them back. So it is, I think it is a lot of work. Because, but it's ... 'cause I mean when you're actually working on a job and something like I do like fast food I mean you go and you're there. Mind you there you're working but otherwise I mean it's meaningless. When you're a student, it's always somewhere around. There's always something you've got to be doing. It's total, mostly out of class time.

She contrasts her shift work at a local restaurant with her work as a student:

> Kate: It's 24-7. You're always a student regardless. You're sometimes a

worker at [fast food restaurant] like me but you're always a student 'cause there's always something you've got to be doing. … So I mean it's, it's something that you're always aware of and actually if you're not doing something then you're feeling "I should be doing something 'cause guaranteed there's something I should be doing that I could be doing right now but I'm not!"

Alex concurs with Kate's observation about the constant nature of student work. He explains his work as a student and also comments on how this is not understood by his family:

Ok I do my readings um jump through the hoops, figuratively. Um do tests. Study for tests. Um the work that goes into a student is as much a state of mind as it is an actual amount of work, simply because you are a student from when you wake up to when you go to bed. Um this is no more clear than when I go on vacations home to visit my parents whose work consists of nine to five and they come home and sit on the TV. They see me lounging around for half an hour, then they realize, then they wonder, don't you have work to do? But then they turn around and they see me and I'm working. I'm working in the evenings, I'm working 'til I go to bed. I get up and I read. I take a break. I read. I always have work looming over me. I always have tasks to accomplish, more learning to be done, always looming over my head. Even when I'm out drinking, unless I'm getting absolutely hammered I still think I have more work to do. There's and this thought has always been with me, ever since I started being a university student. It's not, it wasn't so bad as a high-school student, not at all really but as a university student that is the one thing that I notice about it that defines me as a university student is the, is the perpetual state of workishness. (Laugh) Work always looming over your head. You're always thinking of things in terms of how it relates to your work. Even if you're a procrastinator, always in terms of should I be reading? Should I be studying? Should I be writing?

Both Kate and Alex identify the essential character of student work as its continuous nature. There are no clear boundaries in that one is not a student only at the university – hence it is not geographically bounded. It is also not temporally bounded – one is still expected to work off campus, away from class. One feels there is always more work to be done. Students can be at the mall or have scheduled in some social time, but find themselves unable to relax. Their minds drift to a mounting list of tasks they must

accomplish. Their self-identity as a student is their dominant, omnipresent identity while at university. And as such there is no relief to their work. There is also little feeling of time management. They do not have time to themselves.

In reviewing the stress literature, the issue of time management comes up repeatedly (Jacob and Dodds 2003; Struthers et al. 2000; Nonis et al. 1998). Many studies suggest that time management techniques should be taught to students. Feeling in control of one's time is understood as a stress reducer. While this may be true and might be beneficial to some students, it does not entirely address the issues identified by Kate and Alex. Firstly, there is the point that time is finite, in the sense that there are always only 24 hours in a day, and seven days in a week. The number of tasks one is required to do cannot increase exponentially if one is going to get them done without experiencing stress. There are limits to what can be accomplished by individuals regardless of how effective they are at managing their time. In addition, Alex and Kate seem to be talking about a curious quality associated with being a student. When there is no separation between themselves and their identity as students, then students who are stressed in relation to their student role are always stressed.

Certain university subjects also lend themselves to being unbounded. Sociology is one of them. One the first sociological maxims that most students are introduced to is the notion of the 'sociological imagination'. C. W. Mills encourages students of sociology to reflect on their seemingly unique individual experiences and how these experiences can be understood as part of the larger social world (Mills, 1959). Throughout their four-year degree, sociology students are presented with concepts, questions and theoretical frameworks that initially pick apart their personal understanding of the social world. They are then encouraged to put together a new understanding of how the world they are part of works. Sociology is not a subject that is entirely irrelevant

to or separate from student lives. The knowledge they are learning encourages them to question everything around them including: family, relationships, gender issues, sexuality, education, health, development, religion, media, race and ethnicity, power, politics, communication, and sports and leisure on both a macro and personal level. This can make the study of sociology rewarding, but also very challenging and at times overwhelming. For example, when asked if sociology has been personally relevant, Anna observes:

> R: Ahh, yeah it has because um ..... hm ... yeah because when they talk about statistics and stuff uhmm you know like you hear these profs talking about but I'm living it and uhh it's kinda funny because uhh some profs are talking and I'm like well no you really don't know what you're talking about you're just reading that out of a book. (Laugh) Right? Like you can't do that. (Laugh) But ah yeah it has been relevant um and you know you hear them talk about single parents and juvenile delinquency and uh I'm like well I've got a child who their streaming, people don't agree with it but anyway just streaming within their school. He's in the top stream of his reading and his everything, like abilities and stuff and that. And so I'm like well I'm a single parent my child is doing well and he's well off for his age right?

The constant nature of student work relates not only to the amount of work, but for the sociology student there is also the possibility of continuous personal reflection. This highlights one of the major contradictions which students in general, and sociology students in particular experience. As the individual student increases her knowledge and understanding of the social world, she becomes more adept at analyzing her life and the forces at play in it. More of her personal life is held up to scrutiny, and often found lacking. He or she becomes more aware of the way options and choices are mediated by social institutions and individual and collective histories. The main point here is that for students, their work as students can be deeply personal, as well as constant and continuous with no reprieve.

Morris, Leslie and Beth illustrate three ways in which time and the constancy of

student work can contribute to feelings of stress. Their comments illustrate how student stress is not always the fault of the individual, but often the result of social organization and thus removed from the student's sphere of influence. A semester has a regular rhythm to it. Courses are organized in similar patterns with assignments or exams scheduled in the same two-week period in the middle and end of each semester. Morris talks about the 'crunch' time, namely mid-terms and end of term exams and papers. When asked if he ever felt squeezed for time, Morris replied:

> Oh all the time. Definitely, uh ... especially around mid-term break. And all the exams are towards the end of the semester. Seems that every prof wants a paper done at the very end of the semester. It's always, always, there. Uh, especially amongst my courses. It's always been there. And then people say 'oh you should have started that a month or two months ago'. Yeah right, when I was in the middle of writing exams I should have been writing my papers is that what you're saying? Yeah, yeah. They just don't understand, you know? Like you've got exams and you've got a test. As soon as you get out of that you start working on your three different papers. There's always, then of course there's quizzes that pop up and you still got to keep up on top of your work. Time is a bad thing. I mean one of the big questions now is how's your exam schedule? Are you really pressed for time? 'Cause I've had some really rotten, rotten exam schedules, right? [Joanne: Really?] Oh yeah, five exams in the first three days. That's Thursday, Friday and Saturday starting at nine o'clock in the morning go til two Thursday, Friday and Saturday morning. That was the first day of exams. So I've already had like two days to get a whole lot of studying done (laugh).

Students are familiar with this routine and accept it as a part of being a student. Knowing they will experience this does little, however, to offset the pressure to accomplish all their tasks and to perform them well. Though all students face examination schedules and deadlines, this shared reality does not necessarily result in equal opportunities for students. For example, students have differing social obligations and their roles outside the classroom impact how much time they can commit to their studies and thus their capacity to deal with intense schedules.

While Morris identified immediate school related deadlines as stressors, Leslie identified a different set of issues linking her life options and university studies with more long-term consequences.

> Leslie: The main stressor for me was trying to figure out what was I going to do, 'cause you know, I'm not going to do something that there's definitely going to be a job in because I mean what's the point of going doing something that I'm not interested in? Waste of money for me, waste of time. I've only put in my effort. But then again you don't want to go do something and there's no job market. You know it's like you gotta try to think of your whole life ahead of you, and how this decision's gonna impact you either way. And to me that was the biggest stressor of my ... Everything else you know exams, and stuff like that – that's stress time. But I mean it's only a week. You know two weeks, three weeks and then it's over with and then you got your relief. I mean this is ongoing type thing. **Did I** [spoken loudly] make the right decision? **Did I**? [spoken loudly] You know what I mean?

Leslie identifies two aspects of the stress experience for students: short-term intense periods of stress and the stress that accompanies decisions related to education that have long-term consequences. Students do not experience these thoughts or concerns as distinctly separate. If one does not perform well during these short bouts of stress, this could affect one's future options. Or at least that is the perception. Leslie's comments are indicative of many students who feel the pressure to find work, to find a career, and hope it will be something they will enjoy as well. The implication is that students perceive short-term decisions regarding university and time allocation to have potentially profound and life-altering consequences.

While Morris sites the 'crunch' times of the semester as stressful, Beth suggests the time squeeze is more chronic and related to juggling domestic, employment and academic demands. When asked if she ever felt squeezed for time, Beth responded saying:

Um sometimes there's some days when I've got a million things to do, right? Like there's no groceries in the house. I got to do laundry. The cat ran out of food. Um I've got, you know, something I got to read for the next day and something else is, like reading is piling up from other stuff. This, there's some days yeah when I've got like too many things to do. And you know my boyfriend's out or something and like the dishes need to be done and there's nobody there to do them and I can't do everything. Or I need to be out and ... Or it just takes forever to get somewhere. 'Cause I either walk or take the bus. So there's been days when I can't sit down for half an hour. It's too busy. Saturdays are sometimes like that 'cause I work from nine to five-thirty. And it's usually steady. Depending on what it is whether it's cutting, or serving customers or making sure the place is tidy and stuff. And then I got to go home and I usually make supper and then look to see if there's anything that I got to do for Saturday.

In the case of Beth and Morris, the university treats them in the same way by demanding they respond to the same deadlines and structures, despite major differences in the time they have available to do their school work. Both students work part-time jobs; in fact Morris works more hours than Beth. However, Morris lives at home with his parents and gave no indication during the interview that he participated in the household labor. Beth, by contrast, lives in a common-law relationship where traditional gender roles seem to apply in terms of Beth doing most of the domestic labour.

When students described their everyday routines, it became apparent how diverse their lives were. Both Anna and Sean are students with children of their own. Anna is the single parent of an eight-year-old child. Sean parents his two-year-old child with his common-law partner, who he was marrying within weeks of the interview. Both spoke about similar issues regarding time management. Anna describes her typical day for us:

I wake up 6:30 in the morning. Uhm I get my shower. I get my son up at 7 o'clock, I get his breakfast. (Laugh) Uhmm that takes anywhere between a half an hour and an hour, forty minutes uh. I pack a lunch. I come in here or I go out and I have to help somebody and uh ... that, that

takes up til 12 o'clock. And then my [sibling] has a dog which has to be let out and (laugh) has to take care of that. And I leave there about 1 o'clock to get ready for my 1 o'clock class. And then I have that until 2 o'clock and then after 2 o'clock I study for a couple of hours. Then I have another class from four til five. Excuse me (clears throat), and then at five I go home and cook supper. Sit down and do homework with my son that usually takes another hour, hour and a half. Uhm after supper, I try to wash the dishes, they're usually washed in the morning time (laugh) Uhm I put him in the bath or whatever, get him ready for bed, read a story, that's around 8:30. Between 8:30 and 9 o'clock I try to sit down and relax. At nine o'clock I start studying again and that continues anywhere from 12 or 1 o'clock at night.

Joanne: Wow ... that's ... very good thorough description [Anna: Laugh] That's great. I mean that's great description, (laugh), yeah now do you find that over a semester your routine changes?

