

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MEN

C. J. LADAN

*Department of Psychology
University of Alberta*

and

MAXINE M. CROOKS

*Department of Educational Psychology
University of Alberta*

Abstract

The characteristics, motives and goals of twenty-two mature male students are compared to those of an age-matched sample of mature women continuing their education. It was hypothesized that similarities between their objectives, their reasons for continuing education and the obstacles they faced would be noted. However, results showed that each group chose goals in accord with sex stereotypes. Men continued their education for career-oriented reasons, while women were seeking more personal goals. Explanations are suggested for male compliance with stereotypes, in aggregate affirming that male nonconformance to defined roles is socially censured.

Résumé

Cette étude compare les traits de caractère, les motifs et les buts de 22 étudiants adultes à ceux de 22 étudiantes du même âge. L'hypothèse formulée énonçait qu'on observerait chez les deux groupes des ressemblances entre les objectifs, les raisons pour poursuivre leur formation académique et les obstacles encourus. Cependant, les résultats démontrent que chaque groupe a choisi les buts conformes aux clichés que nous avons pour chaque sexe. Les hommes poussaient leur éducation en vue de se préparer pour une carrière tandis que des buts personnels motivaient les femmes. On tente d'expliquer cet acquiescement des étudiants à des attentes stéréotypées en affirmant de façon générale que la société n'approuve pas que les hommes ne se conforment pas à des rôles déjà bien définis.

The growing interest in continuing education for women has derived from the increasing numbers of mature women who are resuming their studies and broadening their roles (abstracted in Astin, Suniewick and Dweck, 1971; Ladan and Crooks, 1975). The literature has paid scant attention to the mature male student, and this is indicative of the general lack of personal acknowledgement granted him. Andreas (1971) suggests that the university community disparages the "masculinity" of men who return to school, as introspection is considered a feminine trait and "male" roles are not lightly challenged. Further, she suggests that middle-aged men who attempt a transition from vocations in business, the physical sciences or engineering to careers in the humanities or social sciences suffer intolerable social pressures from the uni-

versity community. However, if the decision to return is related to their vocation (as when their education is company-sponsored), the pressure abates. These men have not rejected their occupational role, but suspended it in return for future rewards in their vocation.

As Fasteau (1974) has observed, the masculine ethos not only recognizes the importance of employment, but in fact work is thought the area of life to which "masculine" traits are best fitted: work is seen as the *only* activity worthy of a man's time and energy, and is even a measure of his moral worth. Because male self-identity and esteem are defined by the individual's value in the market place (Fasteau, 1974), the occupational role as dominant in men's lives hinders their return to education. Social

pressures to vocational achievement are also great, and no source of support is available when the action is perceived to be atypical to the stereotyped role (Safilios-Rothschild, 1974).

Thus many men tolerate tedious employ that compromises their self-assessment of value (Stoll, 1974), and few are willing or able to trade these secure jobs in order to re-enter the educational system. Statistics on age and sex for the undergraduate during the 1973-74 winter terms at the University of Alberta reflect this.¹ Younger men outnumber their female counterparts (4:1 at age 25); however, the ratio rapidly declines until it approaches one (29:22) at age 35. At age 37, the proportion is reversed (15:23), and as age increases, female students increasingly outnumber their male colleagues. Correspondingly, absolute numbers of male students are small: 121 male students age 37 or older are enrolled compared to 217 female students in the same age range. Thirty-five to 37 may in fact represent the maximum age at which male nonconformity to occupational roles is tolerated by the person and by those whose behaviors influence him.

The literature suggests that the man who continues his education may be viewed by the academic community as pursuing "feminine" (or at least, non-"masculine") goals. If these individuals fit this stereotype, their characteristics would be expected to be similar to a sample of mature women who are continuing their education. The purpose of the present report is to study the characteristics of men who continue their education, and to compare their characteristics to those of a female sample previously studied by Ladan & Crooks (1975).

