Issues of challenge, coping, and support for first semester clinical psychology graduate students.

Andrea G. Sodano
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses

Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/1988

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
ISSUES OF CHALLENGE, COPING, AND SUPPORT
FOR FIRST SEMESTER CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENTS

A Thesis Presented
By
ANDREA G. SODANO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

September 1977

Psychology Department
ISSUES OF CHALLENGE, COPING, AND SUPPORT
FOR FIRST SEMESTER CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENTS

A Thesis Presented
By
ANDREA G. SODANO

Approved as to style and content by:

David M. Todd, Chairperson of Committee

William Dorris, Member

Ted Slovin, Member

Bonnie R. Strickland, Chairperson
Psychology Department
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to all those who challenged, supported, and coped with me throughout the process of this research. Dave Todd has been a continual source of inspiration, clarity, and support, not only as the chair of my committee, but as an advisor during my tenure as a graduate student. I have greatly appreciated his encouragement of my quest for diversity and my growth as a community psychologist. Bill Dorris and Ted Slovin were helpful critics from inception to finish and their excitement about the project bolstered me during the most difficult times.

My special thanks and love go to those who taught me what a true support system is. Jim Atherton, Martha Bailey, George Brennan, Deborah Leigh Mack-Schonitzer, Hyde Meissner, Chas Norton, and John Peters all made this masters possible and will remain with me long after it is completed. And to my mother, Virginia Addison-Sodano, goes my love and appreciation for being my support, family, and professional role model.

Finally, I want to thank those students who shared their time and thoughts with me. By sharing their experience they helped the complex concepts of challenge, coping, and support become a little clearer and substantially more personal.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I. Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (Stress)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A General Consideration of Stress</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Aspects of Challenge</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity and Social Comparison, Role Conflict, and Role Overload</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalistic Stress Studies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping as Appraisal</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping as Defense</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping as Strategy and Flexibility</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Factors as Support</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kin as Support</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks as Support</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge, Coping and Support in Academic Settings</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge as a Discrepancy between Demands and Preparation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge as Anticipation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge as Person-Environment Fit</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II. Methodology</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III. Results--The First Interview</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for Entry into Graduate School</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Arrival</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beginning of School and Group Development</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Old Friends</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Challenge of Work and Issues of Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Comparison</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Norms</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Reaction to the First Few Weeks of Graduate School</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV. Results--Second Interview</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Challenge of Friendship</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing Work and Friendship</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Challenge of Work</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Comparison</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V. Results--Summary Interview</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Responses to the First Semester</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations about Graduate School</td>
<td>.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity and Lack of Consistent Standards</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Challenge of Work</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Comparison</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Expectations of the First Semester</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter VI. Summary and Discussion</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix. Interview Guide</td>
<td>.182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The hot, humid Connecticut air belted me as I left the safe climate-controlled environs of TWA flight 276 from Denver. Depression and anxiety had been steadily increasing as I realized that my first year at graduate school was not going to be as easy an exercise in growing up as I had initially imagined. I was coming into a brand new situation knowing only one person whom I had met briefly one evening. My self assurance concerning my scholastic capabilities was nowhere to be found. On top of all that my unfurnished apartment's newly painted floors were not dry. I found myself "dropped off" at the Hotel Northampton by my landlord. Knowing that if I ventured out of the hotel to find something to eat I would never find my way back, I called my one acquaintance to casually announce that I had just arrived. Sensing my desperation, my one source of support invited me to dinner.

The next few weeks were a blur of faces, hallways, streets, and classes, combined with an abundance of loneliness. Initially there was an almost desperate sense of support among my classmates, a lot of partying and visiting. It looked like everyone was going to be the best of friends. But after the initial novelty, many of my classmates began to drift back to their wives, boyfriends (who were generally close enough for weekend visits), and other people they knew in the area. In my eyes, my potential support was disappearing.

When I was not cultivating a support system around myself during the first semester, I was having to deal with the rigors of academia, notably statistics and an ever looming Clinical paper. Incompletes
for almost everyone in the first year class testified to the stress that everyone felt concerning their competency as a graduate student. In addition, experiences at the Veterans Administration Hospital doing clinical interviewing did not contribute to many people's clinical self-esteem.

As a result of my experience, I began to wonder what it is like for other people to enter a new system. What are the particular stresses they feel? Are these stresses different for each individual or are they common to everyone? How do people go about assessing and adapting to the system they have entered? How do they cope with the challenges that are encountered daily? Lastly, how do people get support and what exactly is supportive?

---

1 The first clinical core course taken by new students.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the process of entry into and adaptation to a new environment where challenges are maximal and support is minimal. The context chosen to study was the first semester of a clinical psychology graduate student's training. It was assumed that moving a relatively long distance, entering a new environment, coping with the demands of graduate school, and establishing a new support system would be a challenging event. By studying this process over time, while it was occurring, it might be possible to understand the issues these students were facing, how they coped with them, what their support needs were, and how they developed that support. It might also be possible to examine commonalities and differences between students concerning their individual modes of handling the situation and to understand the development of issues and ways of dealing with them over time.

This research is a case study which attempts to understand the dimensions of being a single, first semester clinical psychology graduate student.

In the next five sections we will introduce the concepts of challenge (stress), coping, and support. In addition to defining them and reviewing the literature, we will also examine them in the context of academic settings. In the summary we will analyze this research and introduce a model with which to study the issues of challenge, coping, and support for first semester clinical students. While most of the literature uses the term stress I would prefer to use challenge, a term Murphy (1962) introduced to replace the word crisis. Rather than just im-
plying negative consequences, challenge can also imply positive, growth oriented potential. For the purposes of this paper, stress will be used only when referring to the literature. Otherwise, the term challenge will be used.

**Challenge (Stress)**

The concepts of challenge/stress and coping are practically inseparable in the literature. The introduction of a stressor naturally leads to the initiation of some form of coping response. Therefore, it is impossible to effectively consider one without the other. However, for the purpose of clarity the two will be considered separately. In this section we will look at the concept of stress (including its origins, some examples of its use, and some specific definitions), the positive aspects of the mastery of stress, role ambiguity and social comparison, role conflict, and role overload, and some naturalistic stress studies.

**A General Consideration of Stress**

The stress concept originated in the physical and biological sciences, thus many stress studies are concerned with physiological variables. Hans Selye (1956), one of the original investigators of physiological stress, indicates that exposure of an organism to a stressor (extremes of temperature or a toxic substance) brings on an alarm reaction to counteract it. If the condition caused by the stressor continues, the organism either suffers extensive damage or death.

Numerous authors (e.g., Wolf & Wolff, 1943; Treuting & Ripley,
cited in Mechanic, 1962) have associated psychosomatic reactions to social stress. For example, Wolf and Wolff observed gastric hyperactivity during periods of frustrating life situations. Treuting and Ripley found that attacks of asthma were related to the patient's emotional reactions to everyday life. Although the above studies correlate the impact of stressor and its ultimate consequences, they tell very little about the psychological aspects of stress or about the processes involved in coping with stress.

Those who have considered the more psychological components of stress have defined it in various ways. McGrath (1970) emphasizes its temporal and anticipatory aspects. He feels that stress is the anticipation of the inability to respond adequately to a perceived demand and the anticipation of negative consequences for that inadequate response. Mechanic (1967) conceives of stress as the actual discrepancy between the demands impinging upon a person and the individual's preparation and skills to cope with that demand. He indicates that stress occurs when people either have insufficient means to deal with the situation, or, if sufficient means are available, lack the capacity to use them effectively. The implication is that an imbalance exists between environmental problems and cultural, personal, and social resources. The extent to which a person experiences stress in any particular situation depends on a multitude of factors (e.g., ability to mobilize energy to cope, psychological defenses, extent of support systems, and past experience). For both these researchers stress results from an inability to match coping skills with challenging demands.
Positive Aspects of Challenge

While much of the stress research concentrates on the deleterious effects of stress (e.g., Appley & Trumbull, 1967; Kahn et al., 1964), others (e.g., Coelho et al., 1963; Moos & Tsu, 1976) discuss life crises (another term often used interchangeably with stress and challenge) as a transitional period where an individual is both presented with an opportunity for personality growth and exposed to an increased danger of mental disorder. Erickson (1950) and Levinson et al. (1974) both contend that personality growth results from the resolution of developmental crises. The successful resolution of these crises then enables the individual to cope more effectively with later ones. These authors, as well as Caplan (1964), would assert that a person's most stressful experiences can be capitalized on to enhance personality development and render the individual less vulnerable to future stress.

Various factors seem to influence the outcome of the crisis (e.g., previous experience, degree of stress, and available social and environmental support). If the outcome of stress is mastery of the event then there is a likelihood of increased growth and development. Moos and Tsu (1967) suggest that if the challenge is too weak human potential will be unfulfilled. If it is too strong, the coping attempts will result in failure. Thus, optimal challenge can lead to growth and learning.

Role Ambiguity and Social Comparison, Role Conflict, and Role Overload

Kahn (1973) and Kahn et al. (1964) in studying job stress discuss role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload as sources of tension, conflict, and low trust and liking for co-workers. Role ambiguity is
defined as either the subjective or objective lack of role-related information. Role conflict is defined as a pattern of sent expectations which contains logical incompatibilities or which takes inadequate account of the needs and abilities of the focal person. Role overload can be experienced as stressful either by the amount or difficulty of work which needs to be accomplished.

The lack of clear standards by which to evaluate oneself seems to lead both to a feeling of incompetence and dependency (Rosen & Bates, 1967) and competitiveness for the purpose of obtaining an accurate evaluation of ability (Festinger, 1954). When there are no objective standards the individual will use the performance of others as a measurement standard. Festinger suggests that what most affects the tendency for social comparison is the importance of the ability about which the individual is uncertain. Thus, it would be expected that those students who are the most uncertain about their abilities would be those who are the most susceptible to social comparison (Gorden, 1966, cited in Rubinstein).

Mechanic (1962) in observing students studying for their comprehensive exams and Rubinstein (1976) in studying graduate student clinicians both discuss the issues and effects of social comparison. Mechanic found social comparison to be an important phenomena in the process of studying for comprehensive exams. He found that it was directly related both to a student's sense of competence and the degree of ambiguity concerning the academic standards with which students assess their progress. He suggests that if a student compares him/herself to another student and sees that the other is quite competent, s/he then gets anxious, does not
function well for a few days, and then starts avoiding those who stimulate social comparison processes and anxiety. In contrast to the stress caused by social comparison, there are also positive effects. To the extent that social comparison is successful in reducing uncertainty and enhancing self-esteem, it should function in a positive, self-affirming manner. Also, social comparison can lead to the modeling of adaptive behaviors and the learning of new coping skills. Rubinstein, although convinced that social comparison occurred regularly, found the graduate students quite reluctant to discuss the topic. She hypothesizes that it was a much too loaded concept to examine within the context of a peer relationship.

Naturalistic Stress Studies

Another major area of stress research looks at the physical, social, and cultural conditions apt to be discomforting for people living within a particular group or setting. These studies assume that stress is being experienced because of the nature of the situation. I am assuming, with Orth (1963), that entering graduate school is stressful. Mechanic (1962) assumed that studying for comprehensive exams is stressful. However, Basowitz et al. (1955) indicate that stress does not always conform to a priori value judgments of what should happen. Instead it has to be determined by observations of what exactly does happen. It is for this reason that I am interested in observing several people in a presumably stressful situation. This will allow me to see, if indeed, entering graduate school is stressful, and, if so, how people cope with it and what the process of adaptation is over time.
Coping

As is the case with stress, there are numerous definitions of the term coping. In this section we will attempt to define some aspects of coping. We will examine several researchers' conceptions of coping, including coping as appraisal, defense, strategy, and flexibility.

Coping can be problem solving behavior when the stakes are high and the individual's adaptive potentials are taxed. It can be an array of covert and overt behavior patterns by which the organism can actively prevent, alleviate, or respond to stress-inducing circumstances (McGrath, 1970). Mechanic (1967) stresses that coping depends largely on a person's preparation and skills.

Coping as Appraisal

Lazarus et al. (1969) suggest that the concept of coping includes the most casual and realistic forms of problem solving activities as well as highly motivated, rigid, primitive, less adequate and realistic efforts at mastery. The latter style may be best described as coping and defense rather than problem solving. Coping, as defined by Lazarus et al., is problem solving efforts made by an individual when the demands faced are highly relevant to personal welfare (i.e., a situation of considerable jeopardy or promise), and when these demands tax adaptive resources. These authors indicate that coping represents a transaction between an individual and the environment. Coping cannot be assessed or evaluated without regard to the environmental demands which create the need for it in the first place. Lazarus' main concern is with the de-
scription and classification of coping episodes.

A major focus within this context is on appraisal. A coping episode is never a static affair. Rather it changes in quality and intensity as a function of new information and the appraisal of previous responses. Appraisal also includes the evaluation of information regarding the relevance of an event to the individual's welfare. White (1976) also mentions that securing adequate information about the environment is an obvious necessity for adaptive behavior. However, he suggests that it may be equally important to cut down on the existing input.

**Coping as Defense**

Much of the research concerning stress has utilized the psychodynamic or psychoanalytic framework of defense. Early writers such as Freud (Hall & Lindsey, 1957) used the term defense to refer to the efforts of the person to protect him/herself against instinctual demands and conflicts arising in human development. Later psychoanalysts revised the theory of defense and viewed it as a way of handling conflicts engendered by the social environment. Those who have used this model have seen human adaptation as an intrapsychic mode of controlling environmental threat.

Two investigators who have used the psychoanalytic framework of defense in stress studies are Grinker and Spiegel (1945). They explained the breakdown of flying personnel under battle conditions by psychodynamic principles. Bettelheim (1943) described behavior in concentration camps by similar principles. Mechanic (1970) suggests that implicit in this approach is a certain degree of pessimism about man's efficacy in
manipulating his environment. Adaptation is seen not as a direct manipulation of the environment, but mainly as a manipulation of cognitions about the environment. This viewpoint ignores how one copes in an instrumental sense with situations and other people.

Coping as Strategy and Flexibility

Murphy (1962) is another investigator who is interested in defense as an overall coping strategy. She does not think of defense and coping as polarities, but as different ways of adapting. She indicates that part of the total coping strategy is the flexible use of defense mechanisms along with overt coping maneuvers. Intrapsychic defense mechanisms do not appear as substitutes for active efforts in manipulating the environment or as a result of failure to make active efforts, but go hand in hand with those more active efforts as part of the total coping process. Mechanic (1970) would seem to agree with this conceptualization of defense mechanisms. He suggests that the relative usefulness and adequacy of defense processes depend on the way defense affects coping. The primary function of psychological defense is to facilitate the coping process. Whereas defense refers to the management of emotional states, coping refers to the more instrumental skills a person may possess. The active use of both these methods by students in various settings will be discussed in a later section.

There is an extensive literature on stress and coping in natural situations (e.g., Cohen, 1953; Davis, 1956; Grinker & Spiegel, 1945). Murphy's The Widening World of Childhood is an example of this type of study. She describes the coping process as a matter of strategy, of
flexible management of different devices for dealing with challenges from the environment. It involves maintaining an alert, appraising attitude. Coping is a synthesizing or integrative concept that deals not only with technique but with strategy. Kahn et al. (1964) in discussing organizational stress also refer to the concept of flexibility. They state that with our rapidly changing technology and social systems it becomes imperative for people to be flexible and adaptive. They do not imply, however, that absolute flexibility is an ideal pattern. Just as complete rigidity can be detrimental to mental health, so too can extreme flexibility. Because the flexible individual tends to consider all alternatives in a situation, s/he is apt to experience role conflict and is likely to respond to it with a high level of anxiety (Kahn, 1973).

The essential aspects of coping seem to include the ability to respond to the requirements of the external situation and also to one's feelings about that situation. Caplan (1964) has identified seven components of effective coping behavior. They are:

1. Active exploration of reality issues and search for information.
2. Free expression of both positive and negative feelings and a tolerance of frustration.
3. Active invoking of help from others.
4. Breaking problems down into manageable bits and working them through one at a time.
5. Awareness of fatigue and tendencies toward disorganization with pacing of efforts and maintenance of control in as many areas of functioning as possible.
6. Active mastery of feelings where possible and acceptance of inevitability where not. Flexibility and willingness to change.
7. Basic trust in oneself and others and basic optimism about outcome.

These, of course, are not all used everytime. However, they serve as useful guiding principles in studying the elements of coping behavior.

My definition of coping stresses the transaction between an individual and his/her environment. It also relies heavily on Caplan's (1964) seven characteristics of effective coping behavior. Coping is a process of defining and appraising the situation, problem-solving, controlling environmental stimuli, and utilizing an effective defense and support system which enables the person to deal flexibly with the environment.

**Support**

During a challenge or crisis an individual's responses are influenced not only by the nature of the stress, the current ego strength of the person, and his/her particular coping abilities, but also by the quality of the emotional and instrumental (task-oriented) support provided by the social network within which the individual resides. Although not extensive, there is a literature on the role of social support in coping with life challenges (e.g., Caplan, 1964, 1974; Coelho et al., 1963; Craven & Wellman, 1973; French, 1973; Mechanic, 1962; Murphy, 1962; Orth, 1963; also see Todd & Silver, 1974). In this and the next section we will consider some of this literature, look at some of the dimensions of support (specifically protective factors, kin, and social networks), and attempt to define it.
Protective Factors as Support

People have a variety of specific support needs. They require enduring interpersonal relationships, intimacy that provides the freedom to express feelings unself-consciously, validation of personal identity and worth, satisfaction of dependency needs, and instrumental and emotional support. Within this supportive network the individual is dealt with as a unique individual and as someone worthy of respect and criticism.

Cassel (1973, cited in Caplan, 1972) suggests that the nature and strength of available support provides a number of protective factors which help people stay healthy. These factors seem to consist of: help by significant others with mobilizing psychological resources and mastering emotional burdens, sharing tasks, and providing the person with extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skills, and cognitive guidance to improve his/her handling of the situation. Support systems can both offer guidance to an individual through assistance in interpreting environmental cues and act as a refuge when stability and comfort are needed. It should be emphasized that support is not the propping up of someone incapable of taking care of him/herself, but rather augmenting of a person's strengths to facilitate mastery of the environment. In talking about support systems or networks it is important to emphasize the enduring pattern of relationships that help the person maintain well-being over time (Caplan, 1972).

Kin as Support

The importance of kin (i.e., family) as a natural support system
has been widely discussed (e.g., Bott, 1971; Craven & Wellman, 1973; Nelson, 1966). Much of the research has shown that extended kinship networks bound tightly together by tradition and obligation tend to be the most emotionally supportive. However, even those who live far away from kin and see them rarely still report them as a primary source of support. Although dense networks expedite access to supportive relations (Craven & Wellman, 1973), large networks expedite access to tangible resources and information. If one is part of a large, disjointed network (much as the first year students are), access to information should be readily available, but it can become difficult to maintain interactions and supportive relations with all the geographically dispersed segments. The invention of the telephone has certainly helped in making widely separated support networks more available.

Social Networks as Support

Social support networks are useful in several ways in helping people cope with life challenges and stress. The stress resulting from role ambiguity and absent or confusing feedback was discussed earlier in the introduction. It is suggested here that if individuals are effectively embedded in their own smaller social network it is possible to receive consistent communications about what is expected of them, assistance with tasks, evaluation of performance, monetary help, self-validation, etc. without having to rely so extensively on their surrounding, more impersonal environment. In other words, the harmful effect of stress can be reduced by an effective social support network.

A second way that support networks can be useful is best described
by the "same boat" phenomenon. Caplan (1960) and Silverman (1969) discuss instances where parents of premature babies and recent widows gained emotional and social support and useful information from people who had experienced similar life challenges. An important characteristic of these informal helpers is that they were non-professionals. There was a mutual and reciprocal quality in their interactions where the giver and receiver of support were equally, although differently, benefitted by the contact. Through association with others in the same boat the isolation of being somewhat different or of several challenges can be ameliorated.

It seems apparent that social support is a necessary adjunct to effective coping. The intimacy, guidance, and self-validation all provide a refuge where the individual can mobilize his/her resources and confront the world. Those who are particularly helpful seem to be family and those "in the same boat." This thesis will attempt to elaborate further on the dimensions of support, particularly as they relate to life challenges.

Challenge, Coping and Support in Academic Settings

In this section we will concentrate on the issues of challenge, coping, and support as they relate to students in natural academic settings. Several researchers have been studying the relationship of the ecological characteristics of the environment to the coping preferences of individuals (Kelly, 1971; Trickett et al., 1972). They are primarily interested in the elements in the environment which facilitate or constrain adaptive behavior (i.e., person-environment fit). Coelho et al.
Coelho et al. (1962) have observed students in college. Coelho et al. found a diversity of coping patterns rather than a typical pattern, while Grinker's group tended to use exercise, denial, isolation, fantasy, and sleep as means of coping with stress.

Coelho et al. also examined the use of the students' interpersonal environment in facilitating adaptation. They felt effective coping not only involved self-manipulation of feelings in order to contain anxiety and maintain self-esteem, environmental management, and realistic problem-solving, but also the active exploration and use of human resources in the environment. The ability to form and maintain friendships is important in the overall coping process. The authors found six ways in which students were able to use their peer groups and individual friendships to facilitate dealing with new socioacademic problems in the transition to college. These were: 1) clarifying new self-definitions and career possibilities, 2) intellectual stimulation through informal discussion groups, 3) learning through pooling of information and coping skills, 4) learning through role complementarity, 5) support in time of crisis, and 6) sounding-board for other possible points of view.

Orth's (1963) aim in studying first year students at the Harvard Business School was to look at the emergent systems, norms, membership patterns, and leadership patterns of two different sections. He was interested in looking at the social structure of the group rather than at particular individuals in it.

Social support (defined as the number of friends one had in the section) was one aspect of the group that Orth considered. He felt that if a student did not have an adequate amount of social support s/he
would have difficulty participating fully in the learning process and
in realizing his/her academic potential. Only support from fellow stu-
dents and spouses was considered.

In studying the first year class for a year Orth found that: 1) in
one section the support pattern had become stabilized by February, 2)
study groups were an important source of social support, and 3) social
isolation (lack of support) may occur from the rapid development of
highly restrictive norms. As long as conformity to the agreements reached
by the group were adhered to social support and/or influence were freely
given. In discussing some consequences of temporary systems Slater
(1968) also notes the importance of acute sensitivity and responsiveness
to group norms in order to ease the stresses of constant mobility.

Mechanic's (1962) study of graduate students preparing for compre-
hensive examinations is another example of a longitudinal investigation
of stress, coping, and support. Mechanic's findings complement Murphy's
ideas concerning the interplay of defense mechanisms and coping. There
were indications throughout the study of students compromising between
their coping and defense needs. For example, the students who were able
to cope most effectively were ones who could gather information (partly
by social comparison), but also defend when the anxiety level became too
great. A number of defense devices were used--comforting cognitions,
favorable social comparison, humor, mastery, magical practices, hostil-
ity, and seeking support.

\footnote{Perhaps this explains the incompletes almost everyone in my class
received during their first semester as graduate students.}
The findings also parallel Lazarus' theories of appraisal and severe stress. The effectiveness of methods was continually examined and reexamined throughout the study period. For example, the students initially spent extensive time gathering data about the exam, but stopped when it began to cause too much anxiety. As the examination date approached and the stress intensified, defensive devices became more primitive and less adaptive. The few days before examinations, severe psychosomatic symptoms seemed to appear.

Group resources were an important aid in helping students cope. Adaptation was influenced by student communication. The students sought social support for comforting attitudes and verification of each individual's rationalizations about the exams. Mechanic points out that modes of active coping and reassurance are usually consensual. A student will not maintain perceptions that are clearly rejected by his/her peers. Although group resources were important, the group was also a source of anxiety. This resulted primarily from the use of social comparison. Festinger (1955) notes that social comparison is more prevalent in situations where criteria for evaluating oneself are rather obscure, which is evidently the case with the above students. Social comparison was also found to be adaptive by allowing students to pace themselves with the others.

As stress increased, the students sought any available support.

---

3 It is interesting to note that this is also true for the University of Massachusetts clinical program. Therefore, it might be predicted that there will be a great deal of social comparison during the first year in the clinical program and that the resultant anxiety level will be rather high.
Under these stress conditions the group became very cohesive and supportive. Spouses were most supportive when they accepted the student's definition of the situation, essentially entering the defense system and supporting it. However, blind assurance was not supportive. Reassurance needed to be meaningful and concrete, not global.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has explored the issues of challenge, coping, and support and has looked at these issues as they relate to academic settings in particular. Historically stress has been studied as a physiological variable. More recently a number of authors have begun to consider its psychological components as well. These have included its anticipatory aspects, the actual discrepancy between the demands impinging upon a person and the individual's preparation and skills to cope with that demand, the mastery of challenge which results in growth and increased coping skills, role ambiguity and the resultant social comparison, role conflict, and role overload.

The major issues examined in relation to coping are appraisal, defense, and the use of a flexible strategy. In looking at the concept of support we viewed it as consisting of a number of protective factors including support from kin and the utilization of social networks.

At this point we will attempt to integrate the above research and develop a model with which to study the experiences of the first semester clinical students. Depending upon the particular investigator, the research on challenge (stress) and coping seems to emphasize three aspects
of the concepts. These are: 1) the person's ability to actively cope with the challenge (most often a result of prior experience and mastery), 2) the amount of anxiety and worry elicited by the challenge, and 3) the number of helpful resources and amount of unambiguous information available within the individual's culture (i.e., person-environment fit).

The concept of social support varies as to its importance within each of the three conceptualizations.

**Challenge as a Discrepancy between Demands and Preparation**

In the first part, challenge is explained as a discrepancy between existing demands of a situation and the person's preparation and ability to cope with those demands (Mechanic, 1967). This definition emphasizes the importance of the individual's ability to cope. Thus, if the person is deficient in coping skills (perhaps interpreted as life experiences where the person has learned ways of dealing with the environment), s/he is apt to experience more stress in a challenging situation. For example, those students who had no prior experience with living alone, finding an apartment, or making a major transition in terms of distance or support networks would be expected to have a more difficult time coping than those who had gained those skills as some earlier time by actually experiencing the situation. The emphasis here is primarily on the individual's prior preparation for coping with the challenge. This particular framework would suggest that the mastering of challenges and the exposure to diverse events would facilitate future coping.

Murphy (1962) in talking about children's coping responses, suggests that they can develop a resiliency to stress if exposed to various chal-
lenges. This is similar to Erikson's (1950) and Levinson et al.'s (1974) emphasis on the mastering of particular developmental challenges in order to reach maturity. While it is important to learn methods of coping with adversity, this can only happen if people are also receiving reinforcement and support. If the challenge is too intense or support too minimal then learning suffers and people instead tend to regress (e.g., Moss & Tsu, 1976; Orth, 1963).