Anna: I usually have to keep a very strict uh regiment going and I do. For simply because of the fact that I am a single parent. Um so no it doesn't change. I try to keep it pretty much ... robotic (laugh) .... If there's such a word. [Joanne: oh yeah] ... I can't like. My studying has to be done in a certain time. If it's not done then it's not done at all.

Sean talks about why he does his work from home:

Um my life is more, I think uh, pegged down for me. And for me to be on campus during the semester I've got to make arrangements to make sure [child] is taken care of and make sure [partner] can get a ride home and, or I got a really old car. My [sibling] was down in the states the past two weeks so I was using her car, so I let my car sit. But it's very hard ... I tend to just do everything, I become basically sort of like I would rather stay at home and watch TV than go downtown 'cause by the end of the day I'm too tired. Taking care of [child]. Making sure, dropping [partner] off at work and picking her up, going to the university myself, picking up groceries, paying bills and I have to pay the bills and pick up groceries and make sure our house is decent right.

Anna and Sean talk about having very rigid schedules with little ability to stray from them. They both need to be able to do most of their work at home and to fit it in to whatever part of the day they can. Other students talked about the importance of having

access to the campus and its resources. Frank explains that despite having a comfortable housing situation with his family, he still relies on other resources to get his work done. He states:

> Almost none, well my grandmother lives with us as well. And uh I just find it easier like for the last several years I've been coming into the library although one particular table if I can't get it, I won't be able to do anything. [Joanne: Laugh] That's where I've spent many hours. That's where I do a lot of my work, but we don't have a computer at home, so it's like for papers or anything like that or research, a good friend of mine has a computer and access to the Internet so I'll go over there. And that's pretty much where I type all my papers at his house, I study everything. [Joanne: Yeah, yeah] And it's not too far away to so it's not ... and as well my other job um I get, I can usually get some studying done depending on how the person is. He's asleep or he's you know in a very good mood then I can usually do some.

While Frank had the most demanding schedule in terms of hours of work at two jobs - he also seemed to have the most support in terms of living conditions and social resources.

Students may not fit Shor's (1991) definitions of "working", but they lead complicated multi-faceted lives that require the expenditure of effort and energy. When asked how she balanced work, school and family, Leslie began to question anybody's ability to do so while maintaining an overall feeling of well-being.

> Not too bad because ... like with work - work is sorta casual you I guess in way it is cause everything sorta crops up at the last minute. It's not like this week I know I gotta work Monday, Tuesday, Friday, I can go and I got a class Wednesday, Thursday type thing. It's like you know ok you gotta work tomorrow. You gotta work Friday and same thing with family cause I mean I have family. They work and they go to school. And I think sometimes it's difficult 'cause I think, sometimes it's difficult 'cause you're getting up as they're going out the door and then sometimes you might see each other once a day. It's like 'Hi! Oh how are you doing?' You know. 'Hey you?' That's basically the way a lot of it is in my family. It's like my brother gets up before I do. He goes to school. He's gone to school. He comes home, he gets home for twenty minutes. He's

gone back out to supper time. And then I could be gone now for the rest of the day and then I got class at night. So I might see him before he goes to bed tonight. 'Hello, how're you doing? Goodnight' type thing and you know. I mean how do you get to build relationships in that kinda … and everyone is, you just see them as you're going out the door. [Joanne: Yeah] Where a lot of them, the majority of the way people are anyway. [Joanne: Yeah] Everyone's got things to do. You gotta go to school, or you got to go to work or [Joanne: Yeah, yeah.] …it makes you wonder how people can actually build lasting relationships (laugh) it's scary!

Joanne: Yeah, that's a good point.

Leslie: I mean how can you actually get to know somebody, when you see them as you're passing them? Or when you're saying well, you go ahead - you go out with your buddies I got to go up and do this paper now? Like I found, to me I found that my social life went to the wayside. You know, like my friends. A lot of my friends have moved on type thing and you know they go downtown. I'm, I've never been out - a downtown person. They go downtown on the weekend. They do go to movies, they do this, they do that. But they got money to do that. And they don't have to do papers. And you know they're like, "Well where's Leslie? Where's Leslie?" "Oh she's working - she's doing papers." "Another paper? Another paper? Ain't that bad - she can't be doing papers all the time. She can't be doing" - but it's like there's never, you know there's always something to do. Always, always, always and I think people who work don't understand that. Can't even grasp it, the mentality type thing. Not even a little bit. Unless you've been here you can't. I mean even like University X. Like University X is so much different than other private colleges you know like [Business College] like where one friend is doing like one module at a time. I mean you did more stuff in high-school you know? At least in high-school you know you did seven courses in the one time and, you know what I mean? I mean University X is nuts. Like some people say – "I don't know how you do it - I'd never be able to do it." And I guess that's why some people are cut out for it. And some people aren't and some people and you know. It's got nothing to do with brains. It's got to do with self-discipline and you know what you feel that you know you can achieve. And I mean some people don't even want to bother and some people live for it.

Leslie found herself in the role of a caregiver. Five other students had also become caregivers either through parenthood or by virtue of being an elder sibling. Their interviews illustrate the impact that relationships can have on an individual both in terms

of support and stress. Many students were in a phase of life when they were reassessing their relationships with their immediate family. Others were put in situations where their family circumstances changed and they had to adjust. Leslie raises the question, how does one maintain relationships? How does one make space to form new ones? These questions are relevant for all those living in an economy where the production and movement of goods and services requires shift work, and often multiple jobs.

Personal time is becoming precious and compressed. Since coping resources include one's social resources and the people in one's life, then the time one has to invest into the building and maintaining of relationships is increasing valuable. There is a feeling among these students that there is a high social cost to schooling. The growing separation between Leslie and her friends who are not at university was palpable. Their incredulity at the amount of work she had to do high-lighted her growing isolation. This is similar to the sentiment expressed by Kate and her description of social distance from her siblings and cousins who she lives with, none of whom go to school. Nicole, Anna and Kelly also talked about feelings of isolation as a result of the process of pursuing their education.

In sum, the omnipresent nature of student work contributed to student stress because unlike nine-to-five or part-time jobs, their student work is neither geographically nor temporally bounded. When students closely identify with their student identity, this can magnify stress associated with this role. Student work is characterized by both intense 'crunch' time such as exam periods as well as worry about the long-term consequences of doing well. Some students felt stressed because of the demands created by other roles, including caregiver and domestic duties.

<u>5.4 Students and Professors: Producing and Mediating Stress</u>

The meanings that constitute us, literally make us, are embedded in our

> bodies which are gendered, ethnic, sexual, aged and so on. Thus, for the
> Foucauldian subject, the body is central and cannot be left at the
> classroom door. What goes on in the classroom is felt in the body and
> inscribed on the body. (Grant 1997)

The interactions between professors and students produced and mediated stress. The perceptions that professors and students held about each other shaped their interactions. In my discussions with students and professors it was apparent that all participants saw the student-professor interaction as complex. Some students felt a growing distance from their parents and friends as the knowledge and values they grew up with were challenged, and sometimes changed as they pursued their education. This awareness of change was sometimes amplified as they acquired the social and cultural capital necessary to succeed at university. In this context it should be understood that students' interactions with their professors sometimes took on greater significance as a mediating variable in their experience of stress.

For some students, one challenge of acquiring a university education was learning to deal with the uncomfortable social distance between themselves and other players at the university, chiefly their professors. Professors hold a unique position in the university and in shaping the quality of students' experiences. They are often seen and experienced as the human face of the university. Although professors do not create all university regulations, they were seen by students as the agents of power within the university. Professors' positions bestow them with the ability to aid in the production and mitigation of students' stress. Most students recognized that professors worked within the institution of the university and were also constrained by their own work demands. Professors were also seen as holding considerably more knowledge about the

university, academia, were more socially comfortable and stable in terms of finances and social networks, and were therefore generally in positions of social advantage.

Comprehension of the importance of knowing their professors and how they acted on this knowledge varied among the students. For example, Alex enjoyed learning and debate. He was involved with various groups and activities on campus, and felt comfortable in the educational environment, socially and academically. He approached his professors for multiple reasons, one being his understanding of 'networking' or micro politics. When asked if he felt he could go and talk to his professors, Alex contrasted the relationship he had cultivated with his professors with the experience of his younger sibling:

> Most of them; virtually every one of them. Um in fact I had to do that with every prof this summer. Um yes. Uhm and they were all very uh, conducive. My [sibling X] had uh, X apparently has had, or the way X approached them. Um the student has to realize the profs are only people and if you approach them the wrong way, they're not going to help you. Also it might have to do with the fact that they um see me as an apprentice in their guild, metaphorically guilded institution. Whereas they saw X as a number. If you are a number, you are not worth my time. So that might have something to do with it. But I think it's not hard to develop a good rapport with your profs if you take the initiative to do so. And it will pay off when stress arises, and it inevitably will. And the profs will be able to accommodate it. That's what I tell people, 'learn your profs, talk to your profs, if shit happens, they can help you'. If you don't know your profs, they won't help you. They'll say 'man, I told you it was due then'. Or 'I told you it was 8-10 pages'. You're just a number. The onus is on you to make yourself a not a number.

While Alex's own experiences have been positively shaped by his effort to get to know his professors; he knows that this is not a uniform experience. His sibling's story strengthened Alex's conviction that students need to acquaint themselves with their professors and that it is the responsibility of students to initiate this.

The onus is on the individual student, and consequently only those who have either the personality or the cultural capital are rewarded.

The recognition that professors could help students mediate stress was not uniformly understood or accepted by the students. Rather this awareness reflected the personal experiences of the students. Sean describes how he learned the importance of approaching professors. Sean had three papers due in class and he forgot the due date of the first paper. He explains:

> It was my own fault but I just never scheduled my time properly. But I said 'oh no'. And it said on the sheet on the course outline that no um ... due dates will be tolerated [by the students]. So I said 'oh shit'. So I never did it. And the research paper, the last one, the third one, he said 'ok well on or about'. And I found out he was flexible about it. And I kicked myself for not going to him and saying 'you know what, I know it was my fault, but can I have an extra day to just go home and whip something together?' No, attribute everything to me.

Some professors who are hesitant about extending deadlines en masse broadcast an impression of non-negotiable deadlines. The majority of students will make the deadline. Some might not and might have legitimate reasons or extenuating circumstances for the need to renegotiate the deadline. However, of these few students, how many will know that there is a possibility to renegotiate? And how many will believe their circumstances warrant an extension? Some students said they would rather not speak to their professors because of their preference to 'figure things out on their own'. Others openly expressed their feelings of intimidation at the prospect of speaking with a professor. Reasons to approach an instructor are numerous including, for example: asking for help, expressing interest in a topic, postponing an assignment, or explaining particular circumstances of learning or health. Regardless of the reason, the students expressed reluctance at the

thought of approaching their professors, one to one. Over the course of doing the interviews, it became apparent that one of the main reasons that students do not approach professors was because of their acute awareness of the unequal social status between them. The students feared being judged.

When students assessed a professor's approachability, they observed several cues. Nicole noticed the "willingness" of professors to deal with questions in class and she found "it is really intimidating when you go to a professor's office and it's like 'I don't have time for you.' And the ones that insist that you call them 'Doctor' all the time, not that I call them by their first names or anything." Claire looked for more subtle signs from her professors in order to gauge their attitude towards teaching and students. She noticed when a professor "comes right on time or late and leaves early." A professor's perceived desire to teach was also noted by the students. Kyle concurs that professors can make a big difference in students' lives and education. He states:

> A prof has to be approachable, has to be intelligent, can't be too smart ... and he has to want to be teaching. Like there's some profs that are only here for research purposes that shouldn't be teaching. Like for me Dr. ___ is fantastic. He spent two hours with me one day. Trying to explain it to me, certain things that he said. He's really understanding. He's a nice guy and he's a good professor. And there's other professors that they're almost shoving you out of the office because they think the questions are foolish.