METHOD

Participants

Twenty-two (22) mature male students were matched in age to the female sample studied by Ladan & Crooks (1975). Mean age of the male group was 34.7 years, compared to 34.8 years for the female group.

Questionnaire

The twenty-four item questionnaire employed by Ladan & Crooks (1975) was adopted. Self-attitudes and the perception of other's attitudes towards the individual's continuing education were

measured via a five-point scale ranging from "very positive" (1) to "very negative" (5). Elaborations of responses were solicited for each scale. Areas of interest, motives, goals, and obstacles to his enrollment were also surveyed via open-ended questions. Information on marital and economic situations was also collected.

Procedure

Participants were individually contacted via random selection in a major common room on campus. All who were approached agreed to participate. The questionnaire was completed immediately and returned to the experimenter.

RESULTS

Results relating to the major influences under study (i.e., motives, goals, obstacles, the influence of others) are preceded by descriptive data.

Description of Some Personal Characteristics of Mature Male Students

Marital Status: Eighteen per cent of the mature men were single, compared to 11% of the mature women. Eighty-two per cent of the male students were married, while 62% of the female students checked "married". The latter difference is balanced somewhat by the 27% of the female sample who were divorced, separated or widowed. None of the male students listed these latter categories. Marital status was not reliably related to the descriptive characteristics that follow, or to the motives, obstacles and influences perceived by the mature students.

Finances: All mature male students were partly or fully self-supporting, compared to 31% of the mature female group. Forty-two per cent of the women were supported by their spouses, while 14% of the male student's wives were employed. Private business, the Armed Forces or the R.C.M.P. sponsored 32% of the males who returned to university.

Academic Specialization: On the whole, the male students were enrolled in male-dominated faculties, or chose a specialization consistent with stereotyped ideas. Sixteen of the 22 males chose Agriculture (Forestry or Animal Science), Commerce, Management Development, Economics, Law, Engineering, Science (Biology), or Education (Vocational Education or Educational Administration). None chose female-dominated areas, but the remainder selected fields in which both sexes are represented, including Science (Psychology), Arts (Sociology), and Education (Drama, English, Social Studies and History).

¹Figures derived from the **Summary of Statistics**, published by the Office of the Registrar, University of Alberta, 1973-74.

In comparison, 85% of the mature female students chose traditionally female occupations. Exceptions to this generalization did not result in enrollment in fields frequented by both sexes, but two women chose the traditionally male-dominated disciplines of Law and Political Science. Eleven per cent of the mature women were undecided in their vocational goals, compared to four per cent of the male sample.

Time Commitment: Although all male students were employed, 86% attended classes on a full-time basis. Three approaches to the education/occupation time conflict were employed: one group had arranged night-shift work in their occupation, a second group had taken sponsored sabbaticals or leaves of absence, while the remainder were employed during usual hours, and enrolled in late afternoon and evening classes. Of the mature women, 83% attended full-time.

Motives and Goals

Whereas the mature women stressed a need for self-fulfillment or identity, the prime motive for continuing education listed by mature men was job advancement and financial goals. Sixty-eight per cent of the male students reported a desire for professional advancement through increased skills. Self-growth, when mentioned, was combined with occupational goals. Twenty-three per cent of the male sample named this personal goal, compared to 47.5% of the mature female sample.

Major Obstacles

Financial problems were prevalent for both sexes: 50% of the male sample and 39% of the female sample named this factor. More women than men perceived some obstacles to their education: only 7% of the women compared to 36% of the males reported there were no problems. The female sample experienced personal fears of inadequacy or dissatisfaction with their abilities; in fact, 40% of the women fell at the negative extreme on the self-rating scale. Only 9% of the males reported initial negative self-attitudes. A minimal positive shift in male self-esteem occurred after enrollment.

The Influence of "Significant Others"

Only one man indicated that the opinions or influences of those around him were important, even though the majority of the students were married. The women were more greatly influenced by this factor than were the men, although this difference did not prove significant,

($t(42) = 1.33, p > .05$). Contrary to expectations based on stereotypes, more males than females reported that their friends were enrolled (m: 41%; f: 20%).