**Challenge as Anticipation**

A second way of looking at challenge, primarily discussed by McGrath (1970), emphasizes the anticipatory nature of stress. He suggests that the anticipation of the inability to respond to challenging demands and the resultant negative consequences leads to increased stress. The emphasis here is on the anxiety and worry about the ability to cope regardless of the person's actual skills. Thus, a student could have mastered, in actuality, a vast number of challenges and possess a large repertoire of coping skills, but feel, for whatever reasons, that s/he was incapable of meeting the challenge. Because of the inordinate amount of anxiety concerning his/her skills, s/he would then experience relatively high stress levels. This view of challenge seems to stress intrapsychic modes of functioning and would imply similar ways of coping. Therefore, effective coping behavior is that which serves to minimize anxiety and maintain feelings of self-esteem and competency. This is similar to Caplan's (1964), Murphy's (1962), and Mechanic's (1962) discussion of defensive devices used as part of an effective coping strategy.
Challenge as Person-Environment Fit

Kelly (1971), Mechanic (1962, 1970), and Trickett et al. (1972) emphasize a third dimension to challenge. Rather than concentrate on the individual, either in terms of particular coping skills or defensive modes of reacting to challenging stimuli, the above researchers examine the fit of the environment for each individual. It is suggested that challenge occurs as a result of an imbalance between environmental problems and cultural, personal, and social resources. The emphasis here is on an ill-fitting environment which is the prime source of challenge and ultimately stress, rather than an inadequate individual who is incapable of coping. This framework would suggest that effective coping occurs as a result of an interaction between a person's particular coping skills (i.e., prior experience), use of defense mechanisms, support network, and resources of the culture within which the person is immersed. I would suggest that the latter category includes such things as prior facilitation of accurate expectations about the setting a person is preparing to enter and specific feedback about its standards and modes of operating once the student is in residence.

Similar to Kelly's (1971) and Trickett et al.'s (1972) conceptualization of person-environment fit is Kahn's (1973) and Kahn et al.'s (1964) notion of role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload. Here too an emphasis is placed on the interaction, between an individual and his/her environment, both in terms of challenge and coping. He stresses that there is no perfect way of interacting with the surrounding culture. Instead, attention should be paid to facilitating an individual's particular style of coping. Suggested here by all the above
researchers is the different-strokes-for-different-folks style of coping. It is with an emphasis on this third dimension of challenge, coping, and support that we will examine the experience of being a first semester clinical graduate student.

To reiterate, the intent of this thesis is to explore issues of challenge, coping, and support for entering first-year clinical graduate students. By examining the process of adaptation over the first semester it will be possible to delineate the particular challenges that accompany entering graduate school, the effectiveness and various styles of coping with these challenges, and what role social support or the lack thereof plays in both precipitating and alleviating stress. In particular we will look at role ambiguity and social comparison, role conflict and role overload as sources of challenge. We will also examine the more positive aspects of the mastery of challenge. In terms of coping we will concentrate on the use of appraisal, defense, strategy, and flexibility. With support we will examine the role kin, friends, and social networks play in facilitating instrumental and emotional support. My focus is on the students and their experiences. With the aid of an unstructured interview it is hoped that we will be able to place the experience of being a first year graduate student into a context that will help the students and others understand the complexity of the event.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Issues of transition and entry into a new environment and the consequent development of challenges, coping, and support are complex and multi-faceted. Within this context there are not only specific topics to examine but also an ongoing process that needs delineation. Rather than attempting to force people's experiences of these events into strictly preconceived categories, I wanted to understand people's subjective experience of the entry process and to discover and expand on the particular issues confronting them and their unique way of dealing with these issues. Qualitative research seemed ideally suited to this pursuit. It provided some structure through the formulation of orienting topics and questions (see Appendix A). Yet, it also provided an opportunity to pursue topics in depth and reformulate the problem as new information emerged.

McCall and Simmons (1969) suggest that participant observation is ideal for studying the social processes and complex interdependencies within social systems. Dean et al. (1967) stress other advantages to qualitative research. The most relevant include the ability to reformulate the problem as the research progresses, to design more relevant questions, to design more relevant questions because the researcher often knows the situation better as a participant observer, to constantly modify categories so as to incorporate relevant new material, and to look at more depth material than a scaled questionnaire would allow.
My initial research questions were essentially as follows: 1) What is it like to leave a known environment and enter graduate school, and, 2) over time, what does that process look like? I chose to define this even further by considering the issues of challenge, coping, and support within that process. It became apparent that the methodology used would have to provide a way of both looking at a complex set of variables and a process over time. Lofland (1971) expresses the additional value of face-to-faceness. He feels that to understand another's life the researcher must attempt to "holistically assess the life situation of the other as this other conceives it" (Lofland, 1971, p. 4). He argues further that this can be done only by putting oneself in the other person's shoes.

In my research I was very much in a face-to-face context. I qualified as a participant observer on several counts. Just the year before I had been an entering first year clinical graduate student. I was also a teaching assistant during the semester the interviews took place for an interviewing course the first year students were required to take. I socialized occasionally with a couple of the participants and I was a member of the clinical psychology department. This was advantageous in terms of Lofland's conception of a "reporter" (1971, p. 3), although it also had the potential of creating bias. This will be discussed more fully in a later section.

Participants

The participants of this study were five entering first year clinical graduate students. They included three women and two men. They
were selected from a class of eleven because they were single and had travelled a relatively long distance from their last place of residence to graduate school. They also had few, if any, contacts in the Amherst vicinity. I felt by choosing people who had to make a major transition with little immediate support, that the concepts of challenge, coping, and support could be more easily delineated. My underlying assumption was that making a major transition and entering a new environment where there is a dearth of support can be challenging. I wanted to understand how challenging it was, how people dealt with that challenge, how issues of support affected their adjustment, and how the process evolved over the semester. Therefore, it made sense to study those people who were apt to experience the challenges most intensely and directly.

All the students except one had entered graduate school directly from college. Similarly, all but one of the students chose to live alone for the first semester. Two of the participants had intimate relationships, but they were not in the immediate area.

I recruited the students for the study by asking them personally if they would participate. They were told I was interested in studying the process of making a major transition, entering graduate school, and related issues of challenge, coping, and support. They understood I would interview them in-depth two times during the first semester concerning these issues and that a third in-depth summary interview would occur at the beginning of the second semester. They were also told these interviews would be audiotaped.
An unstructured respondent interview was used to study the issues of entry, challenges, coping, and support. After reviewing much of the literature on these topics, I decided the most effective way to understand each individual's experience was to design an open-ended questionnaire. This allowed me to have some structure around particular topic areas, while also allowing both the freedom to pursue those areas in more depth if warranted and to include topics which might have been overlooked initially. The interview guide (see Appendix A) consisted basically of four parts---challenges around the first semester of graduate school, coping with those challenges, preparation before coming to graduate school, and support issues during the first semester. This format provided some structure and opening questions which were quite nonspecific and allowed the participant to pursue any direction s/he wished. For each topic more specific questions were included which I would address if the participant did not. While many of the questions came from theoretical perspectives within the literature, others came from my personal experience as a previous first year student. The first two interviews were similar in format. The final interview had the same format, but differed in perspective with the primary emphasis being a retrospective discussion of the prior semester.

The interviews occurred approximately two weeks into the semester, the first few weeks after Thanksgiving, and shortly after the students returned from intercession (near the middle of February). The interviews were audiotaped and lasted from 1½ to 2½ hours, with the first interview being the longest. Before each interview I gave a brief general descrip-
tion of the study, discussed issues of confidentiality, and asked each person to begin by talking about what the last few weeks had been like. Participants were free to pursue any direction they chose. The interview guide was used only to ensure I had basic information from all respondents. The audiotapes of the interviews were later transcribed with minimal editing. These transcripts became the source of the data which was ultimately analyzed.

The major advantage to this methodological format occurred because of my peer status. Lofland (1971, p. 3) stresses the importance of the reporter being close to the people s/he reports on. He refers to four types of proximity (all of which I fulfilled to some extent). 1) I was close to the participants in the physical sense of conducting my life in face-to-face proximity to them. 2) This proximity extended over time (a semester and a half) and a variety of circumstances (e.g., teaching, socializing, interviewing). 3) I feel I developed a sense of intimacy and confidentiality with the participants, although this varied somewhat from individual to individual. 4) To a lesser degree I concentrated on the minutiae of everyday life. Instead I preferred to look at patterns and processes that were inherent in everyone's experience. By having had a similar experience to these students and sharing some thoughts about it I may have facilitated a more comprehensive discussion of the process of becoming a graduate student. Particularly by sharing some of the difficulties I had experienced I may have opened a topic which was perhaps both socially undesirable and difficult to discuss (i.e., primarily challenges and social comparison). This particular interview format may also have contributed some support to these students during
their first semester. I was a sympathetic listener who wanted to hear about people's initial experiences and was willing to spend time doing that. In many ways the interviews served as therapy and release time. They enabled the students to examine what was happening to them and place it in a context while it was occurring. On the other hand, it may also have introduced additional stress by concentrating on the challenges people were experiencing.

Bias

The disadvantage to this methodology lies in its susceptibility to bias. The flexibility and open-endedness of this method is double-edged. While allowing openness to input from the participant, it also allows an openness to the researcher's own distortions and agenda. This is true not only during the interview, but also during the analysis.

Much has been written about the bias inherent in qualitative research (McCall & Simmons, 1969). Some find it so flagrant as to make qualitative research invalid or superfluous. Others argue there is less inherent bias because it provides "more direct internal checks and is more responsive to the data that are the imposed systems of other methods" (McCall & Simmons, 1969, p. 2). Schwartz and Schwartz (1955), in suggesting Myrdal's (1944) method of excluding bias from social research, feel it is possible to diminish bias by facing one's values. It is important to understand one's own values and background and to introduce them as explicitly as possible.

While there were advantages to using the qualitative model in my research, there were also some weaknesses. One of the ways I was close
to the students was as their teaching assistant for the first semester interviewing course. Thus, I was in a somewhat evaluative position. This allowed me to be more of a participant observer, but it also may have inhibited people's responses, particularly concerning their experience with that course.

More important sources of bias may have resulted from my own difficulties with entering graduate school and my continuing struggle with social comparison. I was primed to see stress, where for others it might not exist. While facilitating people's expression around challenges, I did little to turn their attention to the more positive experiences of entering graduate school. During the final interview I asked the participants to give me feedback on my interviewing style, the research question, and any biases they felt might exist. Three of them mentioned my concentration on the stressful events rather than the positive. In looking back at the transcripts, my questions rarely initially asked directly about stress or difficulties, rather they initially referred to challenges. However, I did not encourage the participants to look at the positive aspects, instead pursuing what was presented (i.e., the more negative aspects of that first semester). Also, those who did mention positive things tended not to elaborate as freely on them as those who were discussing the more difficult aspects. This will be further explored in the discussion section. It is therefore likely that the results of this study reflect an extreme that is not inaccurate, but rather slanted toward stress.

A similar bias may have occurred with regard to social comparison. I had been particularly sensitive to competition my first year and,
thus, may have pursued the topic somewhat diligently during the interview. Generally, I expected issues around stress, coping, support, and social comparison to arise. Perhaps these expectations sensitized people to those issues, causing them to concentrate on them more than they normally would have. I tried to guard against this as much as possible by phrasing questions in neutral terms and by following the interview guide as closely as possible. Most research sensitizes people to issues. What is important is to know there is an impact and attempt to understand it. For example, I know that discussing issues of support had an impact. It sensitized people to a concept they may not have thought about before. It may have made their lack of support even more poignant. It may also have made them react to this and begin to look for support. Although sensitized to the issue, they ultimately may have been able to discuss it in a more complex way. Those who advocate action research would say that sensitizing the students to support issues was actually positive. They would see it as an intervention that ultimately might create some positive change.

Data Analysis

In organizing the massive amount of data (30 to 40 hours of audio-tape and approximately 400 pages of transcripts) I followed methods described by Becker and Geer (1960) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). Each transcript was read several times to see whether and how people's comments related to the three areas I had chosen to study and if any additional areas emerged. To reduce interpretive bias as much as possible I continually maintained a frequency count of topic areas and comments
concerning them. Through several readings, I established an outline of major content areas for each interview. I then subdivided these areas into their component parts and maintained a frequency count of individual's comments. For example, during the first interview people discussed the concept of challenge. This was further defined into challenges around school, living alone, etc. Under each one of these headings people's comments were listed and commonalities and differences were noted. In addition to looking at concrete topics, the analysis also involved examining the developmental process over the course of the semester. The data for this resulted from the final interview and also consisted of the interviewer's own interpretations. Defining initial categories, refining them, and examining the process over the semester, culminated in an integrated explanation of the issues experienced by a first year clinical graduate student during the first semester.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS--THE FIRST INTERVIEW

In the next three chapters the concepts of challenge, coping, and support will be examined in depth, particularly as they pertain to entering first year clinical graduate students. Out of a series of three interviews a number of issues arose which began to describe the experience of these students. For ease of presentation the results section will be divided into three chapters corresponding to the three interviews. Each of these chapters will be further divided into major topics that were discussed during that interview.

Major issues that arose out of all the interviews centered on being alone and independent, the development of the group and friendships within the immediate area, the maintenance of old friendships, issues around work and the role ambiguity of being a first year graduate student, social comparison, and support. The coping process will be discussed in relation to each of these issues.

It is important to note that while the interviews are divided into particular topics, these are not independent and unrelated to the others. Everything that the students were exposed to and reacted to during the first semester was interrelated and had an impact on everything else. For example, friendship and support, although intimately related, were divided into separate categories. This was done because I wanted to stress the newness of friendship building within the immediate area and its interrelation to the group's development. Support encompassed a broader category that included distant friends, family, and generally,
anything that made one feel good about him/herself. Because each chapter of the results is quite long and contains a large amount of complex information, it may help to read the summary of each chapter before actually reading the results. This will also aid in understanding the process of entry and integration over the semester.

The first interview took place approximately two weeks after school began. In an audiotaped, open-ended interview, the students were asked to describe what the challenges had been during that time, how they had coped with them, what support needs they were experiencing, and how they were going about developing that support.

There were ten issues that arose out of that first interview. They are: 1) prior preparation that facilitated entry into graduate school, 2) challenges around people's initial arrival, 3) the beginning of school, group development, feelings of loneliness, 4) living alone, 5) maintaining old friends, 6) the challenge of work and issues of role ambiguity, 7) social comparison, 8) group norms, 9) support, and 10) people's overall reaction to the first couple of weeks and challenges in general. Issues of coping are discussed within the context of each topic. In the following section, these topics will be discussed in detail and examples of people's comments will be given.

Preparation for Entry into Graduate School

Officially, entry into the first year clinical class and graduate school occurs around the fifth of September with the first meeting of Statistics 545. However, for the five people in this report, preparation for graduate school occurred many months in advance. Once official
acceptance was received, people began to think more and more about the upcoming graduate school experience and transitions that were to be made in their current living situations.

The initial impetus for applying to graduate school seemed to fall into two major categories for everyone. The obviously pragmatic reason of needing a Ph.D. for further work in psychology was mentioned repeatedly.

I saw it in a practical sense as something that had to be done if I wanted to be able to do the things that I wanted to do, do clinical work or whatever. I didn't see that I could do those without satisfying what society says you must do before you can have those jobs.

The second reason related to a real excitement about the field of psychology. There was a certain comfort in continuing in a field that was known and promised a number of opportunities in research and clinical experience. The possibility of attending good courses and small classes made the upcoming fall an exciting time to look forward to.

I had always been academically oriented, therefore it was the easiest thing for me to do. I felt comfortable in this field and wanted to work in it. I was really excited about it.

The opportunity to attend graduate school was seen by some as the ultimate test of their as yet undeveloped abilities. All of one's undergraduate professors and peers had made references to the outstanding capabilities possessed by the individual, but apparently these prior evaluations needed to be assessed in the ultimate testing ground, graduate school.
You've got some questions about your own ability, if you truly want to know the answer there's only one way to find out. If I had not come, for the rest of my life it would be nice and easy to say, 'Well, I could have done it,' but inside myself I would have always had the gnawing feeling, 'Would I really have made it?'

Another person commented:

There was something more, too. I felt I hadn't put out enough, like I was on the threshold of something, like I had just gotten bits and pieces and hadn't done anything original or creative, hoping that I could get into something that would foster that.

For at least two people graduate school represented an opportunity to be special. The role of graduate student seemed to incorporate a certain element of status and autonomy, a position somewhat higher in the social hierarchy than undergraduate.

There was a whole fantasy of being a graduate student up on a pedestal, a very respectable position. Having people look and say, "Ah, a graduate student."

For several months prior to entrance into graduate school people toyed with the idea of what a major transition in their lives would be like. No one expected it to be easy. Evidently the students evaluated their own personality and past history in order to formulate what aspects would be the most challenging for them. By assessing these potential challenges adequately one was protected from having any major surprises catch one off guard. These expected challenges included coping with an overwhelming work load, difficulty in finding a niche, relating to fellow graduate students, living alone, finances, not being the best student, the New England weather, being lonely, and being responsible.
People varied considerably on the concrete preparatory activities in which they engaged prior to coming to graduate school. Most people came to the decision that they would not do anything to actively prepare, but rather give themselves a break and spend the summer relaxing. What attempts were made tended to be small jabs at preparation rather than major endeavors. One person studied statistics in anticipation of the graduate statistics course. Another visited Amherst in January just to look around. A third spent time actively questioning who he was and where he was going. A fourth saw a trip to Europe as an opportunity to learn to be alone and independent.

Generally the months before September 5 were spent anticipating graduate school. People were excited about coming to a new area (particularly New England with its colorful falls and recreational opportunities), meeting new people, placing themselves in a challenging situation, pursuing their career goals, and learning to live more independently than they had previously. But it was not all positive. There were worries too, mostly concerning whether one was going to be able to make it through graduate school and whether being responsible and independent was going to be such an easy task to achieve.

Initial Arrival

Upon arrival in Amherst people were presented with a plethora of challenges. Making a major transition is rarely easy and, for the people involved in this study, it became doubly hard because of the lack of contacts. Two people had the benefit of their parents to help and another had a close friend from home, but the remaining two were pretty
much on their own.

One major problem that confronted all the first year students consisted of a communication stoppage from the department to the students after than had been accepted.

I did have a little bit of doubt, because after I had been accepted the communication stopped. I was expecting things because Sally had said we would be getting information about our first year classmates and that never came. I never heard from my student buddy, so I was a little bit fearful. But in the back of my mind I said, "They accepted 11 out of 1300 and they must have something for me; it's not that big a department and they were really friendly over the phone. They'll take care of me once I get there.

Unfortunately, the wishes expressed above were a bit unrealistic and people found a somewhat cooler reception than they had expected. This was probably not a reflection of disinterest on the part of the more advanced graduate students or faculty, but rather a combination of the American Psychological Association's meeting and the Labor Day holiday. Many people were simply not around. But this made it more difficult for incoming students who were hoping to rely on other graduate students for advice and assistance in apartment hunting.

The two students whose parents accompanied them quickly found apartments and began to settle in. Another enlisted the aid of the clinical area secretary who found a place where the person's possessions could be left and the individual proceeded to camp-out until an apartment became available.

One person had heard horror stories about how expensive apartments

---

4 The clinical area secretary.
are in the East and had come fully expecting to have to move into a YWCA or worse for $200 a month. This person employed the resources of a rental agent and met with fairly rapid success in finding an apartment.

I immediately found a local rental agent who I could tell was going to take me under her wing and make sure I had a place, and she did, she really did that. Not only that but the apartment wasn't going to be ready for two weeks and I was a little upset that I was probably going to have to store my furniture... She and the people who owned my house decided that was a little ridiculous and appreciated the financial situation and moved everything out of the garage, so my furniture went in there.

The fifth student had the most difficulty in finding an apartment and establishing initial contacts. S/he was quite surprised to discover that apartments were difficult to find and more expensive than expected. Combined with an arrival just prior to the holiday, apartment hunting became an impossible task. Finding a place to stay for a short while was equally difficult, so the most sensible ploy was to retreat to a nearby state where old friends lived.

While I was there I went through the papers again, wrote specifically a step-by-step thing that I was going to do when I got to Amherst on Tuesday. Before I came back I was determined that I would be prepared this time. So I listed what I would do, so then if I got befuddled I could look back and say, "OK, this is what I'm going to do." The very first thing I did when I came back on Tuesday was to find a room, just for that week so I at least knew I had a place to stay temporarily, and then once I had that taken care of then I felt I could look more at my leisure.

Once moved into an apartment, people's next task was to find their way around a new area. Arrival in Amherst had generally occurred at least a week before school started, so becoming familiar with the area
often occurred without benefit of advice from other graduate students.
The first week for many was spent "fumbling around trying not to get
lost." One technique that seemed useful was "just finding a supermar-
et, whether it was the best one I don't know." Listening to WMUA (the
university radio station), driving around, and talking to other people
(particularly Sally, the clinical area secretary) seemed to be the major
techniques used in exploring the area.

I took my dog and my camera and put myself in my car and
rode. I had been up every possible highway, had gone as far
as I could go. One Sunday afternoon without anything to do,
I drove to Vermont and went up to Pittsfield.

Most people began to learn about the area fairly quickly and if not
exactly having the best time of their lives, were managing to deal with
the situation effectively. For at least one person, however, finding
out about the area was not as positive an experience as had been hoped
for. When asked how much this person had discovered about the area and
the school, the reply was:

Not much, not at least as much as I wanted to. That really
disappoints me. One of the big reasons for coming here was
to go East, New England. Although I've never been here I've
seen pictures... I was really ready to come, and since I've
been here I've done absolutely nothing in terms of enjoying
the area. Walking back from Whitmore5 today to Tobin6 I
looked out across the valley and all the forests and the
rolling hills. And once in a while I'll go up to the li-

5 The administration building.
6 The Psychology building.
I don't have the time.

For almost everyone the first few weeks after arrival in Amherst were extremely difficult. There was such an abundance of stimuli coming from every direction that people had trouble organizing their reactions into some kind of coherent emotion. Some felt completely overwhelmed, while others characterized it more as an extreme hassle. Most agreed, though, that the first few days were "really terrible" and all agreed it was the most challenging situation they had encountered to date.

It's terrible to be alone, not knowing anyone, lonely, frustrated. I didn't know where stuff was, how to get car registered. Everyone was anxious when classes started. Everyone was bright, would I measure up with others, we weren't sure of ourselves. . . . Every little thing produced more anxiety and others' anxiety increased mine. . . . In new situations things get blown out of proportion. I feel so vulnerable. I'm not sure of myself. I'm emotional. Anything that happens attacks my security. I felt lonely but knew I'd get over it.

The fact that Labor Day weekend and the American Psychological Association's meeting occurred between people's arrival and the start of school was not particularly helpful in facilitating people's adjustment. For many, Labor Day weekend was an especially lonely time. If people had come to Amherst with parents or friends, they had left by now. And there had not yet been an official opportunity to meet fellow students. The more advanced ones were generally out of town and the newcomers had just arrived. Because there was no central clearing house for messages, none of the new students could get in touch with each other. As mentioned previously, there were also expectations that everyone in the department would be extremely friendly and receptive to the new students.
These expectations were not met for everyone, thus causing additional stress.

Yeah, I expected to say, "Well, here I am," and have people respond with, "Hi, how are you, glad to see you, we've been expecting you." And it wasn't that way at all: "Oh, yeah, you're a first year graduate student. Nice to see you. Later." Without a doubt Friday was really tough. The other days weren't quite as bad because then at least I had found a place to live. Then there were two or three days when not much was going on at the University. I still felt sort of lost because nobody was being very friendly or helpful.

Three of the students spent a rainy Labor Day weekend holed up in their apartments in virtual isolation.

After my parents left I was utterly isolated. Thoughts began to revolve around Detroit and dwelling on stressful events I was about to go through. All of that was exaggerated, a very distorted perspective. It developed over two days of total isolation. My perspective was very dismal. I'd been forgotten about in Detroit; they didn't care about me; no one was going to care about me here; there was no possibility of establishing an intimate relationship here. I would tell myself that's crazy; you've been through situations like this before. It helped a little, but not a lot, that I had been through similar situations. Nothing really compared. Too many things were novel; like living alone; graduate school being difficult, or at least I thought so; a new kind of environment; not knowing my way around; not knowing anyone.

One person in the first year class did not seem to experience nearly as many challenges as the others during those first few days in Amherst. For this particular person that time was experienced more as a series of little hassles (knowing where things were, finding out information) and small details. It was not that this person did not experience similar emotions and thoughts as the others, but the difference seemed to be in the intensity of these feelings and the way they were
About a week before I left home I was possessed by two types of feelings, an unbelievable kind of excitement and some nice size grief. . . . What I had anticipated was missing some people I had left behind; some fears; thinking for yourself; some periodic loneliness, both as a function of not having anyone else, and in who you in fact do not have. And what I have learned is that all those things are true. There in fact were some hassles, there were some people I left behind. I acknowledged them and labelled them. I don't allow myself to be thrown off the track by them. I admitted them and let the hurt or whatever get in and I kept going.

The Beginning of School and Group Development

Once people had an opportunity to start school and attend a few classes the situation started looking better. People began to feel as if they really belonged at the University of Massachusetts and could begin to settle into a routine. Once the first clinical class met, people began to find out about each other and who constituted their first year class.

Most everyone I met in the clinical area was really open and receptive and changed my view to a much more positive one. Initially I felt the reception was very cold. I didn't expect a band, but at least a "Hi, how're you doing?" But then things changed and people were really quite friendly and very helpful.

The first tentative attempts toward establishing acquaintances and perhaps future friends began. To a large extent this was accomplished through much partying and socializing. The group seemed to spend a lot of time together, both in doing fun activities and in dealing with the more instrumental tasks that were ever-present. People consistently relied on each other in "learning the ropes" (Goffman, 1961).
The whole first year clinical group is pretty close in helping each other, suggesting that such and such is there in case you want to know about that. "I don't know about this, does anyone want to come and find out about it with me?" We tend to do things like that together, safety in numbers.

Another person indicated:

Originally there was a small subset of us who got together a lot. We were always getting together, clustering around. The group was helpful for me. The second week, things were really rough for everyone. We got together and that helped. We ventilated our anger, played, and forgot about it.

For some this was an exciting time because a whole new field of potential friends had become available. They felt the first year group was supportive and enjoyed the anticipation about who would be their new-found friends.

The key thing for me (concerning the program) would be the people, and that's been so positive. That's been number one in terms of my feeling about the program.