When asked if there were enough opportunities to get to know his professors better, Morris responds:

> ... again that depends on the prof. Some are more than willing to do what they can. If they're able to help you with the papers. There was one prof and I went up to her office and she passed me a folder with 500 pages of information on the topic I was doing. She said, 'Just pick through this'. She was really nice. And then there were others ... I've actually had one

prof tell us in class 'you guys drive me nuts with your questions and you're asking me for stuff'. He said, 'I come. I teach the class. What's so difficult about that you know? I'm a prof. You're a student. Just listen to what I've got to say. Do the work and we're fine'. And he was, that was his theory of students and profs.

There were references to this particular professor's way of interacting with students made by four other students [Claire, Kate, Elizabeth and Anna], lending some credence to Morris' account of the relations between this particular professor and the students. Even if Morris' account may or may not be a verbatim record of the professor's comments, his recollection and perception of this professor's teaching style is a perception that was shared by other students of this professor. This suggests that this professor engaged with students in a manner that tended to underline and reinforce a particular student-professor dynamic. Or at least that was the message that these students understood. The students in this classroom were reminded of their expected student role as they knew it in their elementary and high school classrooms. The professors' words and/or actions reinforced the traditional understanding of professor/student dynamics and would be something those students carried with them into all their classes. Critical educational theory suggests this teaching style assumes that students are "blank slates" waiting to be inscribed by the professors' knowledge (Dorn, 1990). This might be acceptable to some students, as long as the professor was able to maintain a sense of civility and approachability. However many students spoke about a desire and appreciation for teaching styles that encouraged engaging with professors in a dialogue.

Leslie describes how professors can set the tone for a class and a learning

situation:

> I mean no matter what you do in their eyes you're not the star pupil or you
> know you don't measure up no matter what you say type thing ... you
> know? I mean people that you don't feel are approachable. I mean you're
> not going to go to class and if your
> prof doesn't want to look at you. You know, he doesn't want to be there -
> or she doesn't want to be there. You know, it's a chore for them to come
> in every day and lecture to you and you're lucky to have the privilege type
> thing ... I don't even want to be around people like that let alone profs who
> are in this position of authority type thing ... But I think if you don't have
> the personality to be able to teach - you shouldn't. I mean go do research
> or do ... you know be in some kind of other aspect of the university if
> that's what you, you know want, really want to do but I think you should
> have certain qualities if you're gonna be a teacher.

These students perceive several qualities that make a professor a good teacher.
They are aware of the power differential between themselves and professors, but
they appreciate professors who convey through their language and actions that
they are interested in the students, that they respect them and would not judge
them. These observations suggest and re-affirm that an individual can make a
difference within an institutional setting.

A curious double standard exists regarding the communication of personal
information among students and professors. For example, students who were employed
while attending university generally knew about the demands and constraints of their
professors – i.e. they were required to do research, teach other classes, etcetera.
However, this awareness was often not extended to the students. The students revealed
that their employers were very understanding of their school commitment and illustrated
this by scheduling students according to their class and exam schedules. Employers were
reported to generally respect the place of school in their employees' lives and

accommodate the students. By extension they would also be accommodating the university by agreeing to manage their businesses in such a flexible way.

When asked if their professors were aware of their employment commitments, most students said no, though one or two said a professor had seen them at their place of work. Students are expected to organize their working lives so that it does not disrupt the practices of academia. This again illustrates the power of the institution. It is the employer and the student who must adapt to the schedule dictated by the university. Professors are not compelled to consider their students' schedules when they organize their course syllabus. The university as an institution does not have to consider ways of being more flexible and accommodating to students' schedules. Grant (1997) argues that it is through the structure of the timetable that students are disciplined.

Leslie's response to the question about her professors' awareness of her work schedule typifies the sentiment about professors' attitudes towards students' external commitments in the interviews:

> I think a lot of them don't even ... a lot of profs think you go to school and that's all you do. You don't have no family commitments. You have no outside jobs. You have no volunteer work. You have no anything else that takes up your time. You just do school work. And I've run into profs like that and you're looking at them and thinking you know - do you even live on this universe? You go home and if you don't have children, you have, you can have other family. And you still have parents. You still have other family commitments. You have to work. You have, you know, you have to schedule in your leisure time. And I think a lot of them ... a lot of profs don't take that into consideration. And then they just think, 'hey well you gotta do this work and that's it'. Let alone that I have to baby-sit my younger brother. You know my mother just left, so I mean my younger brother was living with me. And I've got to take care of him. And you know I've got to go to work. I've got to volunteer and you know I've got to go to school full-time. You know and then you're looking at these people and you know - get a grip! You know, get with it. People

don't just go to school. You don't just have a one-dimensional life. You gotta mix everything with it and you gotta take everything into consideration.... and someone who looks at it like that. You know you wonder if they even live in this world. 'Cause I mean no one has one thing on their plate and that's it. You've always got at least two. I mean you know. Everyone's alive. Everyone's coming out from every direction. I mean for someone to even think like that is hilarious. I find. Especially whether you know, you think that a university professor. You think highly educated you know, very worldly knows a lot about a lot of things. And then they're you know expected to look at you one way and you're Leslie, a student, not Leslie as sister, not Leslie as you know daughter, girlfriend, friend anything. So that's funny. ... Not funny. It's tragic in a way …

Several students shared the perception that professors did not recognize the complexities in students' lives. For many, stress was not the result of a crisis point like the death of a loved one or a medical trauma. It was due to a chaotic living situation, compounded by financial strain and possibly a care-giving role (spousal, parental, familial or friendship) and student workloads.

Anna had a wealth of personal experiences and therefore knowledge that could have been utilized as a reference for sociological analysis in several of her courses. However, this was not always recognized by her professors.

Joanne: Do you come and just uh ... you know you have all these experiences and you know you have to go to the classes and ... uh ... uh ... I don't even know what I'm trying to ask, but sorta the ... there's a gap between what you've experienced and like having to...

Anna: (clears throat) There is and there isn't. Um like ... somebody can sit down and read a book and then can understand it from the book ok. And they're probably good at understanding that uhm but it's another thing when you read a book and you understand the book, but you understand the book in a different way. Because you lived it, uh I can't explain (laugh).

Joanne: No that's good

Anna: Um I can't explain it no more than that, like ... uh let's see if I can give you an example ... okay there's a prof okay, and I went up and I talked to him and this occurred this term actually. Nice prof, excellent, very understanding right? Uhm accommodating. Um, and I said to him like my child's sick this term. I'm a single parent and uh, you know, ... I may miss a couple of your classes, um but I'm telling you, not, I'm not missing them because I want to, I'm missing them because I have *no other choice* (higher pitch). ... And he looks at me and he says well, he says uh 'I sympathize with you.' *I don't like that word* (said softly) I sympathize with you, I'd rather you just say empathize because it's, sympathize is just ... any ways that's just me [Joanne: Yeah.] I'm like that /?/. He said, 'I sympathize with you', but he said, uh, 'you have to understand that you have to make it to my classes'. Um and he said, 'maybe you're taking too much on, and maybe you can drop this course'. And I mean I was after going over with him, this is my last term. And I'm doing this course right now, I need to finish. And uh... um and then he gets in class and he's talking about uhh .. social class. And he's talking about single parents, and stress and, and uh, you know and how they're kept down. And I felt like saying 'well, didn't you just do that to me?' (Laugh) That's what went through my head right and uh, and so, yeah, yeah. They talk about it, and like I think that if you talk about something, then you feel so strong about something, you should practice it.

Joanne: Mmm

Anna: And I mean when he's talking in class, it seems like he's such an activist and so strong about these things and that's ok. Well maybe he should practice that in life too. ... But that's me. That's just how I feel you know, if I say something, I try my best to practice it right. So.

Joanne: Yeah that's uh

Anna: You know you get a reflection of the person ... uh I know they're doing their job and they've got a certain course load but you tend to get a reflection about how they feel about things by the way they present it and how they say it. And you know, if they feel that way, I think they should practice it. Maybe I'm being judgmental, I don't know.

Anna identifies the difference between learning from a book and understanding her own world by bringing theoretical knowledge to her situation. The narrative is initially

couched in a cautious way. Reviewing the students' interviews revealed an overall reluctance to be critical of professors.[*]

While some of the students had negative stories, most recognized their instructors were just doing their job. They recognized they taught more than one class, had research interests and a personal life. Perhaps their comments are not a display of subservience or of unwillingness to question authority, perhaps they are telling the truth. This professor in particular (and many others) is a good professor, not outstanding, but not punitive, pleasant. However, the nature of power in classrooms, and the social organization of universities mean that even a well-meaning professor can discuss social inequities and act as an agent that changes them or perpetuates them.

Anna was not asking for special treatment; she wanted to assure the professor that it was not out of lack of interest or disrespect or laziness that she might miss some classes. She was attempting to assert herself as a responsible student, and as a responsible parent in the context she had to work with. Her child was ill with an undetermined illness and needed to go for some tests. This would mean she would have to miss classes. The professor knows this and still feels she should have dropped the entire course rather than miss a few classes. Dropping this course would have cost Anna another semester of school, tuition and student loans. As a result, she was faced with the fear that missing classes would be held against her. Anna tries to understand the professor's position; "they are just doing their job, and they've got a certain course load".

Sean observed:

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[*] Please see 6.4 Limitations of the study in chapter six for a discussion about the rise in student critiques through on-line technology.

Most of them don't know about home. Um where I look sort of young. I don't think people, don't think that I do have ... that, that prof I was talking about last semester, I mean she was understanding and um she did do a bit. I guess they're not as understanding as they should be I guess. I mean they have stable lives and they have a job. They have a job they like. They have a job they've been working at about twenty years. Most of the profs are up there. I mean I shouldn't say it like that, you know what I mean. They've been there for a while. So they have a lot of stability to their lives. And their kids are probably brought up. And for a person who a) is starting out and going to school starting out I think .... they .... they are aware of it. And they are understanding of it, but I guess it just doesn't, it's just latent I guess. It's just back there somewhere type thing.

Sean, like Anna and many of the students were aware of the social and power differential between them and their professors. They acknowledged that some of their professors tried to be sympathetic, but felt there was too great a social gap between their professors and them for understanding or empathy to occur.

The stories of Leslie, Sean and Anna, reflect the distance between students and professors that often exists academically, economically and socially in our society. Much of this thesis has focused on outlining the broader social context in which students experience stress. The students' comments have illustrated how their lives are affected by the more macro levels of social organization which they are removed from (i.e., decisions regarding tuition fees; the design of student funding as either loan or grants). The students' interactions with more meta levels of social organization must also be mentioned (i.e., the nature of their employment, housing and family arrangements and how they are linked with cultural influences of gender and class).