DISCUSSION

Because a career orientation is a prime facet of the masculine role, male goals as indicated by our sample tended to be occupationally-related. One-third of the group members were continuing their education as a direct consequence of their occupational role: their company or institution sponsored the temporary suspension of work activities in return for an employee with the potential to fulfill additional functions. Consistent with this result, the majority (68%) were upgrading their skills in their previously-chosen occupations. A number of mature male students found their careers marked by tedium and lack of opportunity for advancement: these students resumed their education as a method of job mobility. Few were seeking a new career however, and a change in vocation from "masculine" occupations to the Humanities and Social Sciences was rare, as might be predicted from Andreas' (1971) comments regarding the great social pressures mustered against such a move.

Consequently, the majority (72.7%) of mature men chose vocations consistent with their sex stereotype. An explanation of the high degree of male conformity may be provided by Safilios-Rothschild (1974), who suggests that men of this age group desire alternatives; having reached a significantly high level of achievement in occupational roles, they become dissatisfied with the lack of options in life style. However, she further suggests that strong social pressures ensure little likelihood of significant changes for men who are now in their 30's and 40's. An optimistic prediction is that males who are currently teenagers may recognize the existence of options and thereby might escape compulsive high achievement (Steinmann & Fox, 1974; Safilios-Rothschild, 1974).

Relative to the total student population, small numbers (< 8%) of mature men are enrolled in university. The small representation in the student body may be due to a number of inter-related factors, including the financial responsibilities of a family which ensure continuing employment (Safilios-Rothschild, 1974). Not only does enrollment produce an immediate financial decrement, but future rewards may not be equivalent

to the benefits accorded experience and seniority. This and other practical reasons may explain why many persons consider the male sample's typical age of 34.7 years to be past the prime time to begin a new career. Low remuneration can also be expected when beginning a new career, and thus the emphasis is on upgrading education rather than beginning afresh in a new vocation.

In comparison with the men, who were seeking an enhancement of a current role, the women studied earlier (Ladan & Crooks, 1975) wished to broaden their roles. While occupational roles for men tend to increase in responsibility and prestige with age, women's roles fluctuate in responsibility with the changing needs of their family (Back, 1971). Role transitions resulted in the return to university for women, whereas the men through education sought to transform their role via augmentation of their occupational status (for example, one tradesman was enrolled in vocational education in order to teach his trade). Our interpretation is consistent with Korman's (1966) report that mature men returning to education have received at least moderate self-esteem from their previous occupations, and hence select areas of study whereby continued education may serve to enhance esteem in their occupation. But the majority of women returning to education have been in the home, and hence have no referent for self-esteem in the paid working world. Thus the women's goals are more flexible, not boundaried by their prior vocational experience.

Our interpretation of sex differences in the motives and goals of mature students is also consistent with Morstain and Smart's (1974) analysis showing sex differences with respect to reasons for participation in adult education courses. They report that the basis for male participation is related to formal requirements, notably those which are vocationally-related. Greatest pressures along this dimension, appropriately termed "External Expectations", were observed for males in the age 41+ group. For the women in their study the Cognitive Interest dimension was more often selected as a reason for participation in adult education. Interestingly, their other four scales, including Professional Advancement and Escape/Stimulation revealed essentially no sex differences. The Social Relationships dimension proved age-related for both sexes, and while constant scores over age were reported by males on the Social Welfare

scale, this dimension declined in importance as female age increased.

Our results are congruent with the Morstain and Smart report regarding the importance of vocationally-related external expectations to men enrolled for further education. But although they report no sex differences in the desire for professional advancement, this occurred because *both* men and women, at *each* age category ranging from "under 21" to "41 and over", expressed this reason for enrolling for higher education. Thus mature women are not seeking continued education simply because they are bored or unfulfilled (as confirmed by the low female scores on the Escape/Stimulation scale); instead, they too seek professional advancement. Our results concur with this finding.