Another felt:

It worked out well, we got to know each other, did things together. I feel close to some people.

A couple of people also found it relatively easy to establish acquaintances outside the department. Ultimately, this seemed to be a particularly helpful maneuver in adapting to graduate school. Generally, it was the people who had more difficulty in establishing these outside relationships who complained later about the lack of friends and outside stimulation.

There were hints of this dilemma early on. Although people appre-
ciated the groupiness of the first year clinical class, they quickly began to see drawbacks to the situation. It was tremendously appreciated during the first few hectic weeks when everyone was lost. But, as people began to feel a bit more comfortable with their new home and familiar with the tasks that needed to be done, questions about classmates and the group as a whole began to arise. The people who were satisfied with their newly formed relationships, as well as the ones who were not, began to worry that they were being pushed into certain sorts of relationships by some unknown force.

I've met a lot of people, but in terms of establishing intimacy that hasn't happened. I was a little disturbed when I first got here...that we were being pushed into intimate relationships. I don't think that kind of relationship can be programmed, or that one can say, "Next week I'm going to be intimate with one person and the next week I'll pick up another."

Another said:

Initially we were all going to be very polite to each other, good friends, facilitate unity, don't say things to bother people.

At least initially, feeling that everyone had to like everyone else became established as a norm. Everyone seemed to verbalize it and to worry about it to some extent. People reacted to it with varying degrees of concern. Some just ignored it, while others more actively questioned its implications and effects on their lives.

Everyone is easy to get to know, but there's this feeling that we are a group and there is supposed to be group cohesiveness, the feeling of being a clinician and expected to be in love with everyone. You find out you don't like someone
and you feel like you should. I'm trying to sort it out, trying to realize that I don't have to like everyone, that I'm not expected to.

Questioning whether one really had to like everyone else led to some anxiety, for some students, about whether it was possible to be honest to one's feelings and philosophies and still communicate with people who might differ radically.

I have developed alliances and animosities, it's sort of a nasty feeling. . . . It's a matter of personal philosophy and I wonder if that's going to make it difficult to be with certain people. It was unexpected. At the beginning I was very hesitant to jump to any conclusions as to where people were, but each hunch was right. I don't know what to do about it. . . . With one person I avoid him/her. I'm a little antagonistic and angry. I want him/her to share ideas. I do want to be tolerant.

Three of the interviewees expressed definite ideas concerning friendship, particularly what they wanted and expected and how they would go about accomplishing it.

One person felt that establishing friendships was not exactly a challenge, because it was not necessary to prove oneself.

It's not something that I have to conquer. I don't have to conquer people to make them like me. They're not objects I can work my will over.

Instead, the issue seemed to concern the ability to give of oneself, to share feelings and thoughts. This was seen as a somewhat gradual process where one naturally meets people, hits it off with some, and either establishes friendships or acquaintanceships. In this process it is not necessary to go about seeking friends.
The origin of friendship is that it comes from inside of me and stems to those people and then ultimately a circle comes back. I don't see it as people bringing their friendship and I grab it and say, "Yes, we're friends." I feel like I want to give to those people. I want to be kind. I want to be helpful. And it's not absolutely necessary that they do retain something... We're all a little bit lonely, so it's been really easy to give, and I found that really rewarding.

In contrast, the other two people did not talk about friendship at such great length, perhaps, because for them it was not such a salient issue. They were confident it would happen and at the same time expressed the feeling that, indeed, it was already happening.

If six months from now there are no reciprocal friendships, I will begin to worry. Today I just don't.

Early on they began to interact with a number of people outside of the department. For one person this was accomplished through a very specific interest that facilitated meeting people other than first year clinical graduate students (e.g., recreational activities). For both, the issue seemed less urgent, perhaps because they each had at least one intimate contact from their past with whom they could interact regularly. Although this past relationship seemed to help in removing some of the immediate pressure concerning establishing friendships, it also contributed its own impact on the process of adapting to graduate school. This particular issue will be discussed later in the section on maintaining old relationships.

During the first few weeks people generally seemed quite active in establishing contact with others in their class, although, of course, there was variation in this activity. In order to control isolation, it
seems necessary to initiate a process of actively seeking contacts. However, for some this constant push to be with people became a strain. Somehow this ploy did not mesh with people's wishes for naturally occurring friendships. In addition to the contrived and forced qualities, there also seemed to be an element of insincerity. People were trying to be friendly, likeable, and charming.

When I first moved in I was just being very open and friendly, definitely going out of my way. . . . I took a lot of first steps. It was very successful and I met a lot of people. . . . Once I had met a few people I went back to being cautious and shy. Maybe I should take the time to meet new people, but it seems so forced, having to devote time. It kind of irritates me, having to go and having a good time.

This feeling of constantly having to push relationships so as to diminish isolation was also reflected in people's thoughts about being involved in a class that spent so much time together, both in and out of school. Certainly the members of the group were helpful in providing companionship, sympathy, and someone with whom to explore the surroundings. Yet for several the group became too contrived. In fact continual participation in the group may have made it more difficult to establish individual friendships. The constant group activities allowed people very little opportunity to interact with just one other person. It also may have been difficult to break away entirely and develop contacts outside of the first year clinical group, because people did not want to be left out of the group atmosphere.

We all kind of stuck together. "Let's get together and have a 'good time.'" The group thing felt uncomfortable. I grabbed somebody by themselves. There were things we needed to talk about. I invited people over. I hadn't had to do that
for a long time. That was good.

Interactions with people the first few weeks were described as basically superficial and for some this became problematic. The difficulty may have occurred as a result of the content of the interactions. People seemed to spend much of the time feeling each other out and assessing if there was any potential for friendship.

I'm accustomed to meeting new people, but when it's everyone it becomes a strain. I did have some contact with people that was a little less superficial, but I was hesitant to rely on them. It was important for me to strike out on my own and those people weren't always available.

The major sentiment expressed by everyone was that they did not want to push relationships. They wanted to give them time to develop. This wish to let relationships develop naturally, though, was incompatible with people's immediate, and sometimes urgent, need to go out and meet some people, so as to establish the intimate relationships that were currently lacking. People resolved this dilemma most often by telling themselves:

Be patient. Let things happen. They've happened before. You have to go through a process of being lonely. One way of dealing with not having a lot of friends is having old friends. It helps to know they are there.

The loneliness that people were feeling was particularly intense because there was so little control over it. It was not that people were choosing to be alone, but that they were being forced into the situation by the lack of contacts. At those times it became the most apparent that there really was not that very close person who could always be
called. To a certain degree there were people to play with, but there was definitely no intimacy established as yet. There was some sentiment that, even though it was nice to have people to interact with, one was becoming trapped with this group.

I feel like I'm getting estranged from the rest of the people around, the undergraduates. In the past I've felt more a part of different groups of people with different interests. Psychology people are pretty much the same kind of breed, always talking about their emotions. I want some diversion, but I haven't thought of any ways of accomplishing it.

Initially this quest for intimacy and outside contacts was a difficult thing to discuss, perhaps because it was so timely. My sense is, that during the first few weeks, people did not really discuss it with each other. Nevertheless, it seemed to be a particularly poignant issue, that for a few, was one of the more difficult challenges to cope with or know what to do about.

There is so much more involved in this, some kind of intimate relationship, just being able to share with a person. I miss that; I really miss that, having someone to sit and listen, that I can read poetry to, something simple like that. It's a kind of loneliness that I don't know exactly how to cope with yet. I've never had to exist in this kind of situation. I keep searching. I keep thinking how I can meet someone. How can I go out and get into circulation and meet people? . . . What I've said to myself is, "Well, you really don't have time for that now anyway, worry about your studies and maybe. . . ."

No amount of telling oneself that things would eventually be better seemed to help significantly. It was one of those challenges that people had to suffer through.

The lack of intimacy and the loneliness affected everyone to some
extent. For some the loneliness seemed to make "other things hard to adjust to." The more challenges there were for each individual, the more the challenges seemed to compound themselves. Thus, if people were feeling bad about one area of their life, it was likely that these feelings generalized into others. Generally people did not come to graduate school with naive expectations that they would not experience any loneliness, but compounded with other challenges, it sometimes became more difficult to deal with than people had expected.

Everyone seemed to use a variety of coping methods to deal with the lack of intimacy and loneliness. The most commonly used methods were thinking about how one had coped with similar situations in the past, and talking with other people about their plight. It seemed helpful for people to acknowledge that they had experienced these feelings before and had dealt with them effectively. These thoughts helped support the notion that it was just a process of time and the situation, rather than personal inadequacies.

Talking with others seemed to help just by the process of sharing. This was such an important method that if a person was unable to find someone to talk to, the situation became even more problematic.

I couldn't find anyone to talk to about the problem. I reacted by getting and keeping it inside. I wanted to talk to people when I was feeling bad.

There was a definite benefit in talking to people about the loneliness. Not only was one sharing with another and probably discovering that s/he was not alone, but, in addition, groundwork for a future friendship was being laid just by the process of coming together and talking.
Another method commonly used was to engage in a favorite sport or activity. This seemed to serve the purpose of getting one's mind off the situation and engrossed in more pleasant endeavors.

I like to take my guitar and just sit down and play a song that may or may not have something to do with the way I'm feeling. It somehow gets me expressing emotions. When I sing I really sing the way I feel, so I can sing myself an emotion. If I'm feeling melancholy I can sing melancholy. Sometimes I can sing myself out of that to a happier feeling. I can change what I'm playing and force myself to feel the emotion that the song is trying to express. . . . Partly it takes my mind off what it was and emphasizes my attention on something else. There's a certain amount of concentration in playing the guitar. . . . To me it's just kind of a therapy thing, it kind of relaxes me.

Another successful ploy was to very consciously force negative thoughts out of one's mind, instead of ruminating about all the problems.

Other useful coping methods mentioned included arriving with realistic expectations concerning the difficulty in immediately establishing intimate relationships; knowing that other people from the past cared, thus making it less urgent to establish other caring relationships right away; and utilizing neighbors and other acquaintances to introduce one to outside people. Interestingly enough, most of the above methods were very cognitive and did not involve much active manipulation of one's environment. People initially were quite active in seeking out relationships and certainly maintained this to some degree. However, it also seemed important to both ignore the situation at its height and be able to comfort oneself with what one called "a mini-internal-talking-to."7

As mentioned previously, challenges tended to be compounded by
other challenges, and the issues around establishing friendships and coping with loneliness were intricately entwined with issues of living alone, maintaining old relationships, and sorting out one's dedication to work versus socializing and playing.

Living Alone

All but one of the interviewees were living alone during the first semester. They had all chosen to do this and had been looking forward to it with both anticipation and trepidation. For some it was the first time they had not lived with other people and at times, for them, it was very apparent that, indeed, there was no one else there.

At first I had to ask myself if there were any messages. I wondered if the phone had rung. The TV helped. I needed noise at me.

The experience of living alone varied from person to person and also varied for each individual within a particular time span. Everyone seemed to agree that there were both advantages and disadvantages to living alone. There was also general agreement that the first weeks were the hardest, primarily because of the lack of contact with others. One person described the first few days as particularly difficult to deal with, even though s/he had expected it to be challenging. Boredom, the superficiality of most relationships, wanting to meet people, being

---

7The cognitive methods discussed here are examples of defense mechanisms used effectively as coping devices. Mechanic (1962) in studying students' reactions to the comprehensive exams also found denials of emotions and cognitive defenses useful ways of coping with stress.
by oneself, and the loneliness of it all were the major components of living alone, initially.

One Friday night I couldn't stand to go home and be by myself. I tried to find other people, but just couldn't. It was really frustrating and a bad experience. . . . Living alone really makes me think about myself.

After the initial loneliness wore off and contact had been made with others, people seemed to feel more comfortable with living alone.

I feel pretty comfortable with it now, went through being lonely at first, but I'm not that lonely now. I'm always with people at school. The guy who lives next door and a couple of people upstairs are always dropping in. I don't feel like I'm really living alone. I'm happy with the privacy. It's a different kind of loneliness, getting stuck with only psychology people, not having a chance to meet anyone else. My neighbor intensifies the distress because I talk to him all the time, but I don't have time to do things with him. Even if I were in a situation where I could meet a lot of people I wouldn't have time to do anything with them.

For some there were aspects of living alone that were really exciting.

This is the first time I've had my own place that I knew I would be in for a period of time. I really enjoyed having people over to my place. I was always the one to go to other people's apartments. It became a very personal thing, bringing people over to my apartment. I felt a little apprehensive having the responsibility in a social situation. I found it to be really exciting and have enjoyed it.

People generally liked living alone, enjoyed the privacy, and thought it was good they were able to separate themselves from others when necessary. There was a feeling of independence and self-reliance attached to making it on one's own. However, people wanted to control
it and not have it control them. This particular aspect of living alone took the most time before some stability was reached. Yet, after a few weeks people realized they were not going to have to be alone all the time and that they were indeed meeting people. Just this realization helped immensely in dealing with the challenges of living alone.

The methods used to cope with this living arrangement were similar to the ones used in dealing with general loneliness. People tried to make sure they did enjoyable things such as reading novels, watching TV, and writing letters so as to keep busy and avoid thinking about their difficulties. This avoidance of rumination seemed to work relatively well, although some still reported being pretty lonely and depressed initially. Of course people also used more active methods of coping, by purposely searching out people to be with or inviting guests over to the house.

Maintaining Old Friends

The vacuum of leaving old friends and concurrently attempting to maintain these old relationships was a central issue for everyone and, combined with making new friends, was probably one of the most challenging aspects of entering graduate school. The lack of close relationships in the immediate area was more problematic for some than others. And again various coping styles seemed to mediate how stressful the lack of old friends was going to be.

... The lack of close relationships is not a totally unpleasant event in my life. There are times when I'm down about something and I wish I had someone here that I could share with. I also miss people sharing with me. Other times I can
say, "Yeah, that's not here with me yet, but it's exciting to know that it will come." I've been able to so far handle it and get over it, mostly by telling myself I'll get over it.

Not allowing oneself to think about the lack of new friends and the old ones left behind seemed to be a widely used method of dealing with the situation. People certainly thought about their old friends, but if this was done too much it often became debilitating.

I'm kind of irritated that close friends aren't here. I'm so far away from them and we can't get together. I haven't thought about it a whole lot, just sort of set it aside, because I'm here and I can't be with them. Otherwise it's too disruptive. I knew I wasn't going to be with them. Maybe I haven't set it aside. I'm not stewing; it comes into my mind when I get letters.

People seemed to have a wide range of reactions to and thoughts about leaving old friends. At least initially, for some, the feelings were quite strong and sometimes difficult to deal with. One emotion expressed was anger. In some ways the students were quite reliant on past friends to provide support until new ones were made, but this reliance led to problems if the friend was not holding up his/her end of the deal. It would seem that the feeling of abandonment would be particularly strong in this situation. Therefore, it is not surprising that anger was a commonly experienced emotion.

There is one friend who is really close but he is not corresponding and I wish he would. I know that's him, yet I feel angry and feel like it's a cop out. . . . If he really cared he would. I really look forward to mail. I do have friends who are busy but write.

Another worry mentioned involved leaving old friends and rapidly
being replaced. People realized a risk to the relationship was created once they left the area. This was certainly a realistic problem to deal with and was probably at the core of most people's concerns. The example previously mentioned concerning the lack of correspondence and the subsequent angry reaction demonstrates the worry involved in thinking one has been forgotten. However, the problem was not solely one of being forgotten. This did concern a couple of people, but for others the worry revolved more around the question of how things were going to change within the relationship when the members were separated by such extremes of time and space.

I had very important relationships. It was a big decision for me to come here. The loneliness began long before I ever hit the Massachusetts state line, because I saw relationships begin to change a little bit. I saw myself change. I worked very hard not to become an emotional lame-duck, which could have happened. . . . A comfortable feeling would be that these relationships are kind of taking a leave of absence. Somewhere there will be an opportunity to start up again. I don't deceive myself into thinking that I will be the same person.

Maintenance of the old relationships was taken quite seriously, perhaps as a result of people's worry about them and the idea the relationship was more fragile due to distance. This maintenance was done primarily by letter, but the telephone was also used extensively.  

All I can really do is keep up contact with and be supportive of them; try to keep that closeness as long as we can. It probably won't be the same as we had. It has to be a differ-

---

8 This is similar to Craven and Wellman's (1971) finding that the telephone was used extensively in the maintenance of geographically dispersed social networks.
I've pretty much accepted that. I still do feel a bond between us that hasn't shattered yet. I still have my memories. I see us as being very close. The crucial time will come when we get back together. Noticing that difference will be hard to handle. Recently my life has been kind of transient, as the separation didn't come as a shock. Everyone has moved from the University and friends aren't going to be there. I didn't like the University except for the friends, I might as well go someplace fresh and new, interesting physically.

It is important to realize that though people were lonely, missed their past friends, and at times worried about how they were going to maintain those relationships, these feelings were not totally pervasive or stressful. Certainly people's reactions varied, but not everyone, all the time, was experiencing difficulty or unhappiness.

The past friends served a very useful function even if it was limited. They provided support, caring, and a helpful reference point. They served to remind one of his/her capabilities and accomplishments when no one in the immediate environment could do that because of lack of knowledge and history. However, because old friends were so valuable initially, they took on an added importance that could potentially cause problems if one sensed the beginning of a gap occurring. At that point there would not only be a lack of new friends, but the possibility of losing the old.

While everyone was attempting to maintain old friends, an additional few were also trying to maintain lovers. Although the issues were quite similar, they sometimes became more urgent and complex with lovers. For at least one person some of the urgency may have resulted from the distant lover making extensive demands on the person. The most obvious issue, though, was whether the relationship could be maintained. The
experience each person had in dealing with his/her lover was reliant on the quality and history of the relationship prior to separation.

For one person it was simply a matter of being a little further away and not having the opportunity to see one another as much. They had had to deal with that previously, so it was not a totally new experience. This person had also decided relatively early that s/he was not going to spend a lot of time worrying about what was going to happen to the relationship. This seemed to be a successful ploy in warding off most major disturbing feelings. Because the relationship had experienced separations before, the distance did not seem as problematic as for others.

Another person reacted more strongly to the separation, possibly because the relationship was in question at the point of leaving.

I reacted violently to the fear of leaving my friend and hated myself for it. I generally acted pretty crazy, not eating or sleeping and ignoring people. I knew I would resolve it, that it couldn't last and it didn't. I was frustrated because I couldn't do anything. I withdrew from T., then realized I was angry. I wrote a heart-break kind of letter, martyr-like. . . . I expected some reply, but there was no response for five days. A friend called and said that T. was upset. Now I've gotten to the point where I can be more critical of the relationship and ask if it's worth clinging to. I feel pretty strong now.

Although the difficulty in this relationship centered around leaving a lover with very little chance of seeing him/her, there were also difficulties involved in having a lover close enough to see occasionally. Here the situation consisted of juggling the demands of school and a career and the lover. At times these two areas seemed to be mutually exclusive and the resulting frustration became difficult to deal with.
During those times emotions revolved around sadness, loneliness, frustration, numbness, and anger.

I would like to take a week off just to figure it out, but F.'s got classes and the same for me. I can't. I'm conflicted about this, felt really bad, and didn't know which was more important. I definitely decided school was more important. It bothers me that F. doesn't understand that. I was raised that school was very important.

Juggling school and friendships was not an issue reserved exclusively for interactions between lovers. Everyone seemed to feel it to some extent.

It's difficult to find time to visit with friends away from here. I worry about losing friendships because there is not enough time to visit. There are too many commitments here and I can't get away. There is stuff to do on weekends, research. Sometimes I wish I could go away, but I can't cut classes. I stay here and feel bad, like my priorities are all mixed up.

The Challenge of Work and Issues of Role Ambiguity

One of the more prominent issues facing first year graduate students, reflected in the last quote, was their relationship to work (i.e., graduate school. Although the dilemmas of maintaining old friends while concurrently making new ones and at the same time adjusting to a new area after making a major transition were certainly important issues, one's work and initiation into the field of psychology became even more important. After all, this was the real proving ground. Everyone had made friends in the past and most had made a major move, but no one had singled out a very challenging professional career they were going to pursue and then succeeded in it. This was new, challenging, and most
importantly, something everyone was quite invested in, or at least felt that way initially. Graduate school was near the top of the ladder and, therefore, not succeeding became a long way to fall.

This fear of falling was reflected most strongly at the beginning of the semester when people were suffering from an initial insecurity about whether they belonged in graduate school. Strangely enough, people who three months ago had been perfectly competent and had probably graduated at the top of their class, began to think they no longer knew anything and were in fact miles behind everyone else in capabilities.

I had gone so far to think that I might have to go back and really do a lot of reviewing and get all my old textbooks out, maybe even buy some more, just to catch up where other people might be. They're going to be dropping all these names and quoting all these studies.

One person spent a lot of time fantasizing before s/he ever arrived about how well s/he was going to meet the expectations of pertinent people.

In the back of my mind I'm afraid that after the first exam or first anything, somebody will say, "Oh by God, how did we get him/her?" That was a big deal for me. I was afraid to meet Professor X. I had paranoid fantasies about him saying, "I don't want to work with you."

For another person these feelings of insecurity were prevalent during the summer, but were also quite strong during the first few weeks of school as well.

As the time for going to graduate school got closer, my degree of positive glow inside of myself got a little less and a little less. During my last year in college I felt really positive about how I was doing..., but as it came time to
go to graduate school it diminished a little bit, and it was down there pretty low for the first week or so. I'm really just not hacking it.

A similar issue and one which served to increase people's insecurity was not knowing what was expected of them. People were walking into a situation cold, and, naturally enough, had difficulty assessing competing overt communications, departmental and area norms, and a very subtle socialization process that people were perhaps not particularly aware of.

There was a double message. One was that it was going to be really rough and a drag the whole time whereas the faculty were saying, "Everything is wonderful; we're going to love you and take care of you. Have a wonderful time, we'll get you through." But at the same time people were giving me trouble about providing me with a mailbox. I don't think it's going to be the worst years of my life and I don't expect to be coddled, but what was reality? I knew some of it was sheer propaganda to smooth over the rough edges. . . . One solid week of hearing about no competition, everyone was relaxed, and then we walked into Clinical I and found out we were to have grades, a test, and that the best paper and test were to be picked out. The class was very angry at Norm, but we didn't know where or how to direct our energies or how much power we had.

This lack of certainty concerning the expectations of the program and relevant others led to frustration and resentment because the first year students had not expected to encounter such difficulties. Generally, during the first few weeks, there was a lot of confusion and in the

---

9Numerous authors (Festinger, 1954; Kahn, 1964, 1973; Mechanic, 1962; Rosen & Bates, 1967) have pointed to the fact that ambiguous standards lead to anxiety, social comparison, and crises of competence.

10The professor for Clinical I.
the midst of everything else the reality of the situation became hard to decipher. People managed to cope mainly by talking to others who knew the norms and the department. This helped to clarify the situation and lessen the anxiety.

The easier issue to deal with concerned one's feelings of insecurity about belonging in the department and academic incompetence. By just immersing oneself in courses and clinical situations it was discovered quickly that in reality one could at least perform and perhaps do very well. Once people started getting feedback they became more secure and self-confident.

I guess the biggest part of the change was the acceptance extended by the department; that was part of it. I could tell they were glad for me to be here. Probably the other part has been over the past few weeks in whatever class--my work has certainly not been spectacular by any stretch of the imagination, but I think adequate--I haven't been overwhelmed by things I have never heard of, or courses haven't presented situations for me where I had to just run along and catch up to starting. I discovered I was ready to start, so that's fine.

As people kept persisting in their work, things seemed to ease up and get a little better. The person who had been feeling badly about him/herself before began to regain the previous good feelings and self-assurance.

Just tonight when I got home from school I had a feeling about myself, a really positive feeling about myself, what I was doing, my relationship with other people. I was regarded the way I wanted to be regarded, which is with respect, and with friendship as well. And then when I looked at how I was working hard and what I felt I was accomplishing, it gave me a good feeling about myself.
Just by thinking that things had been accomplished well, feelings of competence could be increased substantially. This success could be in any number of areas--doing well on a test, participating actively in a class discussion, doing a good clinical interview. The important point was that the student was actively dealing with the environment and managing to meet the challenges successfully.

An additional aspect to the previously mentioned difficulty in assessing the reality of the situation concerned the tendency of the more advanced graduate students to harp on how bad graduate school was going to be.

I was anxious about coming out here. People had told me it would be bad. Everybody here kind of said, "Good luck," like I was really in for it. It didn't help me at all, especially with statistics. It was run into the ground. I got tired of hearing it. It was nice to hear that other people had a rough time too and you're not weird, but people overdid that. It made it seem that everything was going to be really rough and looking back now I wonder if I would have felt as intensely as I do now. The whole rap about how hard it was to be a first year student, I really felt that a lot.

These messages were hard to interpret and made it difficult to remain neutral toward school. Since many of the clinical students were already a bit anxious about their statistical capabilities, the joking and comments only served to increase the worry. Ideally people would have liked to have a more balanced view. Certainly everyone's pessimism must have created a great deal of anxiety. When people have just arrived at a new place where they are going to spend the next four years, it seemed very important psychologically for them to initially have positive (although realistic) expectations. At that point they are probably having
problems in other areas of their lives (issues of support, homesickness, loneliness, etc.) and need to cling to their initial excitement about graduate school as long as possible. It appeared to be very distressing to arrive at a school that a person has dreamed about for months, to find that many of the people there spend most of their time downgrading the experience. At any rate, once people began to get involved in school and other activities the situation seemed to improve. Initial fantasies and expectations and communications that were being received from others could realistically be assessed. After the assessment stage people could then go about actively coping with their environment.

Rather than dealing with fantasies, it was now necessary to deal with reality. This involved actual classes, coursework, and clinical training as well as an extremely large workload. In addition, people began to explore what their real interests were, how to get involved with them without waiting four years, and, perhaps, decide if this was really what they wanted to do.

Statistics seemed to be one of the major concerns. People found statistics particularly frustrating and some, at times, had doubts about their abilities to do well at it. One person indicated that statistics periodically got him/her quite depressed.

It was not because of the difficulty of the work, rather it was depression at feeling like I was really wasting my time. If there was any more lousy and inefficient way to spend my time, I couldn't think of it. They, whoever they were, somebody was forcing me to spend hours and hours doing things that I didn't much enjoy and that I couldn't see that much value in, at the expense of not being able to put my time to some things I really came here to do.
There was a perception on some people's part that the professor had something against the people in the Clinical area and almost enjoyed making it tough for those people. The issues with this person around information to be imparted and his handling of the class over the course of the semester was bound to create some anxiety, especially for the more statistically insecure students. One person's reaction to this particular situation was:

I'm going to show you that just because I'm in Clinical does not mean that I can't handle statistics. . . . My tendency was sort of to grit my teeth and do it.

This same person utilized a number of additional methods to cope with the difficulty of statistics. S/he bought a calculator so as to cut down on computation time. A course was dropped because "I could have handled all those courses mentally, but I couldn't have done any kind of quality work." The important thing became doing well rather than just getting through. This person felt it was important to keep persisting and take whatever steps were necessary to meet the challenge, to a point. However, everything was not going to be sacrificed for the sake of statistics.

Two common ways of coping with the challenge were to talk to other people in the same situation, or who had been previously, and to think back to the past when other challenges that had been considered tough were handled. Sharing problems with others seemed particularly useful. It allowed people to discover they were not the only ones having the problem and that sometimes they were even doing better than others.

This continual comparing and assessing of how one is doing in relation
to others is an important issue that will be discussed later.

Thinking back to the past allowed the student to note that challenges had been met before, so there was no reason they could not be overcome again. Even though there had been unpleasant times, they had been mastered. This cognitive reassurance and "talking to" was also employed in terms of imagining the worst thing that could happen.

What's the worst thing that can happen to you? You have to take it over. I wouldn't like that a lot. I'd be embarrassed. But I'm not going to let it interfere.

Once this issue was thought through it became apparent that there really were not such dire consequences as had initially been imagined.

Writing papers seemed to be another area of concern for several of the students. For one person the anxiety revolved around picking a topic.

The Clinical 11 paper has me a little anxious, just in the decision making. You know, do I want to draw from where I know something already, probably presenting a more scholarly paper just because I have a better foundation, or do I want to begin in some new areas that interest me, and probably a less scholarly paper because it would be new material. . . . I'm going to make a decision like that every day, so it has me a little anxious.

For another, the issue was how skilled s/he was in actually writing the paper. S/he felt a lack of preparation, training, and practice that would cause difficulty in sitting down to do the paper.

11The first semester interviewing course.
Writing papers is very scary. I haven't had to write very many papers. I had a scientific background, mostly large classes and few papers. I'm now faced with two papers this semester.

This particular person, as well as others, dealt with having to write a paper in various ways. One quite ineffective way was to avoid the whole thing. It was hard to get started and easy to watch TV. After exhausting this route and seeing it was inefficient and ineffective, people would often begin to check off immediate goals and do a little at a time. This worked quite well because people began to have something done, could then feel a sense of accomplishment, and pat themselves on the back.

An area that was harder to see any measurable progress in was clinical skills. Sometimes regular academics was easier to deal with because people had had abundant previous practice and knew reasonably well how to perform whereas, if they had any clinical experience, it was probably somewhat limited. Concerning clinical skills, there was also very limited concrete, comparative feedback concerning one's skills. Academically one could at least write down information or take a test over the subject matter. It was much more difficult to be evaluated clinically.

Clinical skills are more of a challenge than coursework. I have a long history of being a professional student. I'm not having the same kind of panic about a masters as others. I have done my own research. It gave me a feeling for it. It's going to be rough and a pain in the ass, but I can handle it. ... I haven't had practice with clinical stuff. Being evaluated in that respect is much more challenging.

The major concern around evaluation of clinical skills seemed to be the subjective quality inherent in supervision.
When you don't know what the content of the course is you wonder what is this Clinical Lab. The word evaluation was tossed around and you wonder how can that be evaluation when it's done so subjectively. Until you know better you're anxious.

At least one person did not feel so critical of the evaluation aspects of the clinical lab.

I like the Clinical Lab. I want to improve and do a good job. I'm not anxious. I know I'll do all right, get feedback and do better the next time. It hasn't seemed stressful.

One event that was mentioned concerning coursework seemed to help the class become more cohesive. When the students heard that Clinical I was to be graded and there was to be an exam the whole class rebelled. They banded together against Clinical I and decided there were to be no grades or exams. As a result people felt closer because they had been active together in confronting a challenge. Evidently, having some sort of outside stressful event such as statistics or a difficult teacher definitely increased the class cohesiveness and the support within it.

The large amount of work involved in graduate school was a topic everyone mentioned. All but one of the students felt overwhelmed to some degree by the various tasks. The one individual who was the exception handled the situation in such a way as to not become overwhelmed. S/he just refused to become anxious.

The homework assignment, the last one, is quite long and difficult, and there were two problems I had yet to do. I also had an Attitudes exam and I wanted to spend some time read-

12A course offered in Social Psychology.
ing the last assignment for the Lab. So I walked in and said, "Now this is the way it is, I'm not embarrassed to say I haven't finished my homework when I put in a decent amount of time. I will hand it in incomplete and take the consequences. Give me extra time or whatever, here it is." The honesty circumvented the anxiety.

Another person saw the challenge as having to "reading everything" and that the real challenge would come with the deadlines. At this point it was just trying to keep up and get a topic for Clinical I. None of this was particularly overwhelming, but rather the challenge was in being skilled at rationing time and forcing oneself to work a lot. S/he did not feel behind and felt it was possible to take a little time off.

People at first were dull and zombie-like because they were studying so hard. I take a little time each day and on weekends to mess around, to play with people. I don't mind getting behind. It's a way of relaxing.

The thought of having to cope with so much work made at least one person drastically change his/her previous lifestyle.

My whole lifestyle has changed. My idea was how could I spend the least amount of time under the most amount of pressure and still get through. I would stay up for five days straight. Here I'm early to bed, early to rise. Before I was operating on four hours of sleep. ... Things are very organized. I'm trying to make evenings free and one entire day over the weekend. I'm planning, getting assignments done a day ahead of time. I do go off on little binges and be neglectful.

When asked what had prompted this change, the reply was:

Fear, there was no way to do everything. I have to be just like Professor X, scheduled every 15 minutes. Initially, I was very panicky. I knew I had to do a lot, but didn't know
what. I'm not worrying about the Clinical I paper as much as Comprehensives. I'm worrying about six years from now. Knowing what I have to do this semester and where I stand in relation to others has helped.

A couple of students expressed real resentment at how their course work was interfering with the rest of their life. This interference was on several levels--interference with other course work, socializing, having time to oneself, and recreational activities. The resentment seemed to be expressed mostly in terms of frustration, anger, and disappointment.

I can't identify any single person. I don't think my anger is addressed at any system. It's just a kind of disappointment with the way things are. It would really be nice if I could go out there and enjoy that, but doggonnit, I can't. That really makes me mad. It doesn't make me mad at anyone, just feeling disappointed. . . . I've thought about it, why can't I just drop work for a day and enjoy the woods. I really wish I could do that, but I've never been able to do that. I'd be out there for five minutes and I'd be thinking I ought to be working. I don't want to ruin my experience with the out-of-doors.

For one person the feelings about the large amount of school work were intimately tied to the decision of whether this career was what s/he really wanted to pursue. S/he expressed the feeling of forcing him/herself into psychology. The dilemma seemed to be that if s/he were to be a good psychologist, s/he was faced with a tremendous amount of work in order to accomplish that goal.

The decision about psychology seems so complex. Maybe I'm just reacting against all the work. I'm so overwhelmed. I was so excited about it last year and what I was doing. The amount of work isn't that much different from last year, just the feeling about the work. It's forced on me. There is a feeling of being trapped. Last year stuff I did was volun-
If I'm going to stay in the program I'm expected to do all this.

As mentioned previously, people seemed to react to this overload by giving up other things, such as socializing. Because people were in dire need of socializing as a result of the lack of friends, a number of students felt a fair amount of resentment toward the program for making them (as they saw it) give that up. Since graduate school was the major reason people were in the area, studying became the most important past-time. This led to a sense of isolation and a feeling of deprivation. It was tricky business trying to juggle making friends (certainly a priority) with remaining in school in good standing (also a priority).

The range of reactions to the amount of work was varied from a confidence that it would get done to a relative panic state.

I get depressed. I sit there and stew. I don't do anything but worry about not doing anything. I read two or three paragraphs and not know a word I read. Sometimes I spend three or four hours doing two hours work of work, read for awhile, put it down and play with my cat. It's very inefficient and I get anxious. I get to feeling like I really don't like this. Research just kind of turns my stomach right now. I used to enjoy it, so something is wrong. In the long run I get everything done, it just seems to happen.

At no point did the anxiety become so debilitating that people did not get their work done. It was more a matter of the mental state they were in while doing it.

Everyone seemed to talk to each other about the work. There was general agreement that everyone was open to discussing it and the problem was universally shared. But talking for most people seemed to reach a point where it lost much of its usefulness. All the talk did not do
any good and, in fact, interfered with actually settling down and doing the work. It also made some people more anxious, because the constant talk was a constant reminder of what one had to do.\textsuperscript{13} Conversely, people were sometimes reluctant to talk about their own problems because they did not want to pour everything out to someone who already had enough problems.

For many what seemed particularly threatening was the possibility of being unable to pursue their particular professional interests, either because they were divergent with the initial core sequence (i.e., interviewing, assessment, psychotherapy, and group therapy) or a split was perceived between Clinical and some other area in which the person was interested in working.

The incident this morning really upset me. I realized that something that was very important to me (clinical activity combined with research activity) was not considered equal endeavors, at least in the minds of some important people. My first response was real anger. It was a smart-ass response. I thought they should have told me, which was silliness, hysteria, and everything else on my part. I was angry and confused about it.

Social Comparison

The feelings and anxiety about coursework led everyone, to some degree, to compare themselves to others. This served several functions in helping to alleviate the self-doubts and anxiety around how one was measuring up. By comparing capabilities one discovered that s/he

\textsuperscript{13}Mechanic (1962) also found that talking about comprehensive exams, although useful in imparting information, was quite anxiety-provoking.
was not as incompetent as initially imagined. Early on, people could begin to assess whether they belonged in graduate school without ever having to take an exam or write a paper. This also ultimately provided people with more knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, when the exam or paper did occur, the person had some feeling for how much information needed to be learned in comparison to the rest of the class.

I had had a pretty good background, and as I now look at what I did have at City and compare a little bit with what other people say they had, it looks like I had a pretty good background in Psychology, which I didn't know before. . . . That was the big mark of knowing if you were adequate or not, how you compare to other people. If I had not compared adequately to the other people, it doesn't matter how good a background I thought I'd had, it wasn't on a level where I was able to compete, so to speak, with other people.

At least initially comparisons were primarily concerned with the ability to evaluate oneself academically or to be good at what one was currently striving for.

It wasn't a matter of personally did they like me or think I was competent. The reason I was nervous was I didn't know whether I was competent or not, and I needed to find out for myself. So that's why I was nervous about finding out about them, because then it would affect my evaluation of myself.

Comparing oneself to others, although helpful in reassuring some, provided additional stress for others. This subtle competition seemed to be a taboo subject for many of the students. It was difficult to admit to; often denied for oneself, but noticed extensively in others; and often responded to in oneself by anger or guilt; but it was definitely felt and had its impact.14
First it made me feel a little bit guilty, like you shouldn't be comparing yourself, you shouldn't compete. Then I realized most of us are doing it anyway, not so much for the purpose of saying, "I'm better than so-and-so," but for the purpose of establishing in your own mind that you're competent, and so I don't feel guilty about it and I'm not consciously grading myself.

Several people saw the large amount of comparing, not as a helpful, self-assuring process, but more as a destructive one-upmanship. It was felt that people were very subtly vying for the top spot in the class. Although most people could understand why the competition was occurring, it did not make it easier to accept.

... I didn't come expecting to compete. The first few weeks with Norm's course we were. I hoped people were saying I was bright. Then, different dynamics were working in the group—a lot of ego trips on other people, subtle, mentioning what they had done, name dropping, struggling for attention from the faculty. Not everyone participated equally. I felt that if I was going to get in on the game I was going to have to prove myself. I better drop some names. I felt uneasy because I really didn't want to do it.

What seemed most bothersome to people was others' needs to talk about what they had done in the past, the use of jargon, and for some, having to listen to very abstract discussions. It seems as if everyone was trying to establish territory about which s/he possessed a great deal of knowledge or accomplishments. This managed to increase the individual's self-esteem, but invariably put others on the defensive, forcing them to assess their own skills in comparison to others.

---

14 Rubinstein (1976) also found the clinical students she interviewed reluctant to discuss issues of social comparison.

15 Clinical I.
I'm really intimidated by X, s/he is so brilliant, I catch myself envying whatever it is that s/he has that allows him/her to put a thought together. S/he's funny, at the same time I like him/her very much for it. But, I do feel bad about myself, I guess that's just the type of person I am.

In summary, comparing oneself to others could be very helpful, particularly if one was reassured that, indeed, s/he belonged in graduate school, was competent, and had enough background to accomplish the work. However, if the comparing turned into competition, it was generally felt that that behavior was not at all beneficial to anybody. Instead of being reassuring, it became a struggle for the top position, where seemingly only one person could win and all others lose. In reality, there really was no top position, so the struggle became doubly frustrating since the quest was somewhat mythical.

People varied in their reaction to the competition. Almost everyone experienced some anger at discovering competition, both in themselves and others.

When I recognized my competitive feelings (doing things I hate), I got angry at the people who were doing it. The Danforth thing made me feel very isolated. I withdrew and wanted it that way. I wasn't going to let them do this to me. I was not going to play the game. I was very angry with them. The Danforth situation made it clear that people were vying for the top spot. It was very anxiety provoking. I questioned my aptitude, then said, "Look, for 22 years I've been happy with things." I felt that it was their fault for making me feel that way. . . . I didn't come back into the group until I had talked to people who had not been participating in it. It was helpful to have those people. . . . They had been willing to admit some of their insecurities. There was a core of people who wanted to make themselves look

---

16 A pretigious fellowship awarded to promising graduate students who are likely to pursue a college teaching career.
good. At first I wondered if something was wrong that I was insecure, until I realized that that was their response to anxiety.

For most there was a definite cycle in dealing with the competition. People initially became anxious; then got angry, both at themselves and others; and then attempted to "turn it off," usually by withdrawing.

At first the competition bothered me, but I decided to ignore it. I'll do the best I can. Let them be that way. It still bothers me a bit. I try to watch the competition in myself. I'm very conscious not to compare myself to others. It hasn't been that bad. Everyone is trying. Grades will increase the competition. It Norm^{17} wants to give us individual feedback, that's fine. I feel more secure about being here. They picked me and now they have me. It makes me feel more secure.

There were also several things that seemed to alleviate some of the competitive, insecure feelings. A primary help was the development of supportive relationships among a few students who could admit and discuss their competitive feelings, their need to compare themselves to some standard (usually other students), and their insecurities about intelligence and the amount of knowledge they had amassed before coming to graduate school.

A second help was to maintain contact with people from the past who were familiar with one's capabilities. The first year students, initially, were very reliant on high self-esteem, because there really was no one who could reassure them as to their competence in this new setting.

---

^{17}The professor for Clinical I.
Thus, it was a great help to have knowledgeable, believable old friends. By referring back to a successful past they provided a standard of comparison to which the student could refer.

I spoke to the people back home. They knew my history and could remind me of my aptitudes and the strong son of a bitch I really am. They wouldn't allow me self pity. They put it in perspective. They didn't do it in quite as direct a fashion, being themselves made me be myself. They were being supportive.

A more thorough discussion of support will follow.

Although comparison used for the purpose of reassurance about competence and strengths can be quite useful, it is apparent from the above discussion that competition is not. At the very least it made people uncomfortable, both with themselves and others. At its most destructive it caused friction between people, guilt because of competitive feelings, insecurity, defensiveness, and worst of all, withdrawal. The implications of this process will be addressed in the discussion section.

It also seems likely that the competition fostered more competition. Feelings of inadequacy were quite contagious. It was easy to spend one's time "bitching" and worrying with other students. It was much harder to break this off and retreat to one's work, alone. A similar situation occurred if people were feeling anxious about their work or themselves. Somehow this anxiety was communicated and would make at least some people react by becoming anxious themselves.18

---

18 In studying students about to take their comprehensive exams, Mechanic (1962) also found anxiety about schoolwork to be quite contagious.
The people who make me feel anxious are the people who go around showing their insecurities, the people who feel they have to be really competent.

Group Norms

When asked about norms that might be developing within the group, several people mentioned that they seemed to revolve around "being very good, the very best" and that people would work very hard. In many ways these norms were helpful because they communicated both an expectation and a confidence.19

Support

Throughout the discussion of establishing new friendships and maintaining the old were themes of support, both instrumental and nurturant. There seemed to be varying forms of support operating during those first few weeks of school, some more useful than others, some aimed at more specific needs, and some more accessible.

Before the issues of support were examined in detail, each person was asked to define, ideally, what support is. The major components

19 However, if people are not feeling they are the very best (and in a new environment where there has been minimal feedback it is easy to question this attribution), it is likely that one might feel insecure and find it necessary to assess the accuracy of the above statement in comparison to the rest of the very best.

Another difficulty with those norms is that in reality people, although intellectually the best, were too much novices to be the best at therapy or even research. The situation seems primed for insecurity. And then of course there was the dilemma: if being the best is so valued, wouldn't one be even more valued if s/he was the best of the best. It is evident that there was more operating than personality dynamics to contribute to the potential of competition.
contributing to supportive relationships seemed to involve the ability to create a feeling of approval and acceptance, that no matter what the person did s/he was not weird. To be really supportive one communicated feelings of caring and concern. Just that people were "behind you" and "wanted the best for you" made the students feel cared for and supported.

Another important aspect to support included the willingness to share, both important events and feelings as well as any problems that were experienced. The general feeling was "if someone will be there for me, I'll be there for them." It is important to note that this "deal" allowed the person not to worry about whether s/he was dumping a lot of problems on the other or "laying a trip on him/her." By listening to someone's problems and successes permission for a reciprocal relationship was established for the future. The willingness to share problems seemed to be one of the major criteria for true friendship.

I find that really important. To me it really indicates a degree of trust, if that other person is willing to share problems. It bothers me if a person who I consider my friend feels that they can't share with me, because that indicates a breakdown in a relationship.

The final element of support that most people agreed on included some type of goal clarification. This included using people for sounding boards and having them help think through particular problems. For at least one person, being given advice was supportive, particularly if it was not expected that it would be followed.

Other aspects of support included in the various definitions were: the contribution of money; favors or gestures which were solely for the person's benefit; empathy as a result of being or having been "in the
same boat"; and physical contact of some kind, particularly being held. All of these gestures tend to convey to the person that s/he is somehow special and worthy of being cared for, that people will go out of their way to be attentive.

The easiest type of support to find during the first few weeks was instrumental in nature. Primarily this involved other people taking charge of things that needed to be done, imparting pertinent information so that daily living tasks could be accomplished, offering social opportunities, and exploring the area together as a group. In addition, the more community residents did to include the new students in both social activities and just in daily living, the more supported they felt.

The people who live upstairs, they've been very helpful. They have done different things, given us furniture. They were somebody who knew the community. Between them and Sally they were initially very helpful.

Not only was involvement in social activities and advice about the community helpful, but just having someone to talk to aided in one's adjustment.

I talked with two or three people in my apartment house who really seemed surprisingly friendly to me, like: "Where are you from, do you like it here, are you feeling at home?" It was nice, because it took away some of the sharp edge of my initial confrontation with school.

---

20 See Caplan (1960) and Silverman (1969) for discussions of informal helpers who gained their role by having been in "the same boat."

21 The clinical area secretary.
Whenever others were willing to take some of the burden of moving and making an adjustment it was deeply appreciated.

I had to wait two weeks on this apartment. For that two weeks they found me a place to stay with a little old lady who apparently used to have boarders, but doesn't anymore. About two weeks at grandma's. By the time it was over I was glad it was over, but I really liked it.

A person who was extremely important, especially during the first weeks, was the clinical area secretary (Sally). People were tremendously reliant on her for information, guidance, support, and a friendly ear. But, invariably people felt guilty about utilizing her so often:

The only person that I really had contact with was Sally and it got to the point where I felt that I was bugging her, and I didn't want to do that. I felt sorry for Sally because there were eleven of us doing that. I think that naturally I would have been drawn to Sally anyway because she was kind of our official advisor.

A number of people suggested that instead of having to rely on Sally so much, students should be supplied with a packet containing all the relevant material about how to become a graduate student.\(^{22}\)

A primary source of support, mostly instrumental, was the rest of the first year clinical class. Just the fact that people grouped together, spending time doing things, sympathizing with each other, and griping together was mentioned by everyone as at least initially being

\(^{22}\)This is an excellent idea, but should not be implemented as a substitute for contact with Sally. She provides much needed support, initially, when students need one knowledgeable and compassionate person to whom they can consistently relate. To alleviate guilt it might be helpful to make Sally the official advisor for the first semester.
quite helpful.

The whole first year clinical group is pretty close in helping each other, suggesting that such and such is there in case you want to know about that, or "I don't know about this, does anyone want to come and find out about it with me?" We tend to do things like that together, safety in numbers. . . . We kind of go as a group, not really knowing what we're doing or where we're going, but feeling secure in the fact that we're doing it together.

Besides group support, people indicated they had felt supported by various individuals, both community and school, from time to time. This was reflected in terms of little favors, a sign of caring or concern, or just company. Although this was helpful, it was of a more instrumental nature than most people wished for.

Certainly there are people like yourself, the supervisors and others that help and talk about what they've been through, but I don't think I've known any of you people long enough to feel like I've built up enough. I don't think there is anyone here I can spill my problems to, or that I think is willing to spill his/her problems to me. I think maybe it just takes a little more time.

People's primary nurturant support seemed to come from previous ties. Consistently, when asked to name who was included in one's current support system, the students listed people away from Amherst. This roster usually included ex-roommates, ex-classmates, lovers, and family. Even if the student did not hear from them consistently, it helped "to know they are there." It is lucky these students were going to graduate school after Bell invented the telephone, because there would have been a dearth of supportive relationships if Ma Bell were nonexistent. Some telephone bills ranged well over $50 a month.
The communication of support by friends and family was expressed in a number of ways. One primary way was to show support by having great confidence in the person, by expressing pride in his/her accomplishments, and by exhibiting a sense of acceptance. This method of support was deeply appreciated by all the students and was most often received from lovers and family. Another way of expressing confidence was to support attempts at being independent and pursuing individual goals and to be reassuring about abilities and skills.

My family, initially, had a hard time understanding that something was more important than money and it kind of sat between us for awhile. One day I was over for lunch and a friend was asking me similar questions about why I would want to go to graduate school. Before I could get anything out of my mouth, my mother preaches how important it is for people to do what they want, and from that time forward I just knew that she was there.

Another person in talking about his/her family said:

They've just kind of been reassuring. They understand that it is tough and they've been through it too, but they're confident that they know I can handle it. They kind of remind me that I have the ability to do some of these things and that I can handle it. They help me to build back the image of myself. They're kind of a familiar voice and people that know me intimately. When things get a little lonely it's good to hear them.

Generally, in talking about supportive episodes that had occurred over the past few weeks, people mentioned: introducing one to the area and friends, just listening to one's troubles or triumphs, knowing one's goals and supporting them, expressing a willingness to "be there" at any time, sympathizing with how difficult the situation is, being able to discuss similar experiences, and simply saying "I love you."
An important aspect of support which was repeatedly mentioned concerned other's knowledge of the situation. Particularly if one had problems, it was easier to go to someone who already knew the situation, the characters involved, and their history. One person suggested that some people were more supportive than others because, "They have some history. I don't have to go through my whole spiel. I can be understood."

This knowledge of a situation also generalized to an intimate familiarity with the person, his/her background, foibles and strengths. Because people had already established a closeness it was easier to approach them.

We're close; he knows me and we don't have to dig down so much. Plus, I think he's thinking about me anyway. I'm not putting more on his back, because he's thinking about me and I'm thinking about him.

The idea that discussing one's thoughts and problems might be burdensome to another was mentioned by almost everyone at different times during the interview. There was a strong feeling that people would be acting inappropriately if they relied too much on any one person, especially if a history of reciprocal support had not been established. It was also felt that others had problems and it was unfair to burden them further. However, just as competition caused people to withdraw from each other, not wishing to trouble others had its isolating effect also. The only people one was able to go to for truly nurturant support were those geographically distant.

Generally, it was assumed that asking acquaintances for support
would be an unwelcome imposition.

Yesterday I felt bad and wanted some support, but I couldn't tell anybody. A friend asked me if something was wrong, but I said, "No." I didn't know him very well and he wouldn't have known what to do with it. I wouldn't do that to somebody I didn't know. It's difficult for me to talk. I'm concerned for them, not enough trust has been built up.

A second person expressed the unwillingness to ask for support in the following way:

I haven't talked to anyone around here about X because I don't feel the relationships here have reached the point where I am comfortable with revealing my feelings, trusting someone with them or feeling that I have the right to lay that kind of trip on someone.

There seemed to be two major components to the lack of active support seeking. One of the difficulties was that people felt others had problems too and therefore should not be burdened with additional ones. It was felt that the result of sharing problems would be everyone crying together instead of actively doing anything about the situation. A second aspect concerned the students thinking they did not know people well enough to trust others with their most intimate feelings. Essentially, what resulted was either people repressing many of their support needs or going to people from their past. Relying on old ties was partially successful, but lacked the immediacy and proximity of talking with people in this area.

It was not just an inability or unwillingness to ask that led to a lack of nurturant support. People's unfamiliarity with the student led them to miss cues signaling for help, whereas those more familiar
with him/her could decipher them relatively quickly.

I talked to my parents on the phone Sunday. They were really supportive of all the feelings I had had all week. They asked me how I was feeling, how I had been. We had been talking about superficial things and I was kind of reluctant to lay a whole heavy trip on my parents. My parents picked up on that right away and said, "OK, what's the matter?" They wanted to hear even if it was going to make them unhappy. She would do that for me. It's the same kind of thing with a friend--picking up on those subtle little hints and tossing aside his worries, which he was definitely having to, to listen to me.

A number of students mentioned people not recognizing cues and also conveying subtle messages concerning their willingness or unwillingness to listen.

In general, it's the thing of dropping the subtle hints and then not being picked up on. I feel like the person doesn't want to listen to me... They're not sharp; maybe they just don't want to listen. One has hassles going on with himself. It's the whole thing of not throwing things aside for another person... I just have to accept that I can't give of part of myself, that I have to hold it in.

Similar situations would occur when people made overtures that were not acknowledged.

Sometimes I would make overtures to people and they would not pick up on it by saying, "I have to run or maybe some other time." That happened once with X when I got clear vibes that she had something better to do. I felt really bad that she didn't take the time. I guess if something is really bothering me I always manage to find somebody suitable.

In discussing the support received from families, a number of people mentioned that their parents were extremely supportive financially. The amount of monetary support varied greatly from person to person, but
what was supportive was the thought and willingness to contribute rather than the amount.

Financially, my parents are supportive. They're providing about as much as I'm getting from the college, and that's helpful not only in terms of peace of mind, but also there's something about a financial commitment that makes it a real commitment. I know it's important to them that I do well and that I be happy at what I'm doing. It means an awful lot to me to know that they're sending me their hard earned money, just basically giving it to me to make it easier on me. It means a lot to me, in terms of satisfying them and wanting to achieve partly to make them happy. That seems to me to be very reasonable and I'm proud to tell them what I'm doing and I got an A on this. They like to hear that.

Parents were not the only people to offer money. Friends could do that too and when it happened it was generally perceived as a very caring event.

A friend just offered to loan me money with no indication on my part that I wanted it. She just knew things were rough.

This particular situation is another example of someone perceiving very subtle cues and acting on them.

**Overall Reaction to the First Few Weeks of Graduate School**

In general, the first few weeks of graduate school were reported by everyone as the most challenging experience ever encountered. For two people, the challenge, although large, was fairly consistent with their expectations, but for the other three the challenge was even greater than expected. The consensus was that the challenge resulted from being totally overwhelmed by a novel situation. Although people had had somewhat similar experiences, entering graduate school was significantly dif-
what was supportive was the thought and willingness to contribute rather than the amount.

Financially, my parents are supportive. They're providing about as much as I'm getting from the college, and that's helpful not only in terms of peace of mind, but also there's something about a financial commitment that makes it a real commitment. I know it's important to them that I do well and that I be happy at what I'm doing. It means an awful lot to me to know that they're sending me their hard earned money, just basically giving it to me to make it easier on me. It means a lot to me, in terms of satisfying them and wanting to achieve partly to make them happy. That seems to me to be very reasonable and I'm proud to tell them what I'm doing and I got an A on this. They like to hear that.

Parents were not the only people to offer money. Friends could do that too and when it happened it was generally perceived as a very caring event.

A friend just offered to loan me money with no indication on my part that I wanted it. She just knew things were rough.

This particular situation is another example of someone perceiving very subtle cues and acting on them.

**Overall Reaction to the First Few Weeks of Graduate School**

In general, the first few weeks of graduate school were reported by everyone as the most challenging experience ever encountered. For two people, the challenge, although large, was fairly consistent with their expectations, but for the other three the challenge was even greater than expected. The consensus was that the challenge resulted from being totally overwhelmed by a novel situation. Although people had had somewhat similar experiences, entering graduate school was significantly dif-
I think in some ways I reacted atypically in terms of feeling insecure and nervous. That was not very typical of my behavior in the past. Normally, in the past I've felt pretty confident, even in new situations. It was like coming here all of a sudden, I was removed from any framework or foundation that I had ever been familiar with before. I had no basis for judging myself. So, it was atypical from what I normally feel. In new situations I don't normally feel that uptight; and I usually do enjoy, in a positive sense, the challenge, like the academic work.

It was as if nothing really compared. Too many things were novel, such as living alone, entering a new kind of environment, not knowing one's way around, not knowing anyone, trying to make new friends and at the same time maintaining old. People were attempting to quickly assess the norms and decide whether to become socialized, or wondering what was happening if the socialization process was not recognized. Generally, graduate school was experienced as something very different from college.

Here was a rigorous test of whether my self-perceptions were accurate. I had been very successful and had dealt with each crisis situation just fine in my life. This involved every aspect of my life and was much more important to my life than other things had been. I was going to find out what kind of a person I was. Clinical is a very intense experience, academically and personally. Relationships tend to be more intense as a function of who goes into clinical. I expected to test out feelings I had about myself. That was a mighty challenge, one of the most challenging times.

For many, the commitment to graduate school and psychology was exciting and challenging, for others it was more anxiety provoking and raised a number of issues around the direction one's life was going to take.
Even though the situation was often difficult, most genuinely seemed to enjoy the concept of a challenge. People described the experience of a challenge as enervating and exciting.

I like them. I love to try something no one thinks I can do and then do it really great. It makes me try hard and I feel like I've accomplished something. I have to give out effort, test yourself, use my maximum ability. It makes me alert.

Another person says:

I sort of enjoy it. I get punchy if I don't have something to keep myself going. I guess that's really kind of putting the finger on my state, mental state, in terms of challenge. It's almost like the adrenalin gets going and you're keen and you're aware that, OK, now you really have to perform. You have to get all those resources that are available to you and put those to work and it's a state that you're constantly in, being ready to perform. I enjoy being in that state; being keen and being prepared is not necessarily anxiety producing.

The most positive aspect of experiencing a challenge seemed to be the opportunity to grow and change into a more fulfilled and self-actualized person.

A couple of people found the experience of such a major challenge more threatening and tended to experience more anxiety than enjoyment. At least occasionally some of the anxiety seemed to stem from a fear of failure. Yet, even during the most challenging times people eventually rallied. Some methods of doing this were:

...figure out what the problems were and why I was flipping out over them. What can I do to restore myself?... I took one baby step at a time, had to have patience. I knew it would take time. I trusted that good things would happen... and I told myself that things would work out.
Summary

The most salient feature of the first few weeks of graduate school was the immensity of the challenge encountered by almost all the entering students. Although all had prepared in some way for the move, it was evidently not enough to alleviate much of the challenge. By far the most stressful period was the first few days before school had started, when people were still in the process of moving, apartment hunting, and had not yet met their fellow students. During this time people experienced a great deal of loneliness and worry about the upcoming graduate school experience.

As soon as school began the stress diminished somewhat and people began concentrating on what the clinical program consisted of and who their classmates were. During this stage the primary emphasis was on group development and basic coping with the environment. The students gained a great deal of instrumental support from the group. They helped each other with information, played together, and served as a sounding board for people's gripes, worries, and questions. The group was particularly important initially because all but one of the students were living alone. While each person basically liked this arrangement, there were also periods of intense loneliness.

Once the initial positive glow toward classmates began to fade, each student started questioning the validity of a totally cohesive group. Differences in style and belief began to emerge, causing everyone to question their alliances and support needs. At the same time the challenge of work became more salient. People were receiving ambiguous messages both about the experience of graduate school and what
was expected of them. This was combined with an initial insecurity about individual capabilities and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of work which needed to be done. Since the standards for evaluation were ambiguous and the evaluative feedback slow in coming, people resorted to the only feedback mechanism available to them, i.e., social comparison. While this increased self-esteem for some, it caused much anxiety for others. The general response to social comparison consisted of anxiety, anger, and withdrawal.

At the same time people were beginning to feel the isolation of work more intensely. They were feeling a general pressure to spend less time socializing and more time working. Although the group was providing instrumental support, nurturant (emotional) support was generally lacking. Because people had so much work to do, time to build friendships was limited. Issues of social comparison and the resulting anxiety, as well as a reluctance to burden others with one's problems may have also interfered somewhat with support building. However, the process was begun and would continue throughout the semester.

Another challenge mentioned during this time was the maintenance of old friendships. Although people were gaining instrumental support from their classmates, they were relying heavily on past relationships with family and friends for the more nurturant support. Although quite helpful, this situation also caused problems since, for the most part, the relationships were all far away. Not only were they unaware of what the student's immediate needs were, but the relationship was bound to change as a function of the distance.

Each one of these challenges, taken separately, could have been
coped with relatively easily by these students. However, each challenge was combined with another, leading to a totally novel situation that surpassed most people's expectations of what the challenge would be like.

People relied heavily on talking to other people who were in the same situation, referring to past successes as a way of reassuring themselves about their competence, comparing themselves to others in order to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and utilizing cognitive reassurances about the normality of their loneliness and the stress they were experiencing. More active means of coping such as exploring the area and school and attempting to meet new people were also used.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS—SECOND INTERVIEW

The second interview occurred shortly after Thanksgiving. By that time people had had more opportunity to settle in and become familiar with their surroundings and the people in them. The major issues for everyone had narrowed to two, relationships with old and new friends, or the lack thereof, and the relationship to work and any consequent competition and anxiety. For most people the relationship between maintaining old friends and acquiring new and dealing with the large amount of work were much more intimately entwined than earlier in the semester.

This chapter will discuss the challenge of friendship, work, and balancing the two. In addition, we will further examine the topics of social comparison and support. Coping will not be discussed as a separate topic, but rather will be considered within the context of the above challenges.

The Challenge of Friendship

In discussing the topic of friendship, it became apparent that at least some people had developed more acquaintances and the beginning of friendships than earlier in the semester. For two or three people loneliness and the lack of friends was no longer a problem. They felt there were a number of people to interact with and that there had been little difficulty in developing those relationships.

23 Interestingly enough these were the three women.
Relationships with several people have either gotten off the ground, or, if they were off the ground, have moved on. . . . I felt they would come in time, that they can't be pushed.

These relationships seemed to mature quite naturally, with little attempt to push the development. It was felt that they occurred because of an increased opportunity to share experiences, increased contact and simply a function of time.

Relationships with distant lovers, particularly for one of the students was more of a problem. Numerous demands were being made for time and visits. None of the students were comfortable accepting these demands in their totality. For one this was accepted somewhat easily by the distant person but for another it became a relatively constant frustration to maintain the relationship and continue communications. A lot of energy was expended in this direction and there was some resentment toward school for limiting the amount of contact time.

For others, meeting people and creating friendships was a slower process. Because it was slower, the loneliness, at times, became more acute. It had dragged on for several months and was beginning to be felt a bit more strongly. Whereas the above three people found that friendships just happened to materialize and then develop rather naturally, the latter two people had a somewhat different experience. Relationships did not develop so easily or naturally and at times it seemed necessary to force the development. However, forcing relationships was both an uncomfortable and vulnerable position in which to be.

I've thought about joining a yoga class. It would be interesting and a good way of meeting people. . . . I also want to meet some (wo)men, but I'm really uncomfortable in a pick-
up scene. Every relationship I've had has just sort of happened; we've just started talking; now I feel as if I have to force things.

For both these people a relationship that provided a diversion from psychology and an opportunity to feel at ease and comfortable was very much desired. Basically what was needed was a situation where the person could, so to speak, let his/her hair down; where one could have a respite from graduate school and its concomitant strains. This wished-for situation also included a place to share joys and accomplishments.

One of the more obvious aspects of wanting an intimate relationship is the sexual part, but it is not the most important. I want kind of a diversion from psychology. It would be nice to have some kind of comfortable thing with another person besides psychology, like eating out, just doing things around the apartment, kinds of homey things that are removed from being a clinician, just being a human being. When I miss those things, then I think back to the past when I had them, or what they meant to me, how they helped get my mind off some of the things that were happening to me.

The desire for a diversionary relationship was not just centered around a lover. One person repeatedly expressed how s/he wanted to be exposed to a number of people who were involved in diverse activities. Although the privacy and quiet of living alone were generally appreciated, there was the feeling that more people around one's living environment would be supportive.

I had always lived with other people who weren't in psychology, so I could go back there and there would be different things going on that would take my mind off of school. It was nice having them right there, not having to go out. They wouldn't all be talking about school. They could draw me away from it.
Part of the problem was that people were not exactly sure how to go about meeting people or what steps to take to change their situation. In the past they had had exposure to many more diverse people because of being in college, living in dorms, taking part in athletics, etc. Graduate school was much more limiting in terms of potential acquaintances and the people who were available were mostly psychologists. In addition, the sheer amount of work interfered with establishing relationships. It is difficult to meet people when remaining primarily in an apartment or at school. As was mentioned previously, these two people were quite uncomfortable with the artificially arranged meeting situations. Thus, their main way of dealing with the problem was to wait for an opportunity to arise which felt comfortable in terms of relating. Although both people indicated they felt fairly comfortable with this process and could control negative feelings by becoming immersed in their work, feelings of depression and loneliness still cropped up at times.

I'm busy most of the time and when I'm busy and concentrating on the work, it's OK. But it's the moments inbetween, when I feel like taking a deep breath, when I'm doing things that are not directly related to the work, that's when I miss it.

During the first few weeks several people mentioned they had dropped hints about their loneliness and need for support, but that quite often they were ignored. This seemed to remain a problem during these later interviews as well. The students to whom this was happening were invariably understanding and tended to diminish the potential anger and hurt feelings. They interpreted it as others being busy too, and that
one just had to accept it and try to understand why they didn't follow up on the hint.

For at least two people a basic lack of support, a feeling of not being able to be oneself, and the need to be on guard still remained an experience to be reckoned with. This was by no means a perpetual feeling, for, in reality, it had probably lessened somewhat since the beginning of the semester. However the feelings remained.

The two people discussed above had various ways of coping with the situation. Talking to people was used extensively and seemed to help as long as it did not degenerate into a perpetual discussion of everyone's problems. When the talk did become too problem oriented, people often found themselves withdrawing from the situation.

Lots of times I just feel myself withdrawing from the rest of the clinical area. It was just too much always talking about your problems. . . . Part of the (withdrawal) was being with people I really didn't like that much, feeling as if I had to like them. Part of it is that they represent psychology and work.

Becoming involved in work was also a useful device to get one's mind off all the problems. However, most of these devices were fairly passive ways of dealing with the immediate problem and served mainly to put one's mind at ease, rather than changing the environment. People were somewhat aware that this was happening and acknowledged that changes needed to be made.

I'm going to have to do some things in terms of getting out and meeting new people, different kinds of people. It does not seem right that I'm here working my butt off for something I'm not sure I want, and then not having the support system or the time to go out and meet people. Now, I just
have to expend more energy to go out and meet people. I'm going to spend the vacation trying to regroup. I don't feel that I can do that right now.

Although people varied a bit in terms of their experience around making new friends, the people interviewed all shared similar feelings about the maintenance of old friendships. For everyone this was a central issue and one that was not easily resolved. The first part of the semester seemed to be spent primarily on old relationships. Then, as the semester wore on, there was a gradual shift to focusing on new relationships. But, even though the new friends were important, nobody really abandoned the issue of old friends.

The two people who were most satisfied with the way they were handling the situation were those who maintained a fair amount of contact. This was done both by visiting old friends who lived in the area and by maintaining extensive phone contact. For both these people, remaining in contact with important people was not seen as a major problem, but rather as an adjustment that involved some sadness, but no real loss or hardship.

For others the experience of trying to maintain a balance between new relationships and old was more draining. Returning home over Thanksgiving and seeing old friends seemed to highlight all of the issues involved.

I went to visit and it turned out very disastrous. I felt very bombarded by a lot of emotional stimuli, a lot of people, a lot of different relationships. I didn't really expect to see that many people. I did feel really good. I had almost forgotten that I had those kinds of relationships. It was hard to come back. What really bothered me was seeing that Place X had gone on without me and things had changed.
But then I began to realize that U.Mass. was what I wanted, that it was nice. I had a place here. That was OK. There were things about the relationship in Place X that I didn't want to have. It wasn't satisfying. I needed to be here and s/he needed to be there.

For another person going home accentuated how s/he was beginning to grow away from some of his/her old friends. It was felt that school had somehow changed him/her, that it was more difficult to relate to parents and friends.

A lot of it is that I'm preoccupied with school. Part of it is conceptualizing things differently too, looking at things with a psychology set, looking more at abstractions, thinking about something a little more deeply, having different interests... But, we still have fun together, because I have more than one side. I can relate to all my different friends in a variety of ways. I just don't have a lot of free time.

Balancing Work and Friendship

The situation of maintaining old friends and establishing new became particularly problematic in relation to work. People had chosen to come to graduate school because they liked the field and wanted to work in it, but they resented, to some extent, the total commitment it became. They wanted to feel they had free time to pursue other interests as well, including friendship activities.

Being with old friends is a real problem because of no time. Contact with good friends is a good thing, but I feel like I have to get work done. I have to put contact with friends aside. It feels bad. I talk on the phone a lot, but we're losing some of the closeness. I'm into work so much, I'm losing feeling. I feel guilty. They're making demands. I feel bad that I'm making school my first priority rather than people, but I have to do it. I question that I'm giving up so much, but if I want to get things done I have to limit my-
self as a person. I do see people, but I have had to cut back. I don't do as much as I would like. I couldn't get work done if I played more. My friends are still there, they always will be. During the holidays I will have more time and I'll use it to be with them. I talk a lot on the phone, but it's not quite the same as being there.

Trying to balance work and friends became a real dilemma and precipitated much guilt. Although there was never enough free time, some people used it more effectively than others. For some people it was relatively easy to separate work and play, while for others their free time was often spent worrying about school. Of course spending one's time either actively involved with school or actively worrying about it left little time for maintaining and establishing friends.

People did use some active coping methods (e.g., maintaining contact with people). However, cognitive modes of coping seemed to be more prevalent. Examples of comforting things are: things are not so bad, I often enjoy what I'm doing, in the long run graduate school is more important, I'll have time over Christmas break to spend with people. Although discussions and contact certainly helped, most of the first year students interviewed experienced a relatively large amount of depression from time to time.

I see very few happy people around the department, a lot of anxious people, a lot of headaches and feeling bad, both faculty and students. Some like it, but I get a lot of gripes. I don't know how I feel yet. I'm not as easy going or as happy as I was in college, but I'm not dissatisfied.

The Challenge of Work

As with the area of friendship, establishing one's professional
self was both joyful and challenging. As the semester progressed people began to have many more demands placed on them. This included statistics exams, decisions about paper topics, choosing advisors, and starting master's research. There was a very strong academic norm for this particular class. Everyone was expected to get work done on time, to participate actively and intelligently in class, to be somewhat academically oriented, and to get the masters started. For the people who were comfortable with this norm, the situation was fairly easy to deal with, but for those who were not, the pressure began to build.

There's a lot of work to do. It's not that I don't think I can do it. It's just that it has to be done. There are other pressures besides the Clinical I paper. I have no idea what I want to do for my master's. There's a lot of pressure, getting an advisor. . . . You keep getting bombarded with it. I know that it has to be done and I'll get it done. . . . All this really tires me out. I don't have time to relax and do some of the things I normally do in my lifestyle, like taking time to sit down and think. Now, it's like you're constantly moving. It's fatiguing physically. I have a lot of trouble getting up in the morning. It's mental fatigue to the point where I don't feel like thinking.

For some people the demands were relatively easy to cope with. It was just a matter of doing the work and then having time to play. They enjoyed their work and felt satisfied with spending large amounts of time doing it. Although these students occasionally mentioned having limited amounts of time, particularly to play, it did not seem to be as major an issue as for others. They had decided to come to graduate school and that meant giving up a few things. That was the way it was, and was therefore accepted. 24

For several others, adjusting to graduate school and the work that
had to be done was a bit more challenging.

I still haven't got a handle on graduate school. I fluctuate back and forth, between how hard it is and how easy. I haven't found a groove yet where I know how hard I have to work and how much time I really need to spend.

For everyone, the limited amount of time to work on impending papers, particularly the Clinical I paper, became a challenge. The challenge centered around picking topics and putting the information together in a coherent manner. Some anxiety was reflected by everyone as to whether the paper could be completed on time and still reflect quality work. The amount of anxiety varied from person to person, with those who were actively plodding along in their work feeling the most comfortable. Those who were having more difficulty in planning and writing their papers tended to occasionally experience extreme bouts of anxiety and panic about finishing the paper. It was interesting that people reacted so strongly to a paper, considering that they had all successfully written papers in the past. Somehow people momentarily lost touch with their past history of successes. That the Clinical I paper was the first major piece of work people would be producing in graduate school also contributed to the anxiety. It therefore took on added importance.

Besides the Clinical I paper, the topic of one's masters seemed to be

\[24\] In both situations these people used defense mechanisms quite effectively to ignore the potential stress of the situation. By doing this they controlled their anxiety and became open to more active ways of coping. Basically, they seemed to control the amount of worrying they allowed themselves to do. They were also adept at disciplining themselves and approaching a problem step-by-step.
on everyone's mind. The choice of who to work with and in what area became an important decision.

I have so many ideas. There is no one here to work with on what I really want to do. No one I'm really close to that I would want to work with. I have to make a decision to do something I'm not quite as interested in, so I can work with someone whom I really like. It's a prerequisite that I'm friends with the person I'm working with. I need the support and someone who is really interested. The support consists of the knowledge they have, the ability to find mistakes, the suggestions about other people to go to, the encouragement. It's easier to take criticism and help. I need someone who can give me time and is interested in me as a person.

For another person the challenge became whether to work with a particular professor because of the demands that would likely be imposed. Also included in the decision was a choice whether to do research in an area where the person had been working previously.

I needed to make a choice whether to put myself under that much pressure. His/her style is directly contradictory to my style of doing things. I took the decision very seriously. I'm not sure why I did it. I felt like I was up to it now. I was either going to fuck around or I was going to get down to work. I told myself I wasn't going to fall back on things I already knew. . . . I was a little annoyed at myself that I didn't pursue a different area. It was a little passive on my part rather than active. I felt awful the day I made the decision. Now, I'll deal with whatever I have to deal with. I expected a lot of demands, but when they came I walked out of the room terrified. I felt like I had gotten myself into a corner. . . . But, I decided I could do it, that I did have enough ideas.

One challenge that seemed to be particularly prominent at this point in time was concern about academic evaluations, particularly by faculty. For a couple of people this tended to occur earlier and was dispelled rather quickly, primarily by reassuring oneself about one's
competence and recalling past histories of successes. For others the worry was more pervasive and harder to extinguish. It was also fairly nonspecific. It seemed as if, for several people, work, particularly writing papers, was not an enjoyable aspect of school. This was obviously not always true, but often during the interviews people, when asked about recent challenges, would quickly refer to their anxiety about school and their capabilities.25

One (challenge) was trying to sit down and write my paper. I wrote the introduction about four times. I was having a block to writing. I just couldn't write anything at all... I was afraid that I wasn't a good writer.

The anxiety about school seemed to manifest itself in several different ways. Some people reacted by avoiding the work altogether, becoming panicky and depressed. People slept a lot and even when they were awake they would spend time daydreaming. The avoidance of work also occurred through agitated sorts of behaviors (e.g., difficulty in sitting still for extended periods of time). It seemed hard for the students to verbalize, but it was as if they were afraid to put anything on paper for fear of it being evaluated. The anticipation of feedback essentially froze many of the students. The emotional turmoil was not just around evaluation, but was a result of a general overload in every area of the student's life. Everything was changing and being reexamined, new values were being established, new friends were being made, and there were new professors to impress.

25Rubinstein (1976) also found competence to be a salient issue for the graduate students she studied.
I'm annoyed at myself for expending as much energy as I have on fruitless kinds of things. A lot of energy has been focused into emotional things and things outside, but that would be OK if I thought it were useful for me, but I don't. It's a drain. . . . I feel a lot of agitation, running around in circles, a lot of time wasted and I just don't know where it goes. Some of it is clearly avoiding something, a lot of it is just deciding what to do. A lot of the anxiety was anticipating neutral and semi-negative feedback. . . . I feel sort of invisible. If I'm not acknowledged I feel bad. . . . Actually, I'm really excited about some ideas, but I feel like I don't have time to let my imagination run wild sometimes. I have to get down to basic business.

Although people tended to talk about the more problematic situations, it should be stressed that graduate school was not a totally negative experience. Most people found the clinical opportunities exciting and rewarding and there were certainly moments when people felt stimulated and interested in the academic aspects. Clinical teams were reported to be quite supportive. Also, as mentioned repeatedly, the amount and types of challenges varied from person to person. In fact, the dissatisfaction and anxiety many people were feeling was often due to being very excited by a particular aspect of psychology, but not being able to pursue those interests because of the large number of requirements. The problem really became how to maintain, and actually postpone, the person one wanted to be.

Staying the person one wanted to be involved many dimensions. One was being able to go in the directions, academically, that were most stimulating. Another was maintaining one's integrity and values in the

---

26 Each first year student participated in a clinical team. These teams consisted of a faculty person, a teaching associate, and four or five graduate students at different levels in the program. The teams reflect various theoretical orientations (e.g., family, community, short-term therapy).
face of so many external demands. This included not getting caught up by evaluation anxiety, by satisfying oneself in terms of work and beginning to evaluate independently of external feedback.

It's not so much what I have to do to satisfy other people. I can handle them. Now, it's going into the realm of satisfying myself and doing things that are really meaningful to me; that I can feel good about and satisfied with, in an academic sense. But, then also balancing out the other part of my life which is social or spiritual. I have to sort things out, which have priority. How much time do I want to spend doing the academic and how much do I have to do before I'll be satisfied? Do I need to spend more time with my spiritual life? I obviously need more time for my social life. It's a difficult thing to integrate those things.

Essentially, the dilemma facing these students was how much socialization were they willing to tolerate. A couple of students experienced questioning and even outright attacks of their basic values. This was expressed in one instance by subtle pressure to adopt certain forms of therapy and abandon one's own viewpoint. In another situation a student became exposed to inter-area rivalry and bad feelings during one of his/her first class presentations. This was particularly traumatic since this person had hoped to not only do research in the other area, but also work with the particular professor involved. For both these people a great deal of energy was expended thinking about and discussing the situations. Although both events were finally resolved, they precipitated a fair amount of stress and insecurity around competence. The first was resolved by the person finally deciding (after a great deal of thought and some worry about how competent s/he was) that "I am going to have my own ideas and my own personal style and other people are going to disagree with me, and that's OK." The second person resolved the
conflict by working very hard and proving to the professor that s/he was 
competent and capable of working in an area other than clinical.

For another student maintaining one's personhood involved not al-
lowing school to be so worrisome and omnipresent.

I'm worried that I'm going to drive myself into a person I 
don't want to be. It's easy for me to be very studious in a 
certain sense, withdrawing, kind of there but not there. . . . 
I don't want to lose all those personal skills and having fun 
with people, but school drags me down and I worry about it a 
lot. School is an important part of my life, but I don't want 
it to be everything. I'm not happy when it is everything. I 
don't want to worry about it either.

A couple of people expressed looking forward to the next semester 
because they would then have this semester "under their belt." They 
felt they would then have more of a handle on things, more relationships 
would be established, and research would be started. For one person 
this looking ahead also reflected the view that s/he had wasted this 
semester.

In some ways I feel like I blew the first semester. . . . 
This was my first big exposure to graduate school and I'm 
going to be evaluated. I copped out on some really important 
research work, stuff I really wanted to go into for myself. 
Instead I did party kind of things, shopping. It got out 
of bounds. Now that it is all coming to an end I can just 
put it aside. I think I will shape up next semester.

People managed to cope with their work in various ways. Although 
some methods were certainly effective more quickly and also more bene-
ficial to mental health, it should be noted that everyone did get work 
done and that it was at least of satisfactory quality. What seemed to 
vary was the amount of discomfort elicited in performing the work. The
simplest way of coping was just to plod along doing little bits at a
time. Some people were very good at this, while others needed to re-
mind themselves regularly that to diminish the panic they needed to ig-
nore everything but the next 15 minutes. Utilizing this skill was quite
effective in diminishing the anxiety and was used more and more as the
semester progressed. Another method employed by one person was to very
consciously go through a relaxation procedure. Talking to others about
the work and the pressure was also used by everyone from time to time.
This worked, especially if used in moderation and accompanied by bene-
ficial suggestions. It was also useful when more advanced or experi-
enced students could be reassuring about particular doubts. It became
less useful when it was done to a large extent and was precipitated more
by people's anxiety or need to compare than by a wish to share helpful
information.27

Lately, the past week or so, I've been talking to people
about work because everybody else is uptight. It used to
feel good doing that, but now I don't know. I don't want
to hear about it. It just doesn't get anywhere. I would
rather be doing something about it.

Social Comparison

Whereas people at the beginning of the semester were generally
quite aware of other students' tendencies to compare themselves to each
other, the observations on this topic varied substantially at this
point in time. Again, competition seemed to be a taboo subject, with

27In Mechanic's (1962) study, he also found that extensive discus-
sion of work and the anxiety involved tended to increase people's anxiety.
few references to one's own competitiveness and many discussions of
others' needs to compare themselves. However, this did vary to a much
larger extent than earlier in the semester. For several people their
confidence seemed to have increased substantially as the semester pro-
gressed. These students seemed more self-assured and better at self-
evaluation.

I know the reasons that I'm behind and it happened because I
made the choices. I didn't procrastinate or goof off, so why
should I feel guilty about it? I just understand the reasons
I'm behind and I don't feel it a judgment on my capabilities.

Another person stressed how much better things were:

Things seem to be better. I feel more confident about myself.
I'm beginning to understand the nuances of statistics. I feel
comfortable with the direction I'm going in; it assumes com-
petence. I feel pretty secure. I'm not going to leave.

The comparing had not stopped. What had changed was people's ori-
entation to the process. No longer was the assumption made that because
somebody else was competent the student was not. Instead the competent
student became respected for his/her desirable traits and could even
serve as a model in some instances. The win/lose, who-is-the-best-in-
the-class, situation seemed to have diminished and was replaced by a
realistic assessment of the environment, including others' and one's
strengths and weaknesses.

While three of the students saw social comparison as only minimally
occurring and did not discuss it extensively, there were a couple who
disagreed with this view. They saw the class, as a whole, being rela-
tively anxious and doing a large amount of comparing among each other.
The peer group does a lot of comparing, everyone asking where you are going, what you're doing, have you gotten things done. It's really incredible. I'm really surprised.

The constant comparing was seen by these students as quite anxiety provoking and extremely destructive to everyone involved, although it was mentioned that it could be useful if one discovered that s/he was ahead. People were trying very hard to maintain their composure, and the group anxiety was quite threatening to the self-esteem they had managed to build. The comparison and worrying about school was also seen as unsupportive. If someone was being thoughtful and friend-like, s/he would not talk about troubles and work all the time, but rather attempt to change the subject in a more positive direction.

The main way of coping with this dilemma still seemed to be withdrawal. But this time, instead of being a categorical withdrawal, it tended to be more selective. The students would avoid certain people rather than the whole environment. This also included carving out one's own little niche where there was nobody else to compete with so self-evaluation became the only method of comparison.

One of the ways for me to remove the competition was to get into an area of my own that no one could really touch, so I could be working against myself. At least I wouldn't have to worry about how I was measuring up against everyone else.

Support

Support issues discussed during the second interview were similar to those mentioned earlier in the semester. For the majority of people major support systems were still in other areas of the country, most
often the last place the person had lived. This distant support included family to a large extent, as well as lovers. These people were extremely important in communicating confidence, admiration, acceptance, and interest. Because of past history with the person, they were also quite sensitive to nuances in behavior and could be there to offer support in difficult times. The students, in this situation, were very seldom in a supplicant role because the supportive person had offered help before being asked.

X rode out that incident with me. S/he came from Detroit because of that, the week it happened. S/he was in Detroit and had not planned to come up. We both had a bunch of things to do. I certainly didn't say, "Please come up, this terrible, awful thing just happened." S/he has a nice way of providing support. S/he doesn't say, "Now, let's talk this out, work it out." S/he's not a psychologist. S/he's plain there and kind of with you, never really demanding, just there. When I picked him/her up at the plane, the first thing s/he said to me was, "I thought maybe you might need to see me."

Nonsupportive situations occurred most frequently when people either did not care enough to check-up on a person regularly or when small signals for support were not acknowledged.

It's not so much that I've asked for support and it's been denied, but that it hasn't been freely given. It is very egocentric of me to expect people to know that I'm in need of support, but it's like if the telephone didn't ring, they didn't care enough to check up on me.

For many of the students, support systems within the department seemed to have become more established since the first interview. Several faculty members began to take more integral roles as supportive people. This was done primarily through role modeling, assurance as to
one's capabilities, socializing, and giving freely of their time. Classmates also began to be more important. At the most minimal level they served as an intellectual support system, supplying information about psychology and a forum where issues could be discussed. At its most supportive, the class became a place where people could complain about the program, be reassured that others were having the same kinds of problems, get feedback about the reality of their environment, and find playmates. Just the presence of others was reassuring.

Although most people did not have a vast support network in the area, everyone had at least one other person they could begin to relate to and see as a potentially supportive person. The major characteristic of these people was that they were comfortable to interact with. They did not make judgments, but instead listened and helped solve problems. Mostly they were just there, providing friendship, understanding, humor, and distractions.

Summary

By the time of the second interview there had been some changes in the challenges with which the students were dealing. Also, there began to be more extreme variations in people's reactions to establishing and maintaining friendships, coping with large amounts of work and the resultant anxiety, dealing with social comparison, and feelings of support or the lack of it.

Although the relative lack of friends and support (compared to past situations) was still somewhat of a problem, everyone had begun to establish some semblance of a friendship network. Some people felt more
comfortable with the progression than others, but at least there was no longer a total vacuum. Those who were feeling the most uncomfortable at this point were those who wanted more than the beginnings of relationships. They longed for the more intimate aspects of already established relationships.

For those who had intimate relationships (i.e., lovers) other problems arose, specifically the dilemmas involved in maintaining long distance relationships. Maintaining old friendships was a central problem for all of the students and was very much entwined with one's relation to work. Most people found it difficult to actively change the status of their more distant relationships because they were too overwhelmed with schoolwork. The resultant mental states seemed to progress from frustration to resignation to at least some moments of depression, with very few active coping methods utilized.

Everyone felt overloaded with school work and responded in varying degrees by becoming anxious and worried. Some were more effective than others in controlling these feelings. Consciously plodding along and not allowing the anxiety to become overwhelming was the most effective technique. Constant discussion of the anxiety and work, and extensive comparison among students of each other's progress seemed to precipitate the most anxiety. Some dealt with these feelings by consciously ignoring them and going on about their business, while others became more caught up in it. For these people, anxiety became a relatively frequent state and one that was difficult to dispell. Most often it caused people to withdraw from the competitive field. If this meant creating one's own area, it was quite adaptive, but often it meant withdrawing
from interaction with fellow students.

Issues of friendship, support, and the maintenance of old friends, combined with a major transition, seemed to be the primary challenge early in the semester. As the semester progressed these issues receded somewhat (although certainly not entirely) and those of competence and work overload became more pertinent. Again, it is important to stress, these issues should not be examined independently. Everything that was happening to the student was interacting with everything else. Thus, if one area tended to be unsettled, ripples were generated which could affect other aspects of the student's life. Those who coped best were the ones who could maintain a steady state in all areas. They were also the ones who had the most solid support networks. If anything went wrong in any area, these networks were quickly activated (often without there ever being an explicit request) and moved in to offer reassurance, caring, and help. For those who did not have this solid base, a great deal of energy was expended in either trying to establish it, or, most likely, worrying about its absence. Thus, there was less energy to deal with the challenges occurring in other areas of the student's life.
The final interview occurred early in the second semester, near the end of February and beginning of March. People were encouraged to look back at the first semester and generally think about what it had been like to be an entering first year graduate student. They were also asked to examine the development of challenges, relationships, coping, support, and social comparison over the semester.

The issues that arose in this interview were similar to those mentioned previously. The first section of this interview discusses each student's general response to the first semester. The next sections deal with what the expectations about graduate school had been, role ambiguity and the lack of consistent standards of evaluation, the challenge of work, social comparison, friendship, support, and the positive aspects of the first semester.

General Response to the First Semester

The first semester of graduate school seemed to be primarily a time of getting established, of finding one's niche. Much of the semester was spent on this task, with it being more or less joyful or stressful depending on the person involved and the particular situation. For everyone except one person, the beginning of the semester was particularly stressful, with the remainder of the semester fluctuating from good to bad. Everyone seemed to be experiencing a heightened sensitivity to all the stimuli in the surrounding environment. Because it was
such a totally new setting with so many small events to cope with, every new situation took on major proportions. This was not because the events were intrinsically difficult or because the students did not possess the appropriate coping skills, but rather that everything added together and at times became overwhelming.

The first few weeks were horrible. I was very labile, manic-depressive, stiff, brittle almost. I was highly responsive to any cues in my environment. I was reacting to it like a machine that switches gears and kind of jolts. There are still days like that where a raised eyebrow sends me into a paranoid panic. Some days I'm fine. I feel like I've experienced a wider range of emotions in a short space of time than I ever have before.

The words used to describe the first semester, particularly the beginning, were consistently ones that conveyed a sense of floating through space, of being lost, of difficulty in finding one's place, of being lonely.

**Expectations about Graduate School**

People had come to graduate school with varying expectations about almost everything. As was mentioned previously, people spent much of the summer before their first year thinking about graduate school. It is likely that some of the expectations people came with were a result of trying to second guess what the new situation would consist of. Developing a set of expectations was helpful because it decreased the anxiety about the unknown and provided an opportunity to mentally practice future events. If the expectations were realistic and a good match with the reality of the situation, then this process was tremendously help-
ful. People, then, really had had a chance to mentally rehearse dealing with the new environment. More likely, the match was somewhat inadequate and based on past history that did not hold in the new setting. For those who had strong preconceptions, adjusting to the new situation became difficult. Not only were they missing the past, where the expectations were formed, but they were feeling frustrated and disappointed with the present that was not meshing with their wishes.

Sometimes you can work yourself into a depression or sense of inadequacy by having a sense of what things should be like and then recognizing that they’re not like that, so all you could do was to go from one area to the next along the path. Another of the reasons I mentioned I was looking forward to going home at Christmas was a chance to get out of the confusion and hassle. I felt it would be good for me to get away from it all and look at it from a different perspective.

Those who could remain flexible and relaxed fared better. These people seemed to respond more resiliently to disappointments and felt comfortable postponing fulfillment. They could talk about their longings for satisfaction, but could also understand the gratification would not be immediate.

Expectations about graduate school did not just arise prior to arrival. More advanced graduate students were extremely successful in indoctrinating students as to what to expect during the first year. When this was positive, action-oriented information, it was quite helpful to the incoming students. But, evidently, a majority of the infor-

---

Kahn et al. (1964) in studying organizations, also found that those who responded with the least amount of stress to organizational demands were those who were most resilient in their coping style.
mation was extremely anxiety provoking discussions of the difficult life of the first year graduate student. It was routinely likened to an initia-
tion ritual.

I met with Sally, met a couple of upper level students, but they kept their distance and nobody was that friendly. Friendly, but, "Ah, first year student." That's when all the shit started pouring out that we talked about. "Ah, first year student, sigh, am I glad that I'm not in your shoes." It made me feel like, "Oh, my God, what am I getting into." Partly you're laughing along, but you're also thinking what's so bad about being a first year student? What's going to happen? When I left school and talked to some students at School X, they said, "Boy, your first year at graduate school is no fun." Like it was the worst year of your whole life and you spent the rest of your years in graduate school pulling yourself together. It made me anxious and I think over the course of the semester it made things worse. I'm really convinced of that. I think if people had come and said, "It's a time when you go through a lot of changes. It's a different trip, but you'll get through it OK," it would have been much different than people coming in and saying, "You're going to freak out." And what else could I expect? I was hearing it from everyone.

Another student commented,

It was very interesting to have eleven very different people sat down and told that we will all be anxious and we will all be competitive. It was just kind of an unnecessary thing to do.

Role Ambiguity and Lack of Consistent Standards

One of the major difficulties seemed to be integration into the clinical program. Roles within the program and how to pursue them were quite ambiguous.

---

The clinical area secretary.
You're sort of floating here without a map and guidepost to the things you're supposed to accomplish and I didn't feel clear about mapping my way through it. . . . I guess I felt lost, because without a sense of what you're doing and where you're going, I at least lost a sense of who I was. I could not identify my goal and certainly could not identify the steps to take. . . . There was a sense of dissatisfaction both with myself in feeling helpless and with the program, feeling it wasn't fair that they would do that to me and everybody. I had a feeling it was some kind of path you had to go through to prove that you could be a graduate student—get through the first semester and maybe the first year on your own without cracking and without getting really frustrated. I think frustration is built into the program.

Certainly much of the confusion was simply a result of entering an unknown environment where new norms and styles had to be learned. However, there were other aspects that hindered the ease of entry. Although people were friendly, there was really no organized effort (other than an initial graduate student meeting and a generally ineffective big sister/brother program) to initiate people into the program. Thus, people (unless they were particularly assertive about seeking help) were left to their own devices in sorting out the maze of information. Not only was there an overwhelming amount of information to process, but it was also often contradictory. Faculty and advanced students disagreed about courses, the difficulty of the program, whether there was rampant competition, who should be trusted, etc. It became difficult to know who to believe and trust and how to interpret the messages being sent. This feeling of confusion often led to insecurity and a sort of wariness about the environment. People began to pull inward a bit. They were less willing to take risks until they gained a surer footing and more of a context.

For three of the students the first semester was characterized as
a time where they really lost touch with who they were, their strengths and weaknesses. People seemed to feel more uprooted in this move than they had felt with past moves. They also found themselves dealing with things which were thought to have been mastered in college. Independence, living alone, doing things for oneself, responsibility—all were issues that needed confronting.

My life was more uprooted by this particular move. And my way of life, there was so little sense of continuity between my life style up to this point and here in Amherst. I had a very ego alien quality about the stuff I was doing and saying. . . . It was a semester of a lot of person stuff, a lot of my own stuff. . . . It was coming to grips with stuff I had thought I had already worked out for myself. I made a lot of assumptions in college. For all practical purposes I had achieved adulthood. It shook me up that there was still some stuff that was adolescent crisis.

People were no longer in an environment where others knew them intimately. Thus, they could not be reinforced for being themselves. They were in new territory where every behavior was open to inspection. The novelty and frequency of stimuli caused behaviors which were perhaps less typical of that person in a more normal, secure environment. It was as if everything was exhibited in an extreme, including both good and bad behaviors.

Part of the difficulty in really knowing who one was may have stemmed from not knowing where one stood with anybody. People had somewhat lost touch with old friends and did not quite know the status of the relationship. Insecurities around new, potential friends were at their height. Professors had given very little feedback as yet, so people really did not know where they stood in graduate school. For most
people, the major reference point was their parents. And that often had its difficulties. Parents were probably less familiar with their children than in the past. Thus, they could offer general support and love, but no specific reality testing. In addition, for at least a couple of people, the need to break away from parents (including monetary support) and establish themselves as competent, independent individuals was keenly felt. Thus, parents' concern was both supportive (mostly through emotional propping-up and reminders of past successes) and somewhat stressful, particularly for those who felt they should be making more of an effort to establish their own identities.

For most people concrete, early feedback, particularly concerning academics, would have been immensely helpful. By knowing where one stood, even if it were less than positive, people would have been able to eliminate some of the worry and self-doubt.

I just feel more secure in getting the feedback. Getting the feedback, to me, cuts down on the uncertainty around everything. You know where you stand. You feel competent about yourself. You feel incompetent, yet you know what you can do to make yourself competent. You make yourself the way you want to be.

Because there was such limited feedback people tended to take it very globally and seriously. Little bits of criticism easily achieved mammoth proportions. People expressed the feeling that one comment, negative or positive, had implications about one's person for the next several years.

Maybe it's part of being a first year student. Because you see things very global, like if you don't do good, you're not a good person.
Maintaining personal style, values, and goals was a central issue for everyone. The students were confronted with a relatively novel situation where supportive resources were limited, expectations were generally poorly defined, and a premium was placed on getting along with one's classmates. It was unclear how much flexibility was allowed in one's interests, commitment, and personality. The road to graduate school had been a long haul and people did not want to jeopardize their arrival. This created problems, though, because some people became very self-conscious and concerned about the image they were presenting. On one hand people were reluctant to establish a specific role for themselves without knowing the norms and values of the culture. Yet, on the other hand, they badly needed a very specific role which would establish them as unique, competent individuals in a generally confusing, undifferentiated environment.

The Challenge of Work

The primary concern first year students had about academic work seemed to revolve around issues of competence. People wanted to be seen as professionals. Everyone interviewed indicated they had come to graduate school with concerns about how good they were, whether they could accomplish what they wanted, and whether they were motivated enough to do all the work. Expectations were generally that school would be challenging and exciting. Although anxious about their competence, students came to school feeling excited about the challenges they were going to face.

For some, this attitude did not remain for long. It was quickly
discovered that the classes were not as challenging as expected. This was both reassuring and disappointing. People were relieved to discover they could easily accomplish the work expected of them. Yet, they were also disappointed to find they were not going to be particularly challenged, nor were they apt to learn anything they considered meaningful.

I was very surprised when I came and found the work so easy. I found that out the second day of the semester, about statistics. The course was really junk. The learning class was not difficult. I worked hard and it was just fine. I kept looking at the class schedule and seeing when they were offering advanced stuff and wondering when is it going to be. I don't think I learned anything in that course.

Not everyone felt as comfortable with statistics as the above person. Of all the courses, statistics seemed to cause the most stress and self-doubt. However, this was relieved to some extent by the relatively concrete and immediate feedback about one's statistical competence. This feedback was in direct contrast to other courses and clinical work, where criticism tended to be limited and somewhat general.

The fact that classes were less challenging than expected contrasts with the amount of anxiety people were feeling about school. Especially after Thanksgiving people reported feeling quite overwhelmed by work. Instead of the amount of work, what may have contributed to the anxiety was each person's doubt about his/her ability to motivate him/herself. Several students felt they were on a par intellectually, but were concerned that they lacked the motivation to really do the work.

I saw myself on a part with them intellectually and academically, but not on a part with their motivation. People are work-
so hard. How do they manage to maintain that. Looking back on my past, I resented the kind of person that could be of even energy. . . . I wondered if maybe I was not the kind of person cut out for this sort of thing. Was that really what was required? Am I going to have to change?

Part of the difficulty in motivating oneself seemed to be a result both of unmet expectations concerning classes and a feeling that it was impossible to become involved in what one really wanted to do. If people were feeling thwarted in their pursuits, it became difficult to maintain the initial excitement.

I didn't feel like I was learning anything new, anything I really wanted to learn. My expectations were not being met, the quality of the teaching I was getting, the quality of anything. It was kind of learning to live in this community, but I wasn't being taught anything new. It was learning about people, learning who was who, who did what, that sort of thing. . . . I had all this energy and wanted to get involved in something, but nobody was willing to let me help. Like I was doing things and never got in the mainstream of things. I never really got into anything. . . . The team was fun. I enjoyed that, but my team activities kind of got filtered out.

Although people at this point in the interviews could look back and say that the semester had been easier than expected, when actually in the situation they tended to experience considerably more stress. Work seemed to be more of an imposition than something beneficial.

I'm feeling imposed upon by my work, like I put in a whole day and I want to go home. . . . I do a lot of running around. It takes up a lot of time. My course schedule is spread out all over the week and I have no big chunk of time to sit down and relax. I have to ration out my relaxation time and my work time. . . . It's the first time in my life I've walked around with a watch and a book! I panicked when I lost my watch! Oh, my God, what am I going to do? I'll never know where to be!
The problem seemed to be one primarily of integrating work, play and the establishment of friendships. Often it became an either/or sort of situation, where one either worked or played.

I was sort of prepared for (school to be central in my life), but I never had to dedicate myself to school that much before. Before I came here I said to myself that I would really have to start working now. So I had prepared myself that I would have to study. So it wasn't a real shock but it was a bit of a change, even though I anticipated it. And I really didn't like it.

Another commented,

Everything was large and harried and the only place not to feel swamped and harried was at home where I was alone and lonely. There was not much middle ground.

Several people mentioned the general lack of collaboration and excitement concerning work. For many people, too, when they actually did settle down to work the anxiety about their competence became very evident.

If you make a decision to work, it's like an irrevocable decision. You cloister yourself away either at the library or at home—a dreary sort of thing. And then when you're done there's very little excitement, even in our research team, which is probably the most collaborative bunch of people. . . . Cooperating and collaboration are not the standard procedure here. . . . I think people feel so burdened by the work of doing a Master's that unless they're actively working on it, they need to talk about it. But, they can't because it's too anxiety provoking to talk about it.

Social Comparison

Part of the anxiety about work, especially for some of the students, may have been a result of social comparison. We have previously pointed out that when roles are ambiguous and evaluative standards are unclear
it is likely that people will turn to social comparison as a way of evaluating themselves. Role ambiguity, particularly for first year students, and lack of clear standards are both present in the psychology department, so it is no surprise that several of the students mentioned the issue of social comparison throughout the interviews.

We're all playing the game that everybody cares, nobody cares. Some haven't even admitted yet that we look at each other and say, "How's your working coming? How do I compare? Where am I in the program?" Everybody cares about that. There are no clear-cut other criteria... It's like is the department making me this, that, and the other thing? Are they watching you? Am I under a microscope? There were messages last semester about what was expected and what wasn't. Was some of it competitive, was some of it not? Is this person being nice to me because they want me to be a certain way for them next week? I wasn't trusting a lot of people.

Especially at the beginning of the semester, the comparing seemed to center around who would be the "hotshot, the shining jewel."

Yeah, I think we compared ourselves to other people quite a bit and I didn't like it. Personally, I thought it was bad, the whole competition. The funny thing is that people would state they didn't want competition, but there was still the competition. ... The motivation was to prove to somebody that I'm sharp and I didn't sense the motivation in people that they wanted to advance themselves, learn something for their own sake and for the sake of doing something to help others.

People were generally not directly competitive, but rather exhibited their feelings in "very subtle sorts of ways." People let it be known who they were and what they could do. When asked what effect that had, one person responded:

It makes you wonder where you stand, it did me. The more people talked and I found out what they were doing, I felt more
comfortable. I felt I had just as good a background as the other people. Initially, it was uncomfortable, not knowing just how much this person has done. But when I found out more, I relaxed. I'd done just as much. This was a progression over the first semester. I felt better at the end of the semester than I did at the beginning. This is something that transpired very much at the beginning of the semester, like when you're first meeting people.

Besides comparing themselves to others people also compared themselves to an absolute standard which they had established for themselves. This standard seemed to be based on an ideal model of a clinician and academician.

A lot of my problems were not so much comparing myself with other people as comparing myself to what I should be doing. One of the things I thought about at the beginning of the semester was writing my Clinical I paper and I wanted to do a very good paper. I had a terrible time sitting down and writing it, probably because I didn't feel as though I had a good background in writing. I felt uncomfortable writing. I never got good grades for my writing. It was really not one of my strong points, so I knew I needed a lot of work on it. I would try to write and I would rip stuff up and start all over again. It was a very long, slow tedious process.

Friendship

Intermingled with work and the resultant issues of role ambiguity, lack of standards, and social comparison was the challenge of friendship. This not only involved making new friends, but maintaining the old. After the total loneliness of the first few days, before school began, the exhilaration of meeting new people was pronounced. It was fun getting to know a variety of new people. There was a party atmosphere and people in the class spent a lot of time together playing, complaining, working, and learning about the environment.
People in the first year class got together and sort of felt each other out. Are we going to be in the same boat? Are we going to get to know each other? It was kind of fun. It was interesting. You know you're going to be around them for awhile.

Although early in the semester people had others they could do things with, as the semester progressed the slowness of developing close friends (people with whom things could be intimately shared) was extremely frustrating for some.

My close friends didn't come in the first semester. It was still feeling people out pretty much. I saw the potential for friends. I didn't feel then that I had anyone that I could trust. I do now. I was really feeling low then; that made me feel uncomfortable. Nobody around here really cares about me.

Another person commented,

I never perceived friendship as a challenge. It was a disappointment all along. I've never had that much trouble in finding friends in the past and I was disappointed that I was not able to find close friends. I reasoned that there really had not been the opportunity. I guess I kind of rationalized it. When I thought about it I was lonely. I would say that I felt it more during the middle of the term. At the beginning of the term everything was new and exciting and I didn't have time to think about that. And at the end of the term I was anxious to get away and get home, see my family. So I was looking ahead. In the middle of the semester work began to pile up, things were beginning to drag. There are times when you can't keep coming to Tobin Hall and doing all that stuff. But, the problem with that is there is no place to go except home, so I usually just went home.

People were aware that there was a progression during the semester from feeling quite positive about the class and the potential of friendship to becoming much more disillusioned about that possibility as the semester wore on. While some were relatively comfortable with the lack
of intimacy, others felt the loneliness much more acutely.

That first semester I felt very unhappy sometimes. I would think about that and think about my loneliness and focus on that rather than going out and making friends, being with people. I think I was still very much caught up in the whole thing of wanting to do other things besides psychology. Before things had always been cut off, my close friends were different than my play friends. Here I didn't have a chance to meet those other people.

Although everyone experienced the lack of close friendships, not everyone saw it as an overwhelmingly stressful event. The two people who felt most comfortable with the limited support both had lovers elsewhere on whom they could rely. They also tended to use distant family and friends as primary support systems. They tended to focus on the potential friends available rather than on the lack of a support system.

Like Mechanic's (1962) students studying for their comprehensives, the clinical psychology graduate students also used their group resources extensively. The group was particularly useful in providing instrumental support (primarily information sharing, a place to vent, and people with whom to play and explore the area). Especially at the beginning of the semester the group appeared to be extremely cohesive. While supportive because of the easy contact with others in the group, this cohesiveness also caused some problems.

I was afraid to hate anybody. I couldn't afford to alienate anyone, too little to grab onto. It made me behave in fucked up ways with people. I really felt like I wanted to be an active cohesive force in the group. . . . I wanted the group to be a group. The group didn't want to be a group. When I started realizing that I didn't want the group to be a group anymore and I could hate people, I felt more comfortable. . . . That started to happen at the end of last semester.
As the semester progressed, however, the generally positive feelings toward the group began to dissipate. Some people began to withdraw from the group in very subtle ways. When withdrawal did occur it was often due to anxiety around social comparison, a feeling of being overwhelmed by school work, dissatisfaction with classmates, or not having intimacy needs met.

I think I was feeling somewhat disillusioned about being around X and other people. I tended to start studying and working at home for a couple of reasons. I can't work well at all with people coming in and out, plus people did a lot of griping. They took up a lot of their time griping about this, that, and the other. Some of the people in the first year class were upset all the time. That was fine in the beginning, but I found that dragging myself down, so I started staying away from school. . . . I don't know what's going on here. I really don't know what else to do but make my friends elsewhere. . . . Nobody seems to have much fun. There's no joking around, people really enjoying each other. There's a lot of, 'Well, how are you? How are things today?'' There's just that lack of spark, no enthusiasm. . . . If I can't find it here then I'll go somewhere else.

The basic problem seemed to be that people entered graduate school with expectations about what their classmates and friendship networks would be like based on past experience. When things were not the same, the students often became frustrated and longed for the past relationships or found fault with the new. For some this also led to withdrawal from the class because it was so unsatisfactory.

Another reason for withdrawal was to eliminate the anxiety produced by constantly talking about how awful things were. 30 While the

30 This was also a coping device used by Mechanic's students while studying for their comprehensives.
communication and support were helpful, the constant complaining was not.

Most of the time I was satisfied with just going home after school, because I could kind of forget about everything. Usually when you're with another person you just end up talking about all the things that are hassling you. For me it was better not to have to talk about it.

Everyone at some point mentioned the difficulty of balancing work and the establishment of friendships. While most people were feeling a real lack of nurturance, they were also having to study so hard that there was no time to establish rapport. This was particularly true after Thanksgiving when people were especially busy and also feeling the loneliness the most strongly.

Sometimes I'm very gloomy. Things did decidedly improve dramatically in some ways and yet I feel as if, "Oh my God, what if this is as good as it ever is going to get? I've reached the apex and it isn't enough." I don't feel that this is sufficient sustenance to nurture me through the program. There is no sense of continuity. You're climbing the walls and sit down with somebody and pour out all this stuff and they sympathize and then you don't see them for a week. There is no time to establish any rapport. I see the same people every day and there is only a moment to chat. I'm looking for someone to share joke #4 with and they will know what you're talking about.

In talking about establishing friendships, people throughout the semester discussed their reluctance to burden people with problems when the other had just as many. Those who really had no familiar contacts felt this the most strongly. For some too, the thought of burdening unfamiliar people was related to a fear that these potential friends would somehow become alienated by the sharing of problems.
I really feel that I was in a small handful of people who didn't come here with a strong one-to-one tie--girlfriend or boyfriend, kid or therapist. They have had a greater chance to lay their shit on somebody without having to worry whether they are overburdening them. What is this going to mean for the rest of our relationship? I have an obligation to not over burden them. . . . I didn't want to grab onto someone and say listen to my shit. I've got a lot of shit. I knew they had their own. I wasn't so sure that I could give it back in a reciprocal fashion, that I would be available to them. I feel pretty strongly about things being equal. . . . How could I test their trustworthiness when I was deep in my own problems and needed it. I didn't have the time or energy to test relationships. I was confronted with having met everyone and then having to choose between them. What if I managed to alienate all of them? I had heard enough stories of the damaging effects of first year contacts from upper level students that I worried about it. This is my little world, treat it with tender loving care. I had no way of knowing the implications of my behavior. I have a better sense of that now.

That all the students, except for one, lived alone the first semester contributed to the sense of isolation most of them sporadically felt. Although the privacy was generally appreciated, the difficulty in meeting people was accentuated by living alone. People had to make an even more concerted effort to meet potential friends.

I don't like to live alone for long periods of time. I'm just a real talker. It's easier if someone is just around. I don't have to call someone up and say, "Hey, would you like to come over and talk about something?" They're there. . . . I was never really upset about living alone, but I don't like it for extended periods of time. It's hard to plan interactions with everyone. [As a result of living alone] I may have made more of an effort to talk to people. I felt more sympathetic to others who were living alone. I did go somewhat out of my way to talk to people. I visited people more often than I normally would.

Support

Although friendships were beginning to be established during the
first semester, people, for the most part, did not experience a great deal of emotional support from their immediate surroundings. The class provided a substantial amount of instrumental support around daily tasks of living, but would not provide the intimacy gained from several years of knowing someone. People varied somewhat concerning the distress they experienced as a result of the lack of immediately supportive relationships. One person coped with it by not thinking much about it and relying on relatives, distant friends, and a lover for support needs. S/he gained enough sustenance from these people, plus some support at the University, to feel relatively comfortable throughout the semester.

Having a lover, even if s/he was distant, and/or parents who cared seemed to lend substantial emotional support. These people conveyed an interest, a confidence in the person's ability to handle things, and a commitment to the relationship. Most importantly, there was a past history which enabled the supporter to listen and give honest and helpful feedback.

They just listened, kind of gave the message that, "Yeah, things are tough, but they would work out." They sort of reminded me that I had problems before and I solved them and that I could do it again.

By knowing the person so well it was sometimes possible to understand what the person was experiencing and to pick up on subtle hints that conveyed what the person needed.

I was very good at interpreting my moods and very good at being sensitive to what I needed. Like s/he can tell if I need to go outside and play, just do something silly, have a picnic. S/he's really good at knowing without my telling him/her what would be a nice thing to do. A lot of that is be-
cause we've known each other for so long. And a lot of that is because s/he is a sensitive person. And I think too that love is very supportive. And we love each other a lot and that is very supportive for both of us, in a lot of ways. I think just because it makes you realize that you're worthy of being loved and you are a good enough person that people love you.

Being made to feel that one was worthwhile as a person was a critical source of support. The message conveyed was that no matter what the person did the relationship would still remain stable. Crises had been weathered in the past and they would continue to be weathered. There was the feeling that the supportive people were not making value judgments about the person based on isolated incidents, but were tolerant of the person from day-to-day. It was possible to say what was on one's mind without having to consider the implications it would have for the relationship.

The most salient thing for me is being able to say what's on my mind, what's in my head, even as bizarre as it sounds to me, without someone hearing that as that's all of you.

A commitment to and involvement in the relationship made people feel very secure. They knew they could count on the other person to be there and be supportive. The support was often not asked for and generally consisted of providing a distraction from the problem at hand. Often this involved being humorous and lightening up the mood.

My friend in medical school and another friend, we could joke about stuff together. That would take the tension off. We could sit back and laugh at something, plus he's such a smuk and does so many stupid things. You can laugh at his incompetence and see yourself there, and laugh about yourself and how funny it is. And that's really a support, that humor. That's one of the most important supports.
For people to be truly supportive, it was important for them to be involved in the relationship and also quite honest in their reactions to the person.

Somebody who was supportive didn't pull punches on me. They didn't sit there and be understanding. If I said this is the way I feel about something and they disagreed, they would say, "You are so off, you don't know what you're talking about, this is a pile of shit." They weren't treating me with kid gloves. It mattered to them. They were involved in my life. They sensed when it was time to criticize stuff and sit down and listen to me and when it was best to go away. Every tiny thing didn't jeopardize the relationship.

A number of people throughout the semester mentioned that being in the same boat as other people was quite supportive.31

In a sort of bizarre sort of way knowing that I was not the only one was supportive. It seems a little weird, but there is some assurance to knowing other people around here were having the same kind of difficulties you are.

Although people were quite verbal in explaining either what would be supportive to them or how distant friends and relatives actually were supportive, for the most part, people did not experience what they termed emotional support consistently throughout the semester. People were definitely receiving instrumental support (primarily from the class) and they were getting some emotional support from different people at the University at different times, but it was never consistent or dependable.

---

31 Caplan (1960) and Silverman (1969) discuss this concept extensively.
I managed to get my needs met for the moment I think very well. Most of my despair was that there was no continuity to it. I couldn't depend on it for the next time.

As with every other challenge different people coped with the loneliness and lack of support in different ways. Those who minimized its impact tended to have lovers elsewhere and also seemed relatively comfortable with handling it alone.

I really didn't seek anyone out. I think I handled it myself. I made myself some promises and I would kind of talk myself out of it. I told myself it would be difficult the first few months. You really won't know anyone, so I felt like I talked to myself. And it was effective.

While not enjoying the solitude, these people managed to tolerate it. They also insisted on controlling the amount of worrying they were doing and just acknowledging that the time was difficult, but that it would get better. Others were more verbal and distressed about the loneliness and lack of support. They experienced more depression and self-examination. As has been mentioned previously, both groups relied extensively on distant friends and relatives. The difference did not seem to be a discrepancy in the lack of support, but rather how one reacted to it. Those who concentrated on it tended to feel its impact more.

As the semester progressed people's enjoyment of their work began to increase and for the first time they began to see themselves as budding professionals. This was quite supportive to everyone. Even though times were difficult there was a reason for it, one that had been a goal for many years. People felt proud of themselves for being in graduate school and this was reinforced extensively by friends and family.
As recently as last night I posed the question, "What am I doing here? Why are we putting up with a lot of deprivation for all of us at one point or another?"... I'm getting a lot of enjoyment out of my work now. I'm beginning to feel like I'm establishing myself. The research I'm involved in is genuinely interesting to me. And the people I've met and that I have some intimacy with are good people and people I respect. I don't feel that I'm in as precarious a position as I was last summer.

Another person commented,

I sit back and think I must have had some support to stick it out and make it through. It's supportive now that I have a career that I'm working towards. If I do stick it out, I do have that. That's probably one of the biggest reasons that kept me around.

Positive Aspects of the First Semester

Although people tended to elaborate more on the negative than on the positive aspects of the first semester, people did experience some pleasant moments and did have good things happen to them over those months. However, it was not really until the end of the semester that these could be seen clearly. Everyone liked the area and was excited about the potential of living in New England. People were proud of being accepted into graduate school and excited about meeting new people.

At first it was just the exhilaration of knowing that you've been accepted in the program, knowing that there were people there that considered you worthy or whatever. So, that was a positive thing, right from the beginning. ... (Some other positive things were) talking to some people, discussions in class and that I could contribute, some respect for what I had to say, a feeling that I was less lost than some of the people around me, my mechanisms for handling some of the pressures.

Although times were difficult people were pleased they could meet
the challenge and also felt they would grow as a result of the experience. By mastering this situation they would have an easier time coping with similar challenges in the future.

Emotionally it was upsetting, but I felt challenged too. Rationally, I could sit back and say this is a pretty good thing, but the main thing was the emotion of being in a new place and trying to get my bearings... Looking back now that was a very good experience to have gone through in a lot of ways. Unless you go through things like that you don't know how you act. It's kind of a test. You don't know how you are as a person unless you encounter some of these things. Probably it will happen again, so you get experience. It's good to see how you act in a new place. I'm in a different position now. Now I can say that I could go through this again, but it's because I've done it.

Summary

In discussing the students' views in retrospect of what the first semester had been like, it became apparent that much time had been spent on trying to find a comfortable niche. This process, for almost everyone at various times, was experienced as one of the more important and difficult challenges that had ever been experienced. The interaction of faulty expectations about school, role ambiguity and social comparison, role conflict, role overload, the slowness in developing friendships, and the lack of support all led to increased stress.

Overall, the major challenges seemed to be the assessment of and integration into the department, and the interaction between the large amount of work that needed to be done and the subsequent guilt and anger about its interference with friendship building. Combined with these issues was the wish for intimacy and the longing for those family and friends who were not in the immediate area. Because the environment was
so ambiguous, people spent much of the semester trying to maintain their self-esteem and define a role for themselves. Social comparison was used extensively in this process and resulted in both increased self-esteem and coping skills and feelings of anxiety which, at times, contributed to people's withdrawal from the situation.

In the context of work, establishing one's competence was paramount. This issue produced a great deal of anxiety throughout the semester. However, the anxiety seemed to result from doubts about motivation rather than feeling that one was incompetent.

The development of friendships was slowed by several processes. These were social comparison, the large amount of work, and the fear of burdening people. Although instrumental support occurred throughout the semester, primarily from other first year students, emotional support was received, for the most part, from distant family and friends.

People coped with the stress in different ways at different times. Those who managed to maintain their self-esteem and confidence and also delay gratification were the ones who experienced less stress from the challenges. Also, the semester was not entirely bad. The process of mastering the challenges, or even just living through them, was a positive growth experience for everyone. In addition, people liked the geographical area and looked forward to spending time exploring it.
In this section we will summarize the findings of the three previous chapters as well as examine the process of entering and adapting to a new environment (i.e., the clinical area of the psychology department at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst). We will also attempt to place the findings of this research into a broader context and synthesize the conclusions with those of other researchers. This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first will be the summary, where we will examine the results from the previous three chapters with an emphasis on the process that occurred over the course of the semester. The second part will be a discussion of the concepts of challenge, coping, and support.

**Summary**

In summary, the process of entering graduate school began months before school actually started. During the summer, people established a more or less realistic set of expectations about the program, their classmates, living alone, the amount and difficulty of work, and their existing and potential support systems.

Plunging into a totally new environment that had an unfamiliar context was extremely challenging in exactly the ways I have defined challenge. It was positive and exciting, stressful, and, most importantly, growth producing. Upon arrival everyone experienced a degree of excite-
ment about their new role as graduate student, the challenging and stimulating work environment, and the opportunity to meet new people and to explore a new geographical area. At the same time most of the people were living alone for the first time, perhaps travelling further from friends and family than in the past, and subsequently feeling extremely lonely. They were unfamiliar with the area and just the mechanics of making a major transition were stressful. Moving, finding an apartment, locating stores all took energy. It was stressful in the way that any major move is. Certainly not impossible, but always a hassle. For four of these students, too, the move was directly from college, so they really had not had extensive experience making major transitions like this before. Although entering college as a freshman is similar, everyone indicated that it was not similar enough to help that much in coping with this particular experience.

Added to the hassle of moving was trying to integrate oneself into a large, friendly, but rather ambiguous, department. Although these students were at the top of their class in college, they all, to some extent, began to experience crises of competence. This issue of competence became intertwined with issues of role ambiguity and the lack of consistently clear standards of evaluation. In turn, this led to a reliance on social comparison as a method of self-evaluation.

As people became involved in school they began to discover that the actual academic material was not particularly difficult to master, with the one exception of statistics. In fact, the classes were rather boring and irrelevant. Thus, students were confronted not with an overload of difficult coursework, but rather with the dilemma of having many of
their expectations about school unmet and having to motivate themselves to get unexciting work finished.

Since none of the students knew anybody in the Amherst area before coming to graduate school, establishing friendships became an immediate priority. Initially, this was accomplished through membership in the group of first year clinical students. People spent a great deal of time together exploring the area, finding out about graduate school, and talking about their experience. Especially at the beginning of the semester this proved to be quite supportive. However, as the semester wore on most of the students became somewhat discontent with their fellow classmates and began to long both for more intimate relationships and acquaintances outside of the department. At this point in time the loneliness people were feeling was qualitatively different from the loneliness experienced earlier in the semester. Initially, the loneliness was simply not having access to anybody, whereas later in the semester there were people with whom to interact, but the quality of the relationship was not satisfactory. People did not define their new relationships as either consistently intimate or emotionally supportive. The major source of consistent, intimate, emotional support was from distant friends, lovers, and family. Although intimate and consistent, this support was also diluted by the distance.

The lack of emotional support became compounded by the amount of work that had to be done and, I would hypothesize, by the social comparison resulting from the ambiguous expectations of the program. While desperately wanting and needing to spend time establishing new friendships, people, particularly from the middle of the semester on, were feeling
quite burdened by their work. The question was not so much whether people were capable of the work, with the exception of statistics, but rather if they were motivated enough to give up play and friend-making time. In the latter half of the semester most people were feeling quite resentful of the time given to what they termed irrelevant work and were also beginning to feel quite anxious about whether they could indeed motivate themselves to meet the deadlines. Also, again with the exception of statistics, there had been minimal concrete feedback about people's competencies. Therefore, the students were relying heavily on past performance and social comparison as ways of evaluating their strengths and weaknesses. There was a great deal of communication about where people were with their work and how they were feeling about the program. This communication proved to be reassuring when people realized they were not behind and that others were experiencing similar feelings. It became detrimental and even more anxiety provoking when the communication focused solely on the worry to the exclusion of discovering more active, adaptive ways of coping.

Methods of coping with the challenges over the semester varied from situation to situation and from person to person. Clearly, the more flexible and resilient the person could be, the easier it was to adapt. The use of cognitive defenses to control input from the environment and maintain self-esteem was particularly useful. Many of the students would quite actively remind themselves of past accomplishments and friendships. Trusting that the situation would not remain as difficult and being relaxed were also effective coping methods. Those who became engrossed by the loneliness and anxiety suffered most. Their worry
about one aspect of the situation tended to contaminate other areas, so that from time to time some of the students would feel quite overwhelmed. These onslaughts of anxiety tended to occur primarily right before the beginning of the semester, during the first few weeks, and between Thanksgiving and Christmas—all times when people were feeling either insecure about their capabilities or overwhelmed by work and longing for intimacy that was unavailable.

Although people felt there was sufficient instrumental support (supplied primarily via the first year group of students), there was a paucity of truly emotional support. Needs were met from day-to-day but there was no consistency to the support. Because the students were trying so hard to make friends and there were no intimate allies in the environment, there was rarely a chance to relax. For many, there was a sense of being quite self-conscious throughout the semester. The lack of emotional support was experienced most strongly when people felt that help was generally not freely offered and that hints that might have been acknowledged by intimates in the past tended to be ignored. Emotional support during the first semester came primarily from long distance interactions with past friends and relatives. Also, the two students who had lovers, even though they were distant, generally tended to feel more supported and comfortable with their loneliness.

Although the first semester was generally difficult, it was not unbearable. People felt a sense of accomplishment in mastering the challenges that confronted them. They did begin the process of making friends. They learned they could survive the feelings of loneliness. While classwork was dissatisfying, clinical work and research began to
be reinforcing. Finally, people loved the area and were happy to have a chance to explore it. As difficult as it was, the students, particularly in retrospect, felt satisfied they were struggling with independence and their professional identities.

In the next section we will draw some conclusions about the issues central to the challenges involved in entering graduate school, methods of coping with those challenges, and support needs. These topics will be discussed more generally and implications of this research will be examined.

**Discussion**

To reiterate, the purpose of this thesis was to examine the experience of being an entering clinical psychology graduate student. Through interviews with five participants over the course of a semester it was possible to begin to understand the particular challenges each student had to confront and the response to those challenges. Important mitigating factors in this response were each individual's support network and their way of utilizing defensive tactics to maintain self-esteem and feelings of competency. In the discussion section we will attempt to place the findings of this research into a broader context and synthesize the conclusions with those of other researchers. The conclusions will be divided into an examination of the concepts of challenge, coping, and support.
Challenge

It is apparent that any one of the challenges which confronted the students upon entering graduate school was not overly stressful in and of itself. Everyone had previously moved to a new environment by him/herself (even if it was only to a freshman dormitory), become a member of a group, made friends, been lonely, and accomplished work. Although these challenges are not always pleasant to deal with, they could usually be managed relatively well. Particularly for the students entering graduate school (all competent and relatively experienced) these were challenges that had been mastered at least once before. However, according to the students, the first semester of graduate school was by far the greatest challenge they had ever experienced. Plus, many of the challenges they thought they had mastered previously were cropping up again. I think the reason for this is multi-faceted.

Usually, the challenges mentioned above are experienced independently of each other. For example, although a person is confronted with making new friends, there often is at least one other source of support available. Although people change jobs, it does not necessarily mean that they will also have to move, enter a totally new group, live alone, etc. In other words, challenges that might normally have been experienced separately were instead experienced all at one time, thus creating a particularly challenging situation. Of course, entering college is a somewhat similar experience, but I feel there are critical differences and the students in this study held similar views. It is these differences that contributed to the challenge experienced by the participants.

A major difference for all but one of the students was that for the
first time they were living alone. Although people enjoyed their privacy and independence, they did not enjoy the isolation. They were already isolated by moving a long distance and knowing no one in the immediate area. Living alone just served to increase this isolation. In going to college people were exposed to a large number of diverse individuals through living in dormitories and taking a variety of classes. Graduate school, however, was different. Not only were people living alone, but they were also quite reliant on a very small group of people for their social support and pool of potential friends. No longer were they taking classes in a range of departments or bumping into various people in the communal bathroom and dining hall. People were now somewhat limited to a group of eleven classmates who did everything academically together. Going outside of the group to make friends took energy and time that most people felt they did not have. To add to the challenge, each member of the class was picked to increase the diversity of the class as a whole. Therefore, the class was quite heterogeneous. Although this had advantages in exposing people to a variety of viewpoints and cultural backgrounds, it also may have made it difficult to discover much in common.

The development of the class as a group was a significant event in the process of adapting to graduate school. It was the source of both great support and discomfort. Initially the group did almost everything together. They played, learned, complained, and supported. They were most effective in providing instrumental support (in Goffman's (1961) language--learning the ropes) and helping to ward off loneliness. What is surprising is that the group was less effective in providing emotional
support (i.e., intimate, nurturant friendships) during the first semester. I think there are a number of explanations for this--first, the simple ones. As has been mentioned the group was quite heterogeneous, thus making a common ground harder to discern, at least initially. Secondly, a semester may not be sufficient time for members of a group to develop intimacy, particularly if there are variables in the environment which inhibit that development.

However, going beyond these explanations, it is interesting to examine the process of group development over the semester. While initially everyone was relatively cohesive, as the semester wore on this cohesiveness began to break down. Around mid-semester people began to actively question how much they wanted to be allied with this particular group. For the most part, especially near the end of the semester, the students were not feeling any particularly ongoing, strong, intimate ties with individuals in the group. Although people were making contact and beginning to establish friendships with one or two individuals, most people were quite dissatisfied and disappointed with the group as a supportive structure. While all groups go through a phase of questioning their cohesiveness, some survive this questioning in a more intact manner than others. I would venture that whether a group remains an intact, cohesive unit depends to a great extent on the culture in which it resides. I feel that this group was less cohesive and, ultimately, perhaps less supportive because of a particular culture peculiar to this clinical psychology department.

This culture may be viewed primarily in terms of role ambiguity and its impact on personal functioning. Kahn (1964, 1973) in studying or-
ganizations found that role ambiguity was a primary source of tension, conflict, and low trust and liking for co-workers. He also found that role conflict and overload contributed to stress. Other researchers (Festinger, 1954; Mechanic, 1962; Rosen & Bates, 1967) have indicated that unclear standards for performance lead to feelings of incompetence, competitiveness, and dependency. According to the students interviewed, and my own personal experience with this department, concrete, specific feedback about individuals' strengths and weaknesses is difficult to obtain. The atmosphere of the department conveys a sense of niceness and of getting along, but very little direct confrontation, criticism, or disagreement. Although initially pleasant and friendly, it can also be difficult to analyze quickly and effectively. There are numerous mixed messages and unclear expectations. It is a department which can be quite mystifying. The outward appearance is not always the reality.

Based on the above research and the general atmosphere of the department, it is not surprising that the students experienced some feelings of incompetence and insecurity about their roles. It makes sense that self-concept would be related to the feedback one receives. Therefore, if feedback is ambiguous on nonexistent, one's sense of competence might suffer. One way of coping with this was to utilize social comparison as a way of dealing with the competency issues and assessing what their role should be. Both Festinger (1954) and Gordon (1966, cited in Rubinstein, 1976) suggest that those most uncertain about their abilities, while at the same time feeling quite invested in those abilities, are the most likely to use social comparison. Certainly that would be the case with incoming graduate students. They were entering a new environment
which they were deeply invested in, while at the same time feeling slightly insecure and self-conscious about what their role would be in it. Although there were explicit deadlines and criteria for academic success in the program, it was immediately apparent upon arrival that upper level students often did not meet these deadlines and nothing drastic seemed to happen. Where role ambiguity became particularly noticeable was in relation to clinical work (Rubinstein, 1976). Clear standards as to what constitutes good interviewing and therapy skills are difficult to establish, thus clear, concise feedback was also difficult to provide. Depending upon whom one talked to, there was also quite a bit of ambiguity about who was to be trusted in the department, where the power lay, and who was a good alliance.

I believe that the role ambiguity and subsequent social comparison was for the most part detrimental to the group's development and cohesiveness. If social comparison led to a reaffirmation and development of skills then it was useful, but I think it more often led to feelings of anxiety and incompetence. Mechanic (1962), in discussing social comparison among students studying for their comprehensive exams, found that extensive use of social comparison tended to create feelings of anxiety and incompetence and that people responded to these feelings by withdrawing and avoiding interactions with people in the group. Related to this was a tendency for communication about people's anxiety to arouse more anxiety and ultimately lead to withdrawal. However, the response depended on the amount of social comparison and communication. If people compared themselves or talked about their worries to a limited extent it was usually helpful. People could assess their capabilities,
see how others were adapting to graduate school, and realize that others were in the same boat. However, too much of either one caused stress and withdrawal. I think a similar process was happening with the students I interviewed.

Initially the group was very helpful, providing information, playmates, and a forum for discussion. Later in the semester, however, when people were feeling a work overload and the resultant stress from that, the worry and comparing (which had increased because of the lack of feedback) made some people pull back from the group. At the same time people were also beginning to question how much they wanted to be involved with individuals in the group and were feeling deprived by not having intimate friends either within the group or outside. Not only did the role ambiguity, social comparison, and resultant anxiety have implications for group cohesiveness, but it also had an impact on the development of individual friendships between people in the group. Kahn (1964, 1973) found that role ambiguity leads to low trust and liking for co-workers; others (Festinger, 1954; Rosen & Bates, 1967) have suggested it contributes to feelings of competitiveness; and Mechanic (1962) indicates that this competition (i.e., social comparison), if strong enough, can lead to withdrawal and anxiety. None of these findings would seem to suggest a new theory of friendship building. Instead, it seems likely that much was working against the development of intimacy and friendship. At a time when it was crucial for people to establish supportive relationships, social comparison was causing these relationships to break down. Withdrawal, while temporarily alleviating the problem, eventually resulted in a feeling of isolation and anger at one's fellow students. In
addition, people were no longer in situations where they could usefully compare their strengths and weaknesses. Any opportunity to learn from others was thus diminished.

At this point we will elaborate on the atmosphere of the department as contributing to role ambiguity. As has been mentioned, the norms and cultural reality of the department were somewhat mystifying, particularly upon entry. There seemed to be a preponderence of double messages, with everyone having a particular view of how the department functioned. Students experienced the faculty as sending the following messages: work is going to be difficult and intense; you have to get it in by the deadlines; the group should be cohesive and supportive, not competitive; and this is a friendly, pleasant place to be. In addition, the initial expectations of the students (reinforced by some of the advanced students) were that since this was a clinical program everyone would be supportive and concerned about everyone else. Basically, all messages, both internal and external, said, "Academically this is going to be a demanding time, but you are going to get a lot of support and you should experience very few feelings of hostility and competitiveness with your fellow students." However, as the semester progressed people began to discover that the above messages were not always true. In fact, deadlines did not necessarily have to be met. Although work was challenging in terms of being motivated to do it, the actual difficulty was minimal. There was some support, but it was not of the quantity or quality people had expected, nor was it consistently available. Also, since taboos about questioning the solidarity of the group and utilizing social comparison had been established, people experienced some feelings of anxiety
when they began to very naturally and necessarily do some of these behaviors. This was represented most clearly in people's denial of social comparison processes occurring within themselves, although they very clearly saw it happening with the rest of the students. Rubinstein (1976), in studying the same department, also found that people were unwilling to admit using social comparison as a form of self-evaluation. Because the taboos were so strong it also became difficult to talk about the process, anger and anxiety with those who were most affected. The confusing messages from the environment and the discrepancy between expectations and reality caused people to be unsure of their role and anxious about how to best proceed.

Whereas many groups gain at least some of their cohesiveness by battling against some outside force, it was difficult for this phenomenon to aid in group development with the first year students. The department, being as amorphous as it was, was difficult to approach in any organized sort of way, particularly upon arrival when people were still unsure of their role. Any group effort toward change was often diffused into individual concerns. I think this ultimately led to a decrease in the amount of support the group could provide. Since there were no battles to be fought outside, the natural battles inside gained in importance and impact.

As with role ambiguity, role conflict can be the source of a great deal of stress. The students in this study had to cope with a number of conflicting roles. The norms of our culture say that once a person has graduated from college s/he, at the least, has reached adulthood, along with the resultant responsibilities and privileges. By the time many
people reach the age of 24 or 25 they have begun to establish themselves in a career, are making a decent wage, and may have started to have children. Although the participants in this study had achieved much more status as graduate students, they still remained students. They had not begun their chosen career yet, the work they were doing was often not as highly valued because they were students, they were making inadequate wages, and because of that, for some, were still monetarily dependent on their parents. The role conflict of being an adult and a student at the same time was intensified by what the role of student encompassed. We have pointed out that role ambiguity and unclear standards can lead to, among other things, feelings of incompetence and dependency. This is especially apt to happen with clinical work. Although the students were being told they were professional and competent, in many ways they were subtly encouraged to be passive and dependent. They were told what courses to take (regardless of whether those courses fit their needs); therapy was done under close supervision and observation; there were rules against earning money as a psychologist and rules about the proper dress to be worn in the Psychological Services Center. Although the above was designed to facilitate training (and obviously did to some extent), it also had implications for feelings of self-esteem, competence, and independence.

Almost all the students at one time or another had serious doubts about their competence and had difficulty maintaining their self-esteem. This was quite ironic since all of them were superb students who had

---

1The training clinic for the psychology department.
graduated at the top of their college classes. The feelings of incompetence may be explained, in part, by the role ambiguity experienced by the students (particularly in relation to clinical work) and the anxiety aroused by social comparison. However, in returning to our original hypothesis that the environment contributed extensively to the challenges each student experienced, I would postulate that the culture did not fit where most of the students were in terms of professional development. Instead of fostering independence and exploration it encouraged dependency and loss of competence. If students broke out of this pattern they were likely to be faced with loss of approval from faculty, loss of friendship from students, and the likelihood they would be perceived as a threat. This is similar to Orth's (1963) finding that those business students who did not conform to the group norms were likely to be ostracized socially.

Another aspect of role conflict concerned people's attempts to integrate all facets of their life--spiritual, social, and work. Some of the difficulty resulted from simply not having enough time to fulfill the constraints of each role. A second difficulty was trying to maintain one's personal values in the face of conflicting values from the environment. Especially during the first semester the students were constantly confronting and questioning who they wanted to be compared to whom the department wanted them to be. This is most clearly illustrated by the department's policy of training scientist-practitioners. Not only did one have to be a good academician, but one also had to be a good clinician. This made the students feel like they had to be super people, good at everything the department offered. Also, this often resulted in
people having to postpone their real interests in order to fulfill departmental requirements. Often people were left with a sense of loss of control over their lives, which ultimately led to feelings of depression, alienation, and anger. Again, role conflict, in and of itself, was not an overwhelming challenge (people experience it everyday), but combined with all the other challenges the resultant stress became intense at times.

In addition to role ambiguity and role conflict, role overload (both quantitatively and qualitatively) is also seen as a source of stress. For the students in this study, overload was initially experienced as the amount of work needed to be done and whether there would be enough time to accomplish the task. However, concerns about motivation and competence gradually began to emerge. We have already discussed the issue of competence, so we will now turn to that of motivation.

Although people had a lot of work to do, realistically it was often not that much more than in college. However, the subjective experience of the work (equally valid in terms of stress) was that it was an overload: I think the reason for this was that for the most part the students were not doing meaningful work to them. Thus, their motivation was at a relatively low level. They did not always feel good about their work and these feelings translated to the surroundings. Obviously, everyone did get their work done (and even felt good about it some of the time), but I think this was often a result of the negative consequences that might occur rather than an intrinsic interest in and need for the material. Again, it is important to stress the interaction effect between role ambiguity (in this case limited feedback about work
and feelings of incompetence), role conflict, and role overload.

Another interaction which was very important was that of role overload and the establishment of friendships. We have already mentioned that the development of intimacy may have suffered as a result of role ambiguity. It is clear that this also happened with role overload. Because of the amount of work people felt they were unable to spend time socializing. Yet, they were often quite lonely and longed for intimacy. This became a circular dilemma. People did not have time to make friends, but because they had no friends they did not feel good about their work and were unmotivated to do it. Returning to motivation, Maslow's (1954) theory of need hierarchy would suggest that people cannot be expected to perform well or be motivated if their love and belongingness needs are unmet. The struggle between the need for friends and the need to get work done was constant and lasted throughout the semester. Basically, what was happening was that one challenge (i.e., role overload) was limiting important means of coping (i.e., the establishment of friendships) with the overall challenge. This seemed to happen regularly throughout the semester with all of the challenges and was the source of much of the difficulty. People often had the coping skills, but for environmental reasons could not use them.

Concerning friendships, it is interesting that the students often voiced concerns about forcing friendships. Although they wanted intimacy badly, they wanted the relationship to develop naturally and slowly. They did not want to push anything on anyone. I have the sense that at least some of the people might have been feeling vulnerable from the other challenges they were encountering and did not want to put
themselves in a situation that would make them feel even more vulnerable. Several of the students talked about how they felt self-conscious and tight much of the semester. Perhaps this contributed to the slowness in friendship building. Much of the discussion about friendships is also related to the issue of support. Therefore, we will continue that aspect of the discussion in the support section.

One final topic that needs to be mentioned in this section concerns the impact the more advanced graduate students had on the first year students. All the new students complained about how difficult the advanced students made graduate school sound. The students felt they were already worried enough and hearing others talk about how awful it was just made it worse. It also made them angry because they were not ready to give up their positive expectations as yet. I would hypothesize that at some level the advanced students needed to see the incoming students go through some rite of passage. Graduate school was an important professional stepping-stone. Those who were having a difficult time with it were made quite uncomfortable by those who might not. The process of accepting new students added to the anxiety for the more advanced. Faculty would talk about the brilliant new entering class. Often there was excitement about who might work with whom. It is possible that this was somewhat threatening for those who had been in residence for awhile and were feeling a lack of positive feedback from those same faculty members. This perhaps resulted in the stress on accentuating the negative aspects to the new students.

As has been stressed repeatedly, the experience of challenge was different for everyone and also varied from day to day. No one person
experienced all the challenges at the same intensity as everyone else. I think a major factor that differentiated each person was their particular coping style and the support that was available to them. In the next two sections we will examine those issues more fully.

Coping

In the introduction we stated that coping behavior consisted of several different aspects. These included appraisal and information gathering (Lazarus et al., 1969; White, 1976), cognitive defenses (particularly those used to contain anxiety and maintain self-esteem) (Bettelheim, 1943; Grinker & Spiegel, 1945; McGrath, 1970; Murphy, 1962), the amount of prior preparation (Mechanic, 1962), and the development and use of supportive resources in the environment (Caplan, 1964; Coelho et al., 1963; Orth, 1963). It is suggested that the most effective coping utilizes a strategy which consists of the flexible management of various devices for dealing with challenge (Kahn et al., 1964; Murphy, 1962). In this section we will discuss several aspects of coping based upon the above research, the styles the students used, and generally what seems to be the most effective coping techniques.

As we have mentioned, the challenge becomes magnified when the challenge itself denies an important coping device. This is exactly what happened with appraisal as a coping tactic. All the students recognized that to deal effectively with the environment they needed to assess its components and learn the ropes quickly. Although some were more adept at this than others, it was still a difficult task because of the ambiguity inherent in the environment. Lazarus et al. (1969) indicate that
effective coping involves the searching out of new information and then appraising one's responses based upon previous responses. Since there was limited feedback and information flow, and what was available tended to be confusing, the students had to expend a great deal of energy in order to effectively understand their surroundings. At times, finding all the energy to deal with this and other challenges became problematic.

While it was important to increase the input of information in order to better understand and deal with the environment, it was also important to be able to control that flow of information so that it did not become overwhelming. White (1976) stresses the importance of monitoring and ignoring stimuli which have the potential of creating an overload. This would seem to be a particularly salient skill for the incoming graduate students. They needed to acquire relevant information, but also needed to control the excess information which was apt to make them anxious or lower their self-esteem. However, since there was so much ambiguous, conflicting information, this became somewhat difficult to do. Because it was unclear what was relevant, it was almost necessary to admit excess information in order to sort through it all. Again, an effective coping device became short-circuited by another challenge.

A similar way to control incoming information was to use various defensive devices. In studying students who were about to take their comprehensive exams, Mechanic (1962) found that those who coped best were able to secure information (partly through social comparison) but were also able to defend against anxiety aroused by the social comparison and gathering of information. Defenses commonly used by his students consisted of comforting cognitions, favorable social comparison, humor,
anger at the system, and support seeking. Although the students used all of these defenses to some extent (support seeking will be talked about in the next section), the one that seemed to be particularly effective for the incoming students was a combination of denial and comforting cognitions.

In many of the situations there was a limited amount of active coping people could do. Much of the time any active coping became short-circuited by the various challenges (e.g., friendship building suffered to some extent because of the work overload and the less positive aspects of social comparison) and this led, at times, to a sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, and depression. In reality, people had to be able to delay needs. They had to go through the core course sequence before they could take courses specifically relevant to them. Instant friends are not readily accessible. Therefore, to maintain one's mental health and to minimize anxiety, it was at times necessary to ignore as many aspects of the challenges as possible. The comforting cognitions were particularly useful in maintaining self-esteem and reminding oneself of past accomplishments and friends. One of the students regularly gave him/herself a mini-internal-talking-to, reviewing past successes, reassuring him/herself that things would ultimately improve, and stressing that for the time being it was important to relax and not worry too much. Coelho et al. (1963) and Grinker (1962) also stress the importance of denial and the self-manipulation of feelings as important coping devices.

One aspect of coping that has been discussed in relation to challenge is the utility of prior preparation. Murphy (1962) and Mechanic
(1962), in particular, have emphasized the role previous mastery plays in alleviating the stress of novel and challenging situations. Although generally the students had mastered similar situations, it did not seem to help that much this time. This could be due to a couple of factors. Perhaps the other situations were dissimilar enough so as not to generalize to this one. Or, more likely, people were prepared to handle one challenge at a time, but not all of them at once.

Another way of looking at prior preparation is not to see it as actual mastery of past events, but rather as having accurate expectations of what is to be encountered in the new situation. Thus, people could mentally prepare themselves for the upcoming challenge, even if they were unable to do anything active. This would imply that it is imperative for the department to be as clear as possible about the structure of its organization and culture in order to facilitate a good person-environment fit. By insuring proper fit the department is served because the students are more satisfied and under less stress, thus leading to more productivity and prestige for the department.

In examining Caplan's (1964) list of coping techniques and Maslow's (1956) conception of the self-actualizing person, a picture of the effectively coping person emerges. As a number of researchers (Coelho et al., 1973; Lazarus et al., 1969; Murphy, 1962; Mechanic, 1962) have pointed out s/he actively explores the environment and quickly and accurately perceives the reality of the situation. Slater (1968) suggests this is crucial to the healthy adaptation of the person in an ambiguous, transitory culture. Only by quickly assessing group norms (Orth, 1963) and the surrounding environment is one able to enter. Because of this
particular environment much of this was accomplished through social comparison. The next major coping device is that of establishing friendship and support and being able to ask for help when it is needed. This will be discussed further in the next section. The person who can cope well has a high tolerance for ambiguity and frustration. S/he prioritizes and approaches things on a day-to-day basis rather than worrying about things far in the future. This allows much more control over one's environment and contributes to a sense of self-esteem because day-to-day accomplishments are easily recognizable. The ability to maintain control over as many components of one's environment as possible is important and seemed to suffer with the graduate students because of exigencies within the surroundings, which made it difficult to exercise much control. One exception was with social comparison. Some people managed to control the anxiety by carving out their own niche, thus making it impossible to compare themselves to any other student. Probably the most relevant coping device during the first semester was active mastery of feelings where possible and acceptance of inevitability where not and a basic acceptance of self and others. Those who could flexibly approach their environment, change coping tactics quickly as the situation demanded, and use appropriate defensive tactics seemed to experience the least stress. The major task for everyone seemed to be developing a flexible strategy that allowed one to maintain self-esteem and energy and lower the anxiety level. This allowed the student to stay in touch with the environment in order to appraise it and use the resources available in it. Those who withdrew into isolation, fantasy, and sleep (all done from time to time by these students and Grinker's (1962)) ultimately
were at a disadvantage in terms of effective coping.

Caplan (1964), Coelho et al. (1963), Mechanic (1962), and Orth (1963) all stress the importance of being able to form friendships, utilize peer group resources, ask for help when needed, and establish an effective support system. In the next section we will discuss this as an important aspect of coping.

Support

In the first part of this section we will discuss the relative lack of support the students experienced and the barriers that contributed to that lack. In the second part we will talk about what actually was supportive and how that aided in the student's coping and adaptation.

As was discussed in the introduction, people require enduring interpersonal relationships. In that context people can express feelings and needs, gain a sense of identity and worth, satisfy their dependency needs, and feel worthy of respect and criticism. Cassell (1973, cited in Caplan, 1972) and Orth (1963) both stress the need for social support in order for people to function adequately. All the things that are defined as support serve as protective factors which help people stay healthy. Through enduring patterns of relationships and being embedded in a small network people can receive guidance, help in interpreting ambiguous environmental cues, a refuge when stability and comfort are needed, and general help in mobilizing psychological resources and personal strengths. Key words here are enduring patterns of relationships and being embedded in a small network. With the exception of kin and distant friends, the students did not have the above pattern of support.
They did not have truly intimate local relationships. In some instances support and intimacy can be built quite rapidly, but in others the culture and relationships within it are not so facilitating. The culture of the first year students was such that the combination of challenges, role ambiguity, role overload, and role conflict all led to a diminished sense of support. Although there were the beginnings of friendships for some by the end of the semester, for the most part, people felt a real lack in that area of their lives.

The relative lack of support was the source of some of the most intense stress experienced during the first semester. It was not that people could not make friends because of personality deficits, but rather that the complex environmental challenges combined to make emotional support relatively unavailable. Old friends, lovers, and family, all supportive normally, were suddenly often thousands of miles away. Being supportive over the telephone and through letters, while helpful, was not the same as having the person present and it was difficult to empathize with the daily context and problems the student was facing. Thus, an important source of support (that of helping the person reality test, based on accurate knowledge from the past, about an ambiguous environment) decreased. Distant support could provide reassurance and the student's peer group could help with some feedback, but reality testing based on intimacy, accurate knowledge of the situation, and prior history could not occur. Although supportive in many ways, those distant were also the source of some stress. The students tended to worry about how relationships might change and whether they were being forgotten by their friends. While at times supportive, those trying to maintain
long distance love relationships had an additional strain introduced. Just having all of one's support system distant and no friends locally was lonely and difficult.

Role overload and role ambiguity also hindered the amount of support received. People felt like they had too much school work to indulge in spending time making friends. They felt guilty if they took time to play, but often felt isolated and lonely if they did not. Either way there were negative feelings associated with the process. The role ambiguity hindered support building in several ways. We have said that one aspect of support is conveying the sense that the person is worthy of respect and constructive criticism. Certainly people from the past could convey this, but it was more difficult to receive it from the immediate environment. People really did not know the person well enough to assess if s/he was worthy of respect. Both Mechanic (1962) and the students who were interviewed indicated that effective support and reassurance needs to be meaningful and concrete, not global. At least in this dimension, support was difficult to obtain. Distant supporters could only offer global reassurance because of unfamiliarity with the situation and the peer group could not be particularly helpful because they did not know the person well, little trust had been established as yet, and the environment was hard to interpret. Therefore, giving meaningful feedback and reassurance about how the individual was fitting into the environment was difficult.

In the introduction it was suggested that role ambiguity can lead to social comparison as a means of assessing one's status and capabilities. The process of social comparison contributed its own barriers to
the building of social support. It may have caused people to focus on their own sense of self-worth, and, especially at the beginning of the semester, on the resultant insecurities. If people were feeling insecure about their own capabilities, it is unlikely they would want to help others focus on their own strengths. A competitive environment does not often breed collaboration and caring. It has been suggested (Kahn, 1973; Mechanic, 1962) that role ambiguity and social comparison lead to anxiety and subsequent withdrawal from the anxiety provoking stimuli (in this case, the other students to whom one is comparing oneself). Certainly withdrawal from a potential support group is harmful to long term support building. Kahn also suggests that role ambiguity leads to distrust and low liking for fellow workers—again, another barrier to support building.

It is here that the interaction between the challenges (in this context, support) can be shown quite clearly. Most of the students felt they were receiving insufficient emotional support. However, it is difficult to point a finger at any particular source. We have discussed the role social comparison and role ambiguity might play. There are two additional aspects which need mentioning.

As mentioned in the results, the students were very reluctant to ask for support directly (something that Caplan (1964) and Coelho et al. (1963) stress as important for effective coping and adaptation), so instead they would drop comments indicating they were in need of support. Often these hints were ignored. One explanation is that the potentially supportive person did not know the new student well enough to recognize the hint, assuming instead that everything was all right unless otherwise
indicated. Another explanation is that, at some level, potential helpers really did not want to become seriously involved with the incoming students. Because the new students initially needed a great deal of support, people may have been somewhat afraid to step into that vacuum. Conceivably, if they were the first to offer a helping hand, they might have to take primarily responsibility for being the new person's support system. If one is already relatively overloaded with work and interpersonal relationships, taking on a new, somewhat needy friend could be a more time consuming experience than people hoped for. Whether, in reality, people were feeling that way towards new students is hard to assess.

If the above conceptualization is correct, then it is not surprising that the students were unwilling to ask directly for emotional support. They were somehow aware of this feeling among advanced students and therefore did not risk rejection or putting the other person on the spot by asking for something that would be difficult to get. Many of the students, in discussing their unwillingness to ask for emotional support, indicated that their primary consideration was not wanting to burden the other with unwanted problems. Whether this response was a result of a cultural prohibition against asking for support, a fear that one would be rejected, simple projection, or the feeling that one should and could handle it alone, the end product was people often feeling unsupported by those in their immediate surroundings. I think this had an effect on long-term support building as well. By people feeling they should handle the challenge of graduate school on their own, they did not go through the sharing process which is essential to friendship building.
People felt comfortable asking for instrumental support (i.e., information, advice about school, sharing of experiences, etc.), but had difficulty requesting the emotional aspects. We have mentioned that people sometimes felt self-conscious, unsure, and tight about their roles. Perhaps another reason for not asking for emotional support was that the students did not want to appear weak. If they had to ask for support, then obviously they were having trouble, which meant they were not as strong and composed as a good graduate student should be. In a highly individualistic department it is hard not to get the impression that everything, including being supported, should be done by the individual.

Elsewhere in the discussion we talked about the role conflict of being a student, a professional, and an adult and the feeling of dependency and incompetence that often results. There is also evidence that poor social support from one's immediate supervisor and others at work leads to high levels of dependency (Caplan et al., 1975). Although that research was done in a more business-oriented organization, it may still have bearing on the graduate students in this study. Too much support can be infantalizing and lead to people's diminished ability to grow, but, on the other hand, this can happen with too little support as well. As with challenge, there needs to be an optimal level of support for people to be productive and healthy.

Although most of the students felt they received little emotional support from their immediate surroundings during the first semester, this does not mean they did not receive any support at all. The first year class, and individuals in it, provided a great deal of instrumental support and companionship. Family, distant friends, and lovers supplied
the majority of emotional support, although it was somewhat removed and
diluted. We have also discussed how these two sources of support con-
tributed to the challenge occasionally.

The class was most supportive by contributing to something Caplan
(1960) and Silverman (1969) refer to as the "same boat" phenomena. By
being in the same situation and experiencing similar challenges the
students were able to provide each other with emotional and social sup-
port as well as useful information about coping with the challenge.
Just knowing that somebody else was experiencing the same things and at
times having difficulty with them was tremendously reassuring. Here is
an example of the helpfulness of social comparison. Confronted with the
myriad of challenges, it was sometimes difficult to maintain one's self-
esteem. It was easy to feel isolated and maladjusted because of the
difficulties one was facing. By interacting with others in the "same
boat" it was possible to better assess where the problem originated and,
through observation, learn new ways of coping.

Coelho et al. (1963), Mechanic (1962), and Orth (1963) all felt
that the active exploration and use of human resources in the environ-
ment was essential to effective coping. By using the group as a support,
people were able to clarify who they were and what their role would be
in relation to a new environment, further their intellectual and informa-
tional knowledge, conserve energy by pooling information necessary for
integration into the department, and receive support during crises. In-
dividuals within the group were the most helpful when they could provide
an escape for the person, most often through humor or play, so they were
not continually dwelling on the ever present challenges.
Although the students did receive instrumental support relatively consistently, there was generally no continuity to the emotional support people were receiving. Local support fit a more crisis oriented model rather than one of stability and dependability. Ongoing, intimate, daily support was difficult to find during the first semester. The exception to this, however, was the support received from family, distant friends, and lovers. While it did not occur daily because of the distances involved, it had the qualities which were described by everyone as truly supportive. The three major aspects to this support were having a past history, making the person feel worthwhile and loved, and feeling that the support was freely given rather than having to ask for it.

Having a past history contributed greatly to support in general and to the other dimensions above. The length of the relationship gave a sense of intimacy and stability. The students knew that whatever they did they would continue to be loved and admired. They could be themselves and not have to worry about the impression they were leaving. Because there had been an extensive past history, the supportive person could easily and accurately give feedback. There was an honesty in the relationship so that the feedback could either be in the form of criticism or praise. Whatever form it took, it was valued and relied on. The reality testing capabilities of a supportive relationship were essential. By communicating the expectation that the student was capable of handling any situation and doing anything s/he wanted, and reminders of past accomplishments, the student's self-esteem was boosted substantially—something that many of the students needed during the first semester.
While supporting attempts at being independent, especially the family was quite comfortable in allowing the student to be dependent when necessary. This was most obvious in terms of financial aid. All but one of the students was receiving some money from parents. Monetary help was not just the province of parents. When it was offered by a friend the support was felt deeply.

In contrast to feelings about fellow students, the issue of burdening friends and family was seldom felt. Several things occur to me as reasons for this. First, there is a certain amount of obligation involved in being kin or an intimate friend (Bott, 1971; Craven & Wellman, 1973), therefore people may not have felt as guilty about asking for help. Second, because of past history there was a reciprocal quality to the relationship, so even if one person was burdening the other at the moment, both knew the favor would be returned at a later date. Third, often support did not even have to be requested. Because the student was known, the subtle hints (which were ignored by others) were quickly and easily recognized. Since the support was so freely given it made the student feel cared for and valued.

In terms of coping with the lack of support, the most effective method seemed to be developing enough contacts so the beginnings of a supportive network could be established and then not dwelling on the matter further. In other words, the use of denial and delay were effective coping devices. Through denial people could control the amount of anxiety they were feeling and through delay they could cognitively reassure themselves that intimacy would ultimately occur. Those who focussed on the lack of intimacy were the ones who felt the most distress.
Summary

In summary, the discussion has examined some of the challenges that confronted the first year clinical psychology graduate students, their methods of coping with those challenges, and the role social support played in the process. The framework used to study challenge emphasized: 1) prior experience and mastery, 2) the anticipatory nature of the challenge, and 3) the number of helpful unambiguous resources within the environment, with a focus on the latter. It was suggested that felt stress was a result of the large number of challenges experienced at one time with role ambiguity and the resultant social comparison, role conflict, and role overload as major contributing factors. We indicated that the above challenges may have had an adverse effect on the development of intimacy, friendship building, and support.

In discussing coping, we suggested that effective coping was a function of prior experience and mastery, accurate expectations, the effective use of defensive tactics, quick and accurate appraisal of the environment, and the effective use of social support. In general, the person who could deal most flexibly with the environment (using whatever coping technique was appropriate at the time) was the one who adapted most quickly and least stressfully.

The support sectionreviewed some barriers to support (e.g., role ambiguity, social comparison, unwillingness to request support, and others not recognizing hints when they were dropped) and discussed two very effective sources of support (the first year class as a system and distant family, friends, and lovers).
REFERENCES


Caplan, G. Support systems. Keynote address to Conference of Department of Psychiatry, Rutgers Medical school and New Jersey Mental Health Association on June 8, 1972, at Newark, New Jersey.


Gordon, B. Influence and social comparison as motives for affiliation. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology Supplement, 1966, 1, 55-


Rosen, B. & Bates, A. The structure of socialization in graduate


Todd, D. & Silver, E. Social support and the personal community: A bibliography. Unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, 1974.


White, R. Strategies of adaptation: An attempt at systematic description. In R. Moos (Ed.), Human adaptation: Coping with life cri-
Interview Guide

Challenges

Can you list, in the past few weeks, what has been challenging for you? For example, what has been new, unexpected, and difficult to handle in a comfortable, routine way? Challenges could include statistics, friends, loneliness, living space, transportation, feelings about home, getting acquainted with area, deciding what to do, meeting classmates for the first time, socializing with classmates, etc. Be sure to describe a few challenges in detail.

Generalizations about Challenges

Conceptualize what it was like the last few weeks, generalize. Was it a very challenging time? How about compared to other people? Do you see any patterns in the challenges or categories? How much challenge was expected?

Did they internalize or