Finally, the stories of Alex, Kyle, Frank, Sean, Leslie and Anna illustrate how the micro level, interpersonal interactions in the broader social context also contribute to

student stress. A study involving 206 undergraduates at an American university concluded that negative social interactions were related to poor physical health. Edwards et al. (2002) contend that negative social exchange and positive social support are independent of each other. This suggests interesting possibilities in terms of responding to stress which will be discussed in detail in the concluding chapter. I would now like to look at what some professors thought about student stress.

5.4.1 The Standpoint of Professors

Standpoint theory suggests that taking the perspective of people from differing social positions can bring greater understanding of a situation into view. Responses from key informant professors and instructors about student stress, and student-professor interactions expand our understanding of the social context within which student stress occurs. All three of the key informants recognized that the position they held was instrumental and that the difference in social status between professors and students can be influential in professor student interactions. Key Informant 1 (KI 1) described trying to be more informal with his or her students as a means of addressing the issue of differing social status. I asked KI 1 if she or he felt it was important to get to know their students. KI 1 replied:

> Yes, though what you have to understand is that, and this is an extremely important point that's taken me a number of years to learn, is that um we often assume, wrongfully I might add, that everybody comes into the university with I think, the same kinds of orientations, interests, and especially, high level of motivation. Um, um that, that's not always the, you know, the case. And what I have found, is that while I like to try to be informal with all students, and get them to communicate, is that some people enter with a reluctance to be like that. And you can see that they feel uncomfortable and maybe because they're not used to dealing with um teachers and professors on that dimension. So I find that, that

approach can't, can't work effectively with all people. And I think I've had some experience with that in particular this year um dealing with you know some of the students that for whatever reason, they don't seem to kind of understand, at least from my perspective, what I'm trying to do. And what I mean by that is break down some of the status differences so they will feel a little bit more comfortable talking about their work and we can move more effectively toward getting the work done.

This professor recognizes that students experience discomfort with the status difference between professors and students. KI 1 is also aware that students can gain from being able to interact with professors and has made efforts to put students at ease with varying degrees of success. KI 1 conveys puzzlement and frustration that his/her attempts to be informal with students are not always an effective means of addressing students' unease. All the key informants made reference to believing that the level of discomfort is so deeply felt by some individual students that they will continue to feel uncomfortable regardless of the professors' actions. This professor is somewhat perplexed and disappointed that they are not able to shed their unease in dealing with their professors, when efforts at informality have been made. KI 1 seems to underestimate the roots and on-going reinforcement of this discomfort. After all, students have 13 or more years of formal education that socializes them to believe the premise that the teacher is the person with voice and authority in the classroom. Power in the classroom is also divested through other social descriptors such as class and gender to name but two. Various social influences on individual histories and personalities that have either inhibited or enabled students in acquiring useful cultural capital might not be substantially offset over the course of one semester's interaction with one professor.

The above quote hints at another underlying assumption about the students who

are not able to get over their discomfort. It is perplexing that the recognition of student variability is discussed only in terms of 'orientation', 'interest' and 'high level of motivation'. And that only these attributes are discussed in the same paragraph as those students who were not able to respond satisfactorily to the professor's informality. It is suggestive that because they have not done so, they are not sufficiently interested, or motivated in their work. It is quite likely that the students work might be greatly enhanced if they were able to take full advantage of opportunities to dialogue with their professors. However, the inability to do so is a separate issue from the students' interest level or desire to do well.

Other informants understood students' reluctance to approach them in a different way. For example, one professor recalled his or her own history:

KI 3: Oh yes. Yeah. I'm aware of the differentials and um I think in point because when I was an undergraduate, I had a real hard time with that whole thing. I was extremely intimidated. And I found it very difficult to approach most faculty. And not because I think they were sending messages. That was just me at the time. And I took a long time to get over that. And I don't think I've forgotten it. And it's just that sort of enculturated, socialized, um relationship that um is certainly, is so much a part of, and sort of victimized by it I think in a way. But I haven't forgotten it. But that doesn't mean, being aware of it and breaking it down are two different things. But I think part of my methods of trying to be supportive is trying to get over that. Um, uh, trying different strategies of getting people to come talk to me. I'm always looking for the opportunity to just chat with people before, or after, or during class sometime even. It's some ways to break the barriers down, bit by bit you know. And I just remember my experience, you know it didn't matter. I couldn't break that barrier for a number of years. And so I know there's students just like me out there. Um, so I try to keep an eye out for them And then trying to figure out a way to, to level the playing field if you want. But it's, it's always a mystery to me. Um but trying to do it some, because there's a lot of really bright students, a lot of really capable students who don't do well for those other reasons. And they don't do well because um perhaps for sociological reasons right, not intellectual reasons though.

This professor recognizes that some students might be keen and capable, yet feel barriers that keep them from verbally interacting with professors in and outside of the classroom. Professors who drew on their own personal experiences of either discomfort or connection used this to inform their own orientation to students. Both of these key informants felt that after individual professors had made what they perceived as efforts at letting students know they were approachable, the onus for the quality of professor and student communication rested with the student. However, while one of them recognized issues of confidence may have been shaped by an individual's socialization, the other professor seemed perplexed when not all students responded successfully to his/her efforts.

Another professor reflected on the importance of having a personal connection with her/his students and talked about getting to know students:

> KI 2: Um ... be open to engagement with them is what I think of as knowing if you will. Uh I think that in my teaching life that's important in large part because in some of my most valuable and important learning moments came because I had some sort of slightly, personal connection with the prof and it could be because they said 'hi' to me in the hallway three times in a row.

This informant recognized that students sometimes find ways to share their personal stories through their work. For instance, "... sometimes they tell you a lot about themselves, even in an essay exam. Exam essays you know they can tell you a tremendous amount about their life experiences or their situation of racism, they've encountered or whatever, you can read a lot of stuff." This professor identified the students' work as one medium through which students could distinguish themselves as

individuals.

Despite the desire to get to know the students as more than a number, this professor explained the challenges of doing so:

> KI 2: Um in a class of 60, a class of 40 even, it's just about impossible to really get to know people. The most disappointing thing for me, I think in a class was last winter. I had 120 students for 12 weeks, three days a week, for 50 minutes each day. And I probably learned half of them, I'd say half of their names. I like to look at them and know their first name by the end of the term, and I worked at it. (Laugh) There must be ways. I think I just have to try do that more. I started off just calling the roll for example, just the very basic thing of getting to know where people were sitting. You know, so I can at least say well this person came to talk to me last week, they sat over there. You know whatever means of sorting people out. Um so while I think it's you know it's an important feature, it's so hard for me to do in this, in the money driven climate of the university. Where you have big classes, increasing classes. I have a friend who taught 250 students a term… in one of the hard sciences on campus. Aw god. It's shocking! You never get to know people's names except those who speak you know, and I kinda want to try and find out the names of the people who aren't speaking too. But those who do choose to come up and speak, you know, I can make an effort to remember all that.

The university is organized in such a way that some students will remain anonymous to their professors throughout their education. This anonymity means that students' social differences are not taken into account, unless students become their own advocates. How this problem could be resolved is a difficult question. Should there be a more formal mechanism that allows professors to be more aware of students' situations such as a more in-depth mentoring system for students when they select a major, or possibly a demographic questionnaire that a student fills out each semester. Or would such a mechanism be intrusive?

One professor recognized students' lives have become increasing complicated; that there are growing numbers of students who find it challenging to meet all their

requirements, and that this is best dealt with on an interpersonal level.

> KI 3: ... It's, for me, it's more of a, it becomes not an issue of course design and class, that's what I'm trying to get at. It becomes an issue of a one-on-one thing. Um so I won't say 'well gee you know there's a lot of people working full-time here, so I'm going to cut their readings down.' But I will always make sure everybody knows, and I will remind people throughout the term, you know, come and talk to me about any, sort of ongoing problems you're having because of other work commitments and we'll deal with it. So it becomes a one-on-one situation or a small group situation, where someone will come and, and say 'you know I just couldn't study for this exam because I had another one to study for and I work.' And so we'll talk about it in terms of what that means ... uh in terms of their workload. In terms of what they're doing. And then come to an agreement about it in terms of how they're going to deal with it. How we're going to deal with it. So I think that's what I mean in terms of a dilemma. So I think it's wrong to design a course with expectations around that, but you can't ignore it, so it ... becomes, it becomes a very much case-by-case basis.

A university requires the presence of both professors and students, yet their experiences reflect separate and unequal positions. For example, in the course of teaching, it is the professor who has the opportunity to relay personal information to the students over the course of the semester and, in doing so, to assert him or herself as an individual, as a person in a specific social context. The students who attend classes are privy to a one-sided relationship with their professors. They get to know their instructors, albeit in limited ways, as individuals. They come to understand their mannerisms and idiosyncrasies, and something of their personal identity. In contrast, professors often do not have the same opportunity to get to know their students. The men and women who are registered in a class participate as anonymous though numbered members of a group who share the status of "student". How students and professors deal with this imbalance impacts both parties in terms of how they understand and deal with stressful situations.

For students and professors who are able to participate in seminar situations, a greater possibility exists for all parties to become known, and for both the students and

the professors to feel invested in the learning experience. The existence of seminar courses is contingent upon funding decisions made several steps removed from both the students and professors. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that smaller classes will result in more social support for students. It is possible that interactions between professors and students in a smaller class situation might simply produce a greater number of negative social interactions for both the professors and the students, depending on the parties involved.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of the financial issues confronting participating students. The issue of financial stability, both now and in the future, was a significant stressor for these students. There was a high degree of variability among the students in terms of their current financial situation. Some students were in a position of having to assist other family members (children, parents, siblings) and others were supported by their families. Almost all the students had also been forced to resort to either student loans or personal lines of credit to support their education. They felt their pursuit of a university education had come at a high cost, both socially and financially. They questioned their choice to obtain a sociology degree and did not feel confident that they could successfully translate their education into a good job in the labour market. They experienced related anxiety about their ability to repay their loans and had begun to consider the possibility of moving out of the province, taking work they could have procured without their degree, or going back to school to obtain a professional degree. Students felt pressured to do well at school so they would be competitive for either jobs

or seats in the professionally designated programs. Some also felt the pressure to do volunteer work as well as working and going to school for the same reasons.

The belief in limited job prospects meant many students felt trapped. Many of these students will likely feel a sense of desperation when they graduate and many may be in the position of having to take any job that is offered to them. This is unfortunate as Lin et al. (2003) report study findings that suggest the first couple of years following graduation are important in determining one's eventual position in the labour market. A study that assessed professors' beliefs about the purpose of the university found that most professors felt the main aim of the institution was to "impart knowledge and new ideas to students" (Page & Alexitch, 1997:85). The authors argue that "Although professors thought that students could also obtain career preparation in university, they indicated that this motive for attending university should be of secondary importance" (86). In the context of increased debt loads for students and their corresponding concerns regarding career options and the ability to repay their loans, this disparity of understanding between professors and students may serve to magnify feelings of social distance between them.

A mediating influence in students' experience of stress was often their interaction with professors. The students described both positive and negative social interactions with their professors. Both the students and the professors recognized that there was a power difference between them. Despite this recognition, both students and professors emphasized the students' responsibility to approach their professors in times of stress if they wanted help. One of the professors cited a preference to deal with the issue of stress on a one-on-one basis. While this has merit, it also hampers the possibility of effecting

change on a larger level.

> Together, the coordination of the work of students and faculty protect the university, as an institution, from the "critical impact of the wear and tear", of continual adjustment and readjustments (Schaffer & Lamb, 1981, p8). Where students must adapt themselves to the institution's items and services, the existing social organization of the university is preserved and maintained. (Jung 2003).

Drakich et al. (2002) suggest that less public funding for universities and a greater reliance on links with industry mean that "the former institutional drive for success has been displaced by zero-sum competition: within institutions, faculties and departments compete; and within departments, individuals compete" (250). Therefore, in an era of shrinking resources and greater competition among both students and faculty, a key question for those participating in the shaping of higher education is "what kind of people we want our students to become and how our practices are contributing to this formation?" (Grant 1997: 101). Chapter six, the thesis conclusion, offers suggestions about plausible ways that universities, professors and students might begin to take steps that address some of these issues.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This thesis was initiated by curiosity about post-secondary students' experiences with stress. It aims to further understand of how these experiences arise, how they are understood by sociology students in an Atlantic Canadian University in the last year of their program in late 1990's, and to a lesser degree by professors. From these vantage points, other levels of social organization are also brought into view. This chapter ties together the findings of this study, highlights the theoretical contributions, comments on the limits of the study, offers suggestions for future research, and concludes with policy suggestions for both Sociology departments and universities in general.

6.2. Summary of Findings

Some studies suggest that students' motivation and desire for achievement influences their ability to deal with stress effectively, and that greater motivation reflects a tendency to deal with stress using a problem-solving coping style (Struthers et al. 2003; Santiago-Rivera 1995). Other studies suggest that students need to work on their own time management and study skills (Nonis et al. 1998; Arthur 1998). Acknowledging and working to alter these traits can help individual students, yet a focus on these factors overlooks the larger social context within which stress is produced, experienced, interpreted and mediated.

The central research questions for this thesis were:

1) How do these students talk about stress?

2) What are the contexts that influence their comments about stress-related experiences?

3) What can we learn about the social organization of education and its relationship to stress from their stories?

These questions were answered using a qualitative approach informed by Dorothy Smith's standpoint theory. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with graduating sociology students and with three of their instructors who acted as key informants. The findings from this research suggest the production of student stress is linked to compounding social processes located both inside and outside the classroom. Students' experience of stress can be seen as an individual issue; however, this analysis illustrates how student stress is also a social problem in the sense that many contributing factors are the result of the ways in which educational institutions and students are funded, and the lack of social mechanisms to ease the transition from university to gainful employment. In addition, the discourses of stress are reflections of broader social beliefs about stress and appropriate coping mechanisms. For these reasons, student stress can be understood as more than individual, isolated incidents but also as an issue with origins and consequences that extend beyond one person and have a dynamic relationship with culture.

The students referred to the physical, emotional and social qualities they associated with their experiences of stress. Their comments remind the reader that one of the ways a person experiences education is through her or his body and that physicality is part of the educational experience as well as being central to an individual's experience of stress. The students talked about headaches, upset stomachs, fatigue, neck and shoulder pain, sore eyes, flushed faces, rapid pulse, insomnia, and fluctuations in appetite that occurred on a regular basis. These symptoms were associated with feelings of tension, anxiety, loss of control, frustration and hopelessness. Stress also triggered

emotional responses from the students. They spoke candidly about feeling frustrated, anxious, panicky, and having little or no sense of control over their lives.

There were also complex and sometimes contradictory social messages about the meaning of stress and self-identifying as stressed. Their interviews illustrate that stress was generally normalized and accepted as an inevitable aspect of student life. While the students I spoke with were in agreement that having the counseling center available to students who 'really needed it' was necessary and important, few of them had used it. There was a strong sense among the students that they should deal with their stress by themselves. The **individualization** of the stress experience means that the various resources that different students use to cope are generally not socially recognized. **Personalizing** the discourses of stress was also a theme that emerged from the student interviews. By this I mean that negative social beliefs about a stressed individual emerged from the interviews. Students identified being stressed with the traits of emotionality (instead of rationality), incompetence and disorganization. Students managed their stress by utilizing both emotional and active strategies. Emotional strategies displayed by the students include **minimizing** stress by either enduring it or by downplaying it. Some students **re-directed** their stress and found ways of expressing their stress either physically or emotionally. Some students did try to actively deal with their stress, often by calling upon the social resources at their disposal. Students also described feeling a limited amount of control over their stress due to the omnipresent nature of their academic work. In the midst of downtime, thoughts about their next assignment recurred and during their academic work they began questioning aspects of their personal lives thus making their work and identity as students primary and inescapable. Some students felt they were in constant competition with their peers for grades and for access to other programs, for scholarships, or because they believed high

grades would help their employment prospects.

Students talked about feeling stress in relation to situations that were out of their control. For example, the financial costs faced by students are decided at levels of organization beyond the control of students, yet these expenses immediately impact their quality of life. The most obvious student costs are tuition fees, textbooks, and other supplies. Tuition fees in the province increased by 93% between 1990/1 and 2004/5. More recently, tuition fees have been frozen by four provinces (Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and Ontario) however, nationally there was an average increase of 3.9% increase in tuition fees for the 2004/5 year (Statistics Canada, The Daily, 2 2004 September). This is a slower rate of increase than the 1990's which had an annual average increase of 9.7%. Beginning in 1999/00 this increase has slowed to an annual average of 5.3%. University administrations and provincial governments and indirectly the federal government are the locations where decisions are made regarding both the amount of tuition fees and the public resources available to students to pay their school fees. Funding choices that are made beyond the control of students include the decision within student loan programs to rely on loans rather than grants; to organize loan repayments that require payback of the principal with interest rather than, for example, allowing students to defray their loans by working in areas of need to the government for a set number of years. These students were left out of the decision-making process and simply expected to pay the established costs through whatever means were available to them. Students who cannot afford the tuition and books are given a choice: go into debt or forego their education.

There are other financial costs associated with being a student; for many students tuition and books are the more affordable costs they face. Students who were not able to live with family in a rent-free or rent-reduced situation contended with covering their

basic living expenses such as rent, food, utilities, transportation, and insurance as well as their direct costs for schooling. Students with loans identified the necessity of careful budgeting in order to make the money last to the end of a semester. Dealing with unexpected expenditures like car repairs, or trying to fulfill social obligations such as gift-giving heightened stress. For some students this stress was compounded by their responsibility for dependents.

High regional unemployment rates add to the pressures students endure in their graduating year. Upon graduation, students not only have to continue to pay their own living expenses, they also have their loan repayments looming. The complexity involved in graduating is an understudied area of social life. Graduation often signifies a downward shift in social status from that of a student to an unemployed individual. Student loans are designed to cover only the most fundamental living expenses for the duration of one semester. Many of the students in this study worked one or two part-time jobs while students. These jobs generally do not pay a living wage. Once they graduate, students run the risk of continuing with this kind of work in the absence of student loans and in the face of loan repayments. This means that upon graduation students can find themselves with even fewer resources to draw upon than they had as students. They are unable to qualify for Employment Insurance and might find themselves in the position of having to apply for welfare. Alternatively, in the immediate few months after graduation they may find they are only offered jobs that under-employ and underpay them, thus risking becoming ghettoized in the career market.

The students interviewed perceived that low reward jobs would be their most probable post-graduation future. The process of looking for work will require a further outlay of expenses, i.e., interview clothes, costs of printing and sending out resumes, transportation money, possibly a headhunter fee, as well as the hours of time searching.

As Kate's story illustrated, many students consider leaving the region for work; however, this decision can only be made if one has the means to do so. The process of transition after graduation is complex and students begin to anticipate the transition while they are still in school. Their lack of control is further compounded by the fact that by the time most students approach their final year of study, they have a sizable debt. They see few options available to them if they leave school before completing their degrees and some begin to feel trapped by their decision to attend university.

The mechanisms in place to deal with both the production and mediation of stress are also problematic. If one takes a step back and looks at the social resources that are put in place both tangibly and ideologically, it appears that students are left to deal with their stress themselves. Unlike other workers, students are not privy to protective legislation regarding their health and work environment. Nor do students receive the same sort of economic support as businesses and entrepreneurs (i.e., tax breaks) that benefit them to the same degree. There is no labour code for the undergraduate academic. Perhaps this is an example of how a culture can mandate the stress experience. As Aldwin suggests:

> ... one way in which cultures can influence the stress process is by mandating the experience of particular life events by certain subgroups within culture. These events often denote changes in social status, such as puberty rituals, retirement, or O level examinations. They are often highly stressful, but the distress may be mitigated through other social institutions (e.g., pensions). The mandating of such events is often a response to other social problems, that is, certain social goals are achieved, consciously or unconsciously, through subjecting certain populations to stress at specific points in the life cycle (1994:197).

By directing the flow of resources to certain sub-groups of society, cultures influence which sub-groups are likely to experience stress at different times in their lives. For example, when the Baby Boomer generation was pursuing their

education, they paid relatively little for the opportunity. As this generation has aged, educational funding has shrunk and healthcare costs have increased. The fundamental need of the Boomer generation has shifted towards healthcare and that is the topic that garners the most attention on the social/political stage in this country. Educational funding is an issue which politicians tend to mention briefly during campaigns; there are no widespread calls for increased funding or for reduced tuition in most parts of the country. Many students appear to be too stressed, too ideologically committed to managing on their own and too politically naïve to demand changes.

In the process of doing their university work students face a situation where there is little consistency or uniformity of treatment by professors and the administration in terms of grading and flow of information. Students are not formally informed about how to negotiate the world of the university when the circumstances of their personal lives clash with the demands of their academic program. For example, in the case of a family death, all the other agents present at the university are entitled to legislated time off for bereavement. This is known and understood by all the parties involved. However, when this happens to students, they must go to each professor and negotiate various agreements about how they will continue with their workload, or in some cases they may even be encouraged to drop or withdraw from a course. This relies on the assumption that each student has enough social capital to approach his or her professors.

Professors are generally understanding in individual cases when they are aware of

them. The onus is on the student to come forward; however, in many cases they are reluctant to approach their professors for assistance. This might be due to an adherence to the ideology of self-reliance or because of their discomfort with the inherent power differential between them. The professors that I interviewed were aware of their positions of authority and attempted to take individual steps to alleviate this problem. However, their comments suggested they are leery of incorporating more systematic ways of dealing with students and stress. This is understandable in light of the simple fact that professors are also dealing with stress and heavy workloads. Becoming more personally aware of each of their students' situations might be unreasonable given the sheer volume of students a professor encounters in a semester or academic year. The belief that student stress might be a highly personal matter and often related to personal crises was also expressed by the professors. Professors spoke about feeling ill-prepared to deal with these situations, and were reluctant to become embroiled in students' lives.

The nature of student stress is complicated and while some situations of stress are triggered by personal crises, stress also occurs chronically and systemically and is closely linked with the nature of university work. Documenting and minimizing student stress should not be left only to individual students and sympathetic professors, but should be addressed by all levels of the university including departments, faculties and the upper-level administration, as well as by the provincial and federal authorities in charge of education and funding.

6.3. Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, this thesis has contributed to the small, critical literature that

explores the ideological aspects of stress. This project supports the call for stress research to further explore how stress discourses operate among other social groups and locations. This research lends further credence to the work of Donnelly and Long (2003) and their identification of various discourses of stress as 'natural' and 'individual' as well as observing that students 'personalize' stress. These students' stories also illustrate how identifying with the social meanings of stress imply that one is also dealing with the issues of competence and rationality. This research suggests that stress has multiple and sometimes contradictory social discourses that are shared regardless of various social background factors.

Additionally this thesis has emphasized the social organization of stress as a dynamic process involving discourses, material resources and social interactions. By beginning with the standpoint of students, this study identifies multiple factors and players in the production of student stress which necessitates a re-framing of how individuals, administrators, policy makers and service providers conceptualize 'coping'. Acknowledging multiple factors in a social context as components of stress demands that any discussions of coping should include strategies not only for the individual, but also strategies for the institution designed to help reduce student stress and improve their capacity to cope.

While recent trends in popular culture and the education literature suggest that students are 'consumers' of education, such language negates students' own agency and efforts in their education. Delucchi and Korgen (2002) suggest that students subscribe to the cultural norms of the consumer discourse and feel that they are "entitled" to their

degrees regardless of effort. Despite this, their study also found that students wished they could be most like their peers who "are most concerned with studying and keeping up with their course work" (103). Reservations regarding the appropriateness of consumer-oriented students giving teacher evaluations on how much they like the professor, how interesting the classes were, and how much they learned are evident in the sociology literature (Delucchi 2000). The fear is that students as consumers will rate professors on their entertainment value rather than on their effectiveness as teachers.

While I agree that the consumer discourse is problematic, I would suggest that it is problematic because it has become one of the few viable discourses that students can use to assert a sense of control in their education. I would suggest its use is based on a false sense of control. "Consumer" discourse is linked to neo-liberal discourses that support the privatization of education and ignore issues of access and academic freedom. This discourse also masks related fundamental changes in teacher-student relationships. For example, the power students have in consumer-based education is the power to complain about 'service delivery'. Such choices mask the issues of real opportunities for students to actively and democratically participate in their education. They also mask class differences since students with means can go elsewhere for their education while for students who cannot afford university at all or who can't afford to go elsewhere, the power of the 'consumer' role is nullified. Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis explore an array of social and ideological factors that illuminate reasons for students' apparent lessening commitment to an academic ethic and offer an alternative explanation for this shift.

It is evident that one aspect of stress is emotions. Excerpts from interviews with

both students and professors show that emotions are engaged by these actors in the educational sphere. The term emotional labour was first coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) to describe a growing sector of the service economy whose jobs demanded workers be 'nasty' or 'nice'. Hochschild describes the effort and energy involved in workers attempts to 'manage' their feelings to achieve the appropriate emotional tone necessarily for their jobs. In a review article of research on emotional labour since Hochschild's seminal work was published, Steinberg & Figart (1999) point out that emotional labour is an implicit demand of many jobs, including those of teachers and professors. They raise questions about how emotional labour should be compensated, as well as the ethical issue of increasing demands for emotional labour from individuals. Work has been done that documents the ways in which professors practice emotional labour including, for example, their efforts to display positive emotions during classroom interactions, the negation of negative emotion, and their efforts to manage the emotions of students as well (Bellas 1999). This thesis suggests that the classroom is a site that implicitly demands emotional labour by students *as well as* professors (for an example of how emotions might be used as part of pedagogical exercise in the classroom see Roberts and Smith, 2002). The ways in which students and professors choose to deal with stress and the emotions it entails are shaped in part through the university institution and their respective personal resources.

6.4. Limitations of the Research

As a first-time researcher I learned much more from the process of conducting research than from reading about it. I now have a greater understanding of the importance of

organization, of the need to find sound and reasonable ways of dealing with data in terms of transcription, storage, coding and analysis. While there are many things that I learned how to do the long, hard and slow way, these are not limitations of the study. And although I would certainly do some aspects of this project differently if were I to do it again, such things mostly pertain to issues of efficiency in research rather than to the faults. However, there are limitations to this study and some of them are outlined below.

1. As with all exploratory studies, these findings are not generalizable to a larger population of students. Some of these findings might also be limited by the influences of a particular place on these specific students. Other students from other parts of the country might experience different stressors and have alternate coping mechanisms at their disposal.

2. The design of this project would have benefited from the opportunity to elicit feedback on the initial findings from the participants, possibly through a focus group. However, delays in completing the thesis and other constraints precluded this from happening.

3. When the interviews were conducted, on-line blogging and web-sites devoted to rating schools and professors were not part of my consciousness. Nor were there any references to them made by these students. It is possible that the existence of such sites will re-frame the traditional balance of power between professors and students since students now have a venue outside the classroom through which they can assess their professors' performance. The capacity for students and professors to feel judged by the other has shifted because of this new arena for expression. While this subject is

somewhat peripheral to the overarching issue of students' discourses of stress, it does raise questions about how the existence of such web sites informs power dynamics in the context of teaching.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This project points to several areas for further research associated with a broad range of related issues and fields.

1. Research involving a larger sample of students and comparative research involving first and last year students, students from different academic programs and students from professional and nonprofessional programs, as well as programs with and without a co-op or internship program, could deepen our understanding of the relationship between context and student stress. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, there were no participants who lived in the residences on campus who participated in this study. Those students who live on campus have their physicality and education linked in particular ways (e.g., through diet in cafeteria choices and through the physical and cultural geography of residence life). This is an area that has received little attention in the literature on student stress. Non-professional, graduate students are another sub-group who receive little attention in the literature.

2. The sociology of emotions has begun to explore how professors and teachers perform emotional labour in the course of their work (see Bellas 1999; Thorsen 1996). Further work could explore the emotional labour involved in being a student. Such a contribution could have interesting insights for policy, for pedagogical practice, and for educational theory.

3. A study exploring the productivity of students from a conceptual point of view could help clarify their output as a form of 'work' or 'labour'. This project could potentially be useful in an era of changing administrative policies.

4. This study has highlighted the social gap between professors and students. This gap can be understood broadly in terms of class and age if we look at students and professors in general. The social gap between them is further compounded when one also considers ethnicity and gender. In this department, approximately three-quarters of the students are women while two-thirds of the professors and instructors were male. This gender disparity is reflected in both the students' and the key informants' core assumptions about their roles and responsibilities which in turn influence their respective decision-making and behavior. There is a literature regarding gender and patriarchy in the class that suggests there are implicit ways in which women's voices are silenced or dismissed in the classroom, sometimes despite best intentions (For examples, see Lewis, 1993; Lewis and Simon, 1986; O'Brien, 1987 or recall the example of Anna and her professor about her need to take her child to medical appointments). Other work has been done which examines how women's lives are shaped by the demands of their children's schooling (Griffith and Smith, 1991). The experience of gender for male students studying a discipline in which the make-up of their classes is pre-dominantly female has been less well studied. One can speculate that there might be a self-conscious awareness of gender in some classes between male students and their female classmates and their professors. For example, one of the male students in this study referred to heated discussions regarding feminism with one of his female professors. Because

assumptions about power, voice and competence are implicitly part of how both professors and students "do" gender it is possible to see that gender and class might combine in particular and complex ways. While individual differences exist among students, professors and administrators, all of them act out their roles within certain organizational constraints. An institutional ethnography exploring how status discrepancies are enacted and understood by students, professors and administrators could illuminate various processes that exacerbate the experience of stress by all the players at the university.

5. Given the limited research on the social meanings and discourses of stress, there is a need for studies that explore how these operate in other settings. Knowing the various social meanings and discourse surrounding stress for various social groups could prove helpful in further expanding the repertoire of possible coping mechanisms for such groups and provide pertinent policy insights for the relevant institutions.

6. Another study of interest would be one examining the post-graduation experiences of stress. A comparison between the experiences of graduates from academic programs and those who graduate from trade or vocational programs would help to highlight the strengths and weaknesses offered by these programs in terms of support for students with post-program transition. This project would have the potential of developing a best practices policy regarding transitioning from school to appropriate careers.

6.6 Policy Suggestions

The data collected for this thesis suggest a number of policy options. These suggestions

range from the small and simple, to the more utopian and difficult to implement.

1. The most common desire expressed by the sociology students in this study was for the development of a sociology society. They hoped that such a society would foster greater student solidarity and provide the opportunity for networking among peers and professors. Such a society now exists at University X. I was unable to find any literature related to the benefits and sustainability of student societies. This gap in the education and sociology literature makes it more difficult to ascertain what, if any, 'gold standard' exists. However, after perusing various departmental websites, it became quickly apparent that there is a degree of variability in the manner that departments lend resources and energy to the promotion of student societies. For example, some universities have their sociology societies linked to their department website, and/or the list of student clubs on the university website. McMaster University describes the purpose and roles of the sociology society in their on-line undergraduate sociology student handbook. The webpage states, "Students are urged to familiarize themselves with the by-laws, to stand for the various departmental committees, and thereby actively participate in the governing of the Department" (http://www.socserv2.mcmaster.ca/sociology/undhbkms.htm).

2. In response to students' anxieties about finding employment subsequent to graduation, sociology departments might consider beginning a voluntary tracking program of their graduates. The department could work in conjunction with the student sociology society towards developing a mentoring and network program between alumni and graduating students. It appears that efforts in this direction have been taken by the

department of sociology at the University of Toronto (see their website at http://www.utoronto.ca/sociology/links/newsletters.html).

3. A sociology society can provide opportunities for professors and students to get to know each other on a more personal level; however, it is only realistic to acknowledge that not all students will participate. Some students will feel uncomfortable in such a setting and unable to speak freely. Others will not put themselves into what they perceive is an uncomfortable situation. Some students may just not have the time. Therefore, greater efforts should be made to create a communication forum between the department and all its students. There are a couple of ways this could be done. First, a student suggestion box located in the students' union office would allow students to make suggestions to the department in an anonymous manner. Second, a monthly, e-mail newsletter could be sent to sociology majors and minors, graduate students and faculty and even alumni. Examples of such instruments can be found on the sociology department web pages of Brock University, Queen's University, the University of Toronto, the university of Waterloo and McGill. The production of the newsletter could also create a student-work project that would provide students with experience, as well as a means of networking. The topics of the newsletter might be partially devoted to ongoing research within the department by professors, graduate and honors students; partially devoted to profiling previous graduates, to career information, and to fostering academic exchanges and announcements.

4. In a similar vein, a monthly noon hour colloquium for honors and graduate students, and students whose projects professors think should be recognized could be

organized. This would help students feel more involved in their educational experience and offer opportunities for academic and professional development. The possibility of seeing the work of peers would allow students to engage in the study of sociology in a more immediate and less abstract way. It would also help dispel the perception that their degrees provide them with few skills.

5. Surprisingly, a majority of the students stated they did not know about the masters program in the department, what it entailed, or what the application process involved. Nor did they know about the research being done in the department by professors or students. The department could work in collaboration with the sociology student society to address these gaps. When one declares his/her sociology major, the student should be provided with information regarding the sociology department, the graduate program, and the process of applying to the M.A., and the various steps involved in the program. Information could also be included regarding department expectations of student involvement in departmental affairs.

6. Given the high interest among students in their future job prospects, sociology departments might want to develop a co-op program. They might also want to consider other ways of fostering the professional development of their students. This can be done in such a way that does not take away from the best of the liberal arts tradition, but in fact might serve to help foster a greater appreciation for it. The development of a third year, one semester course that deals with knowledge translation, specifically the translation of sociological research results into policy and into related employment would be very popular. Students' academic interest might grow as they begin to understand and

appreciate the skills they are implicitly and explicitly being taught in the process of attaining their degree. The university as a whole might want to consider incorporating similar courses in all departments.

When sociology students are graduating with an average debt load of $22,902, sociology departments and the university community as a whole need to reassess their relationship to wider society – this situation is very different from that which existed 20 years ago. They also need to ask questions about who they are serving and how well?

It should also be noted that just as fiscal constraints affect students they also place constraints on how professors and departments go about their work. The concept of a 'greedy institution' was utilized by Wright et al. (2004) as they explored how institutional cultures affected the context in which sociologists teach. The 'greedy institution' is one that has high expectations of its employees (145). Wright et al. suggest there are different types of departments (teaching, research and comprehensive) which have their own unique values and cultures. While departments have been put in a position where they have had to compete with other departments for fiscal resources and decide whether or not to align themselves with market interests, the authors suggest that sociology departments still have the ability to greatly influence the experiences of faculty and students. They argue that "institutional policies and practices are filtered through and interpreted by colleagues in one's departments (Edwards 1999)" (Wright, 2004).

In the current neo-liberal climate, it is unrealistic to expect that greater public funding will offset tuition rates or student debt. Indeed the push for tuition reduction and relief of student debt has been re-framed into calls for continued tuition freezes which

have been implemented in some places but not in others. In this fiscal context, university departments must begin to ask themselves what their role is in helping their students prepare for their post-graduation lives in a uniform and fair manner. In the process of doing so, they might also be taking great strides in reducing students' stress and anxiety. Indeed, sociology is unique among disciplines, in that "No other discipline is so well positioned to study the effect of the structure of the academy on teaching and learning outcomes" (Wright et al. 2004; 155).

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RESEARCH ON <u>STUDENT</u> STRESS REQUESTS THE PARTICIPATION OF 4th YEAR <u>SOCIOLOGY</u> STUDENTS!

I am conducting a study of stress among fourth year sociology students here at University X. If you are a fourth year **SOCIOLOGY** student and are interested in talking about your everyday experiences of stress as a student, please consider participating in this study.

The aims of this study are to gain an *understanding* of the ways in which gender, stress and education are experienced by students. This will be useful preliminary information to help policy makers address the needs of students.

This study is independent of the Sociology department and your participation is confidential. Participation in the study is completely **VOLUNTARY**.

If you are interested in more information or in participating in this study, please contact me directly:

xxx-xxxx or
e-mail:h75jmc@morgan.ucs.mun.ca

RESEARCH ON STUDENT STRESS REQUESTS THE PARTICIPATION OF 4th YEAR SOCIOLOGY STUDENTS!

STUDENT CONTACT FORM

If you are interested in participating in this study, and want to find out more information, please sign below. At the end of class, the *person who announced the study will collect all the slips (please do not hand them to your instructor)*. If you do not wish to participate in this study then please return this form blank. Thank you for your time and patience.

First Name: _____   Phone number: _____

Best time to call: _____

STUDENT INTERVIEWEE RELEASE FORM
The Social Organization of Stress in the Everyday Lives of Fourth-Year Sociology Students at University X.

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research project and how the interviews will be carried out. Please read this release form carefully and if you decide to participate please sign it below.

My name is Joanne Carey. I am currently working towards my Master's in sociology at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. The interviews I am collecting will form the basis of my research project. This study will examine the social organization of stress in the everyday lives of fourth year sociology students at University X. The questions in the interview will ask you to describe your everyday life. You will be asked whether and what elements of your life you find stressful and to explore the consequences of stress for your well-being. The interview will also touch on your experiences in the classroom, your financial situation and how you perceive the transition from university to the workforce. **The aims of this study are to gain an _understanding_ of the ways in which gender, stress and education are experienced by students. This research will provide policy makers with preliminary information necessary to address the needs of students. It will also provide students with further understanding of how their lives are influenced by the way they interact with forces beyond their immediate experience.**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. **You are under no obligation to the sociology department to participate in this study.** Please note that you may refuse to answer any questions and can end the interview at any time. If you feel there is a topic which I have not asked about but should be included, please feel free to bring it to my attention. To ensure that I don't misrepresent what you have told me, I would like to tape record the interview and then transcribe the audiocassette (put in text form). If, at any time, you do not wish to be recorded, please let me know and I will turn the machine off. If you wish to be interviewed but not recorded, then I will take notes during the interview instead.

I am bound by a code of ethics as a social researcher and I will make every effort to ensure the confidentiality of your answers. Therefore, your name will not appear in the thesis, and a pseudonym will be used instead. I can also assure you that I will tell no one of your participation in this study. **This research is being conducted for my M.A. thesis. It is not being conducted on behalf of your sociology department.** Upon completion of the interview, the tape or notes will be labeled with a code. When I am working with the tape, I will refer to it as interview 15a for example, not interview with Jane Doe. After the thesis has received formal approval, you may have direct control over what happens to the tapes and transcripts from your interview. You may decide to:

1) ask for your cassette tape and transcripts back, 2) ask me to destroy the tape 3) ask me to destroy the transcript.

It is possible that in the process of telling one's stories of stress, some students might find the interview to be distressing. This is not the intent of the researcher and the research schedule has been designed to be as sensitive as possible. At the conclusion of the interview, I will leave you with information regarding the names and numbers of various resources which might be helpful to you. For example, the counseling center, the wellness center, etc. I will also give you a copy of the consent form and the names and numbers of persons who you can contact if you wish to complain about the manner in which the research was conducted.

Thank-you for taking the time to read this form and for considering participating in this project. I would appreciate it if you could sign below. By doing so you are showing that you are aware of its contents. Your participation in this project would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Joanne Carey
M.A. Student,
Department of Sociology, Memorial University

I, _____, hereby agree to take part in the semi-structured interview portion of the project as outlined above.
(Signature) _____ Date _____
The supervisors for this thesis are Dr. Stephen Riggins and Dr. Barbara Neis. In order to verify that I am following proper transcription procedures necessary for narrative analysis, my supervisor Dr. Stephen Riggins wants to listen to one of the audio recordings and read the transcript from one interview.
Have you ever taken a course with Dr. Stephen Riggins?
_____
Do you know Dr. Stephen Riggins?
_____
Have you ever taken a course from Dr. Barbara Neis?
_____
Do you know Dr. Barbara Neis?
_____

If you do not know Dr. Stephen Riggins, do you give your consent to allow him to listen to the cassette recording of your interview? _____ yes _____ no

Signature _____ Date _____

In the event you have a complaint regarding the manner in which the interview was carried out please contact Dr. R. Hill of the Sociology Department. Office A-3077 (phone) 737-4592.

Appendix D – Interviewee Consent Form to be Tape Recorded During the Interview

INTERVIEWEE CONSENT FORM TO BE TAPE RECORDED
DURING THE INTERVIEW

I, _____ the interviewee, have read, understood and signed the interviewee release form. I have agreed to allow my interview to be tape recorded. I understand that anytime I feel uncomfortable, I can ask that the tape be turned off. After the thesis has been formally accepted I want:

_____ the cassette and transcripts of my interview returned to me.

_____ the cassette of my interview destroyed.

_____ the transcripts of my interview destroyed.

Signature _____   Date _____

In the event you have a complaint regarding the manner in which the interview was carried out please contact Dr. R. Hill of the Sociology Department. Office A-3082 (phone) 737-7456.

An executive summary of the thesis findings will be mailed to the following address when the thesis is completed. After mailing the summary, the address will be destroyed. The address will not be given out to any one else.

If you wish to have a copy mailed to you, please fill in your address:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix E – Student Interview Schedule

STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE Part I Questionnaire

Interview # _____

Part A - Questionnaire
1. Personal Background
How old are you? _____
Sex: _____
Where were you born?
Where did you grow up? _____
Where do you currently reside? _____
What neighborhood do you live in? _____
Marital status? _____
Do you have any children? Yes _____ No _____
    If yes, how many? _____
    Ages of the children? _____
Do you work outside of school? _____
    Hours per week? _____
    Number of jobs? _____
Do you volunteer ?
    Hours per week? _____

2. Educational Background
What year you are in? _____
What is your major? _____
How many courses do you have completed? _____
How many courses are you taking now?_____
What courses are you taking? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Are you attending part-time out of choice or necessity?
When did you graduate from high school? _____

When did you start university? _____

When do you expect to graduate from university?

_____

Are there other people in your immediate family who have gone to university? _____

       Grandparents? _____

       Parents? _____

       Brothers? _____

       Sisters? _____

What is your location in the family?

Only child _____	third child _____
First child _____	fourth child _____
Second child _____	specify _____

Please indicate your yearly income:

_____ <$999	_____ $15,000-$19,999
_____ $3000 -$4999	_____ $20,000-$24,999
_____ $5000 - $9999	_____ $25,000-$29,999
_____ $10,000-$14,999	_____ >$30,000

Please indicate your parents' yearly income?

_____ <$9,999	_____ $20,000-$24,999	_____ $35,000-$39,999
_____ $10,000-$14,999	_____ $25,000-$29,999	_____ $40,000-$44,999
_____ $15,000-$19,999	_____ $30,000-$34,999	_____ $45,000-$49,999
		_____ >$50,000

Do you have a student loan? _____

Do you have any other loans? _____

_____

Do you have a student line of credit? _____

_____

Please indicate the approximate amount of your total student debt:

____ <$2999	_____ $10,000-$14,999	_____ $25,000-$29,999
____ $3,000-$4,999	_____ $15,000-$19,999	_____ $30,000-$34,999
____ $5,000-$9,999	_____ $20,000-$24,999	_____ $35,000-$39,999
		_____ >$40,000

Please indicate how much you expect your student loans to be when you complete this degree?

____ <$2999	_____ $10,000-$14,999	_____ $25,000-$29,999
____ $3,000-$4,999	_____ $15,000-$19,999	_____ $30,000-$34,999
____ $5,000-$9,999	_____ $20,000-$24,999	_____ $35,000-$39,999
		_____ >$40,000

Does your spouse have a student loan? ____

Part II. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Theme A: <u>Everyday Routines as a Student</u>
Can you describe for me in as much detail as you feel comfortable, your everyday routine
as a student? Just take a couple of minutes to think about what you did last week, and
then describe it to me.
___Does your routine change over the semester? How?
___Compare this semester to last semester? Why different?

Living Arrangement: ___Describe your living arrangement to me?   ___ like
where living?

                          ___ How did you end up there?   ___ noise
                                                                        level?

Sociology:
So you are in fourth year of a sociology degree and you will be graduating in a while.
___ Can you tell me how you came to be in this position?
___ why sociology?
___ Still feel the same way?
___ Can you tell me about how you are finding the work load this year?
___ Is it different from previous years?

Student-Work Environment:
___ In your experience as a student, do you think of what you do as work?
___ Can you tell me what your work consists of?
___ Where do you do your university work?
___ What is your job description as a student?
___ What are the responsibilities of your employer towards you?
___ Different kinds of jobs have different demands for the worker. For example,
      someone who works on an assembly line can't leave, and is doing the same
      repetitive task. This has consequences for their physical and mental health. Take
      a few moments and think about the expectations you feel you face as a student?
___ What kind of consequences does that have for you?

Theme B: <u>Definitions of Stress</u>
___ When you hear the word stress - what do you think of?
___ definition of stress?
___ other words or phrases to talk about stress?

Theme C: <u>Experiences of Stress</u>
People can have different responses to stress. What does being stressed feel like for you?
___ Physically?
___ Is stress something you live with all the time?

_____ Can you imagine not being stressed?
_____ When was the last time that you didn't feel stressed out?
_____ What was different about your life then compared to now?

Theme D: <u>Stressors</u>
Academic Workload:
Take a couple of minutes and think about a couple of specific situations as a student,
when you felt really stressed, and then describe them to me.
_____ What made these situations stressful?
    _____ Have there been instances when you haven't done as well on an assignment
    or course as you would have liked? _____ Do you know what happened?
    _____ Frustrating?

Classroom Interaction:
_____ How would you describe the interaction that takes place in the classroom?
_____ Are you comfortable speaking in your classes? Does it vary from class to class?
    Examples and explain?
_____ Is there a difference in classroom expectations in seminar courses compared to your
    other courses?
_____ How do you get along with the profs?
_____ How do the profs get along with the students?
    Just think for a minute about your best professor(s). Can you describe the
    qualities you appreciate about them?_____ worst professor(s)?
_____ Is there an opportunity for students in the sociology program to get to know each
    other? Get to know the profs? Would this be beneficial?
_____ Do you feel that students have enough influence over the format of the class? E.g.
    readings, assignments?
_____ How do you feel about approaching your profs on a one to one basis?

Time:
_____ Feel squeezed for time?
_____ Do you ever procrastinate? Does that create problems for you?
_____ Tell me about the last time you procrastinated?
_____ How did you get yourself to do the work?
_____ Have you ever taken a time management course?
_____ Use a day planner?

Employment: (Optional depending on answer in questionnaire)
    _____ Is it difficult negotiating your job commitments with your school and family
    commitments?
    _____ Is your workplace understanding of your schoolwork?
    _____ Do you think your instructors are understanding of your work commitments?

____ Do you know what you are going to do after you graduate? Does this cause stress?

____ Do you know what you have to do to make that happen?

____ Do you feel that your education has prepared you for this?

____ What would you like to see included in the sociology program

Financial:
Some people say they don't worry about money, other people say they don't worry about anything else.

____ Where do you fit into that?

____ What kind of financial concerns do you think about? As you get closer to graduating is this something you think about more?

____ How do you feel about your debt repayment?

Relationships: ____ Do you find that some of your relationships are stressful?

        ____ Are there people you can go to when you feel stressed?

        ____ Is being a student an isolating experience?

Family:
Families can be both sources of support and sources of stress.

____ Is your family a source of stress for you? In what ways?

____ Pressure to do well in school?   ____ what expectations do they have of you?

____ Pressure to find a job?

____ Pressure to support them?

____ Pressure to share their beliefs?

Student-Identified Stressors:

    ____ Are there stressors that I haven't asked about yet? Can you describe these to me?

    ____ If your best friend was two years behind you and was going to major in sociology.... and you could have a wish list of any three things to improve her/his experience as a student .... what would they be?

Theme C: <u>Coping Resources</u>
The way a person deals with stress can vary a lot.

____ Is stress something you try to deal with or avoid? What are some of the ways that you respond to stress? ____Talking? ____ Listening to music? ____Eating? ____Partying?

____Exercising? ____Sleeping? ____ Crying? ____Drinking? ____Anti-depressants?

____Tranquilizers?

Some studies have suggested that both men and women experience stress in a given situation, but handle it differently. What do you think about this?

Family:
_____ Are you able to go to your family for support?
_____ Emotional, financial, etc?
_____ Do you receive financial support from your family?

Friends:
_____ Do your friends help you out when you are stressed? Can you give me some examples?

University Services:
_____ Have you ever used any of the university services to help reduce your stress?
          Counseling center, wellness center, career development office etc.?
_____ Do you think student stress is a legitimate area of concern which the university should address? _____ How would you like to see this done?

Instructors:
_____ Is there ever any discussion of students being stressed in your classes?
_____ Can you go to your instructors when you are stressed?

Spirituality:
_____ Is your spirituality a factor in helping you cope? Explain.
_____ Source of social support?

Theme E: <u>Health</u>
___ Do you have any health problems?
___ Are these stress related?
___ Do you have headaches? How often? Migraines? How often? How do you deal with
      them?
___ Do you ever have an upset stomach? How often?
___ Do you have an ulcer? How long have you had this condition?
___ How are you sleeping? Insomnia?
___ Do you exercise? How often? Would you exercise if you had more time/money?
___ Do you think being a student has been good for your health? For your sense of well-
      being?

I'd also like to talk a bit about food.
___ When you are stressed, do your eating habits change?
___ Does the cost of food mean that you don't eat as well as you feel you should?

Before we end the interview, I'd like to know if there is anything you feel we didn't discuss that should be addressed?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWEE RELEASE FORM
The Social Organization of Stress in the Everyday Lives of Fourth-Year Sociology Students at University X.

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research project and how the interviews will be carried out. Please read this release form carefully and if you decide to participate please sign it below.

My name is Joanne Carey. I am currently working towards my Master's in sociology at Memorial University in St. John's, NL. The interviews I am collecting will form the basis of my research project. This study will examine the social organization of stress in the everyday lives of fourth year sociology students at University X. **The aims of this study are to gain an *understanding* of the ways in which gender, stress and education are experienced by students. This research will provide policy makers with preliminary information necessary to address the needs of students. It will also provide students with further understanding of how their lives are influenced by the way they interact with forces beyond their immediate experience.**

Key informant classroom instructors will be asked about their awareness of, and impressions concerning student stress and stressors. They will also be asked about their impressions of the role of instructors and the university more generally in relation to student stress. University administrators, counselors, career development officers and on-campus medical staff will be asked to discuss their perceptions about student stress and stressors and to describe the university responsibilities and resources related to this issue.

Your participation in this study is **voluntary**. Please note that you may refuse to answer any questions and can end the interview at any time. If you feel there is a topic which I have not asked about but should be included, please feel free to bring it to my attention. To ensure that I don't misrepresent what you have told me, I would like to tape record the interview and then transcribe the audiocassette (put in text form). If, at any time, you do not wish to be recorded, please let me know and I will turn the machine off. If you wish to be interviewed but not recorded, then I will take notes during the interview instead.

I am bound by a code of ethics as a social researcher and I will make every effort to ensure the confidentiality of your answers. Therefore, your name will not appear in the thesis, and a pseudonym will be used instead. **Your position will be identified as "instructor", "administrative personnel", "medical personnel", "counseling personnel" or "one time department head/dean".** I can also assure you that I will tell no one of your participation in this study. **This research is being conducted for my M.A. thesis. It is not being conducted on behalf of your sociology department.** Upon completion of the interview, the tape or notes will be labeled with a code. When I am

working with the tape, I will refer to it as interview 15a for example, not interview with Jane Doe. After the thesis has received formal approval, you may have direct control over what happens to the tapes and transcripts from your interview. You may decide to: 1) ask for your cassette tape and transcripts back, 2) ask me to destroy the tape 3) ask me to destroy the transcript. Thank-you for taking the time to read this form and for considering participating in this project. I would appreciate it if you could sign below. By doing so you are showing that you are aware of its contents. Your participation in this project would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Joanne Carey
M.A. Student,
Department of Sociology, Memorial University

I, _____, hereby agree to take part in the semi-structured interview portion of the project as outlined above. (Signature) Date

In the event you have a complaint regarding the manner in which the interview was carried out please contact Dr. R. Hill of the Sociology Department. Office A-3082 (phone) 737-7456.

Appendix G - Interview Schedule for Faculty and Sessional Instructors

Interview Schedule for Faculty and Sessional Instructors

1. How long have you been teaching at University X?

2. How long have you been living in X? Do you feel your background as a non-Newfoundlander/Newfoundlander influences your interactions with students? Why or why not?

3. How many courses have taught in the past year? At what level were these courses (2000,3000,4000?)

4. Please describe the typical workload (readings, assignments, exams, seminars) in the course you teach at the 2000 level? 3000 level? 4000 level? What do you see as differentiating between courses at these different levels? How do you go about deciding on the structure of readings, etc. the work load?

5. How much time do you expect your students to spend on your course(s) per week?

6. How would you describe your teaching style?

7. Do you think it's important to get to know your students? Why or why not?

8. What do you find challenging and difficult about teaching students? Does this depend on the course/level? The class? What do you find easy/enjoyable? Do you have any other general reflections on your experience of teaching sociology at University X?

9. Please describe the relationship that you attempt to develop with your students when you teach. Is this, in your view, the ideal professor-student relationship? Are you able to achieve that relationship in most classes? With most students? If not, why not?

10. When you interact with students, are you aware of your status as a professor? How, in your view, does this status influence the interaction?

11. Do your students come to talk to you after class about course material? About their grades? Do you think they are comfortable doing this?

12. Many students start university right after high school, and some might complete their degrees by the time they are twenty-one or twenty-two. Does the age difference with students influence the way you relate to them? For example? Do

you think the age difference contributes to students' perception of you as an authority figure in their lives? How do you deal with this?

13. Across Canada, undergraduate sociology programs are pre-dominated by female students. This is also the case at University X, where two thirds to three quarters of sociology students are women. Does the gender breakdown in your classe(s) influence your teaching style? Does it influence the class dynamic? Do you think your gender influences your teaching style? For example?

14. What are the qualities that you think make a person a good instructor?

15. Students tend to think that the only role of the professors/instructors is teaching, but what other duties were you involved in during that semester?

16. What do you think encourages students to major in sociology?

17. What skills do you think they expect to acquire? What skills, in your opinion are they graduating with?

18. Do you think a sociology degree prepares students for the work force? How? Do you think that it should?

19. Do you know which of your students have jobs outside of school? Which students have children? Health issues? Is this something you think that you should know? Does it have any relevance for your teaching?

20. Have students ever approached you because of stress in their lives? What sort of things do they approach you about? How do you respond?

21. Are you aware of the average debt load of sociology majors upon graduation? Do you think that this should have any relevance for your teaching?

22. Are there any things that you would like to see done to change the sociology program ? What? Why?

23. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that we haven't discussed yet?

Appendix H – Transcribing Guidelines

Transcribing Guidelines

A verbatim transcript of the interview will be done by the investigator and interviewer, Joanne Carey, who will transcribe the tapes using the following procedures:

1. At the top of the first page of each transcript the following information will appear:
   Interview No.
   Tape No.
   Date of Interview
   Topic: Stress and Education

2. For all subsequent pages, a code will appear at the top right of each corner.
   Interview #/Tape#, p.#

3. The tape position will be identified on the transcript as follows:
   Begin Tape #, Side 1
   End Side 1
   Begin Side 2
   End of Interview

4. The interviewer will be identified with "I" and the respondent with the first letter of the pseudonym chosen, ex. "B" for the pseudonym Bernice.

5. As much of the original meaning as possible will be preserved. The following rules will be applied:
   Words will be typed as they are heard and in the order they are spoken.
   Punctuation will follow the sense of the words as spoken and not grammatical rules.
   A change in subject will be indicated by a new paragraph.
   Contractions will be typed as spoken.
   Pause words (e.g. ah, well, you know) will be included.
   Fictitious names will be used to protect the identity of the informant and to ensure the anonymity of any individuals mentioned during the interviews.

   The following symbols will be used:
   [] = editorial comments
   /?/ = transcription impossible
   /words/ = within slashes mean questionable transcription
   ... = a half second pause, with an additional dot for every half second
   () = description of verbal behavior or background activities

6. Transcription will be conducted in two parts. An initial transcript will be typed onto a computer file, and a final transcript will be produced by listening to the tape again and making appropriate corrections.