Our results from two studies reveal that *both* sexes encountered financial obstacles to their continuing education; however, more than two-thirds of the remaining male sample perceived no other obstacles, compared to 7% of the female sample. In addition to the obstacles listed by the men, the women found it necessary to cope with child-care and time-bargaining problems, as well as strong personal fears and self-doubt. The latter sex difference may be explained by reference to the inner-directed personality of males described by Bardwick (1971), who suggests that men are less prone than women to introspective analysis, particularly to negative self-evaluations of ability.

As mentioned, the men approached their financial problems directly, by providing full or partial support for themselves and their families. Only a small proportion (14%) of their wives contributed to the family income. Less than 1/3 of the women were self-supporting, while the remainder relied on their spouse's financial support, or had taken student loans.

Affiliative needs were considered by the women in their decision to return to university. The attitudes of others were in general deemed important, particularly to their decision to return. For the married woman, the attitudes of her immediate family were very important in her decision. In comparison, the mature men were less influenced in their decision by their family and social contacts, perhaps because male identity is largely achieved through a career rather than affiliative roles. Consequently, the male sample never mentioned the pressures of role conflict, frequently expressed by the women.

A generalization is that the mature students' motives and goals are consistent with their stereotypes. Men resumed their education in order to achieve future occupational success and concomitant financial rewards, whereas the women sought a more personal form of self-fulfillment, often precipitated by role changes. Continuing education is viewed by mature males as a means of achieving self-actualization through vocational success, whereas mature women seek self-actualization through developing a self-identity.

Because Keniston's (1965) primarily male "alienated youth" of the 1960's are now at an age where higher education is necessary for career mobility, and because Toffler (1974) predicts that occupational roles will not remain static over a life-time, increasing numbers of mature male students may be expected to join their female counterparts in the "life-long learning" process (Long, 1974). Thus there is a need to acknowledge and consider this group's special problem of conflict between role and identity, and to understand the differing needs of this group as compared to their younger counterparts.

To this end, Williams, Lindsay, Burns, Wychoff and Wall (1973) suggest that counsellors act at three levels, working to educate faculty and administration as to the special problems of mature students; working toward public or community education to alter the perception of individuals pursuing continued education, and thereby reduce stress produced by role-conflict; and working with the mature student to solve problems of personal adjustment. Ladan and Crooks (1975) provide very similar suggestions, adding that counsellors may be instrumental in solving time bargaining conflicts and may also provide needed vocational counselling, strongly desired by the mature students we sampled.

We believe these recommendations to be viable, and further suggest that in the context of advising mature male students, it is important to consider whether traditional masculine stereotypes influence their counselling. Additional recommendations are these: a) that a "mature freshman" orientation be conducted in conjunction with regular orientation sessions. The presence of representatives from faculty and a variety of student services may serve to alleviate stress associated with re-entry to the educational system; b) that the formation of undergraduate adult groups might be encouraged to allow in-

formal sharing of educational and personal experience. The realization that a "fear of failure" reaction is typical at re-entry might do much to alleviate attendant stress; and c) that an emphasis on the training of counsellors and resource persons sympathetic to the needs of the mature group be made.

More than twenty years ago, Maslow (1954) described a growth-oriented and self-actualizing individual who pursued education not as an instrument to compensate for some deficiency, but valued education for its own sake. Mature students, particularly women, seem to be responding to this idea.

In acknowledgement of the new dimensions added to the university community by their contributions of full maturity and life experiences, mature students should be encouraged to pursue their serious goals. As Innis (1951) observed, the scheme of adult education must recognize "that maturity has problems of its own and capacities of its own" (Innis, p. 213).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results we report suggest that mature men who return to university are not pursuing "feminine" goals; on the contrary, their objectives are substantially traditional. Further education is sought as a means of job mobility, with only a minority of the mature male students re-entering the educational system to train for a new career.

Thus mature men who continue their education are career-directed; however, their female counterparts seek more personal goals through higher education.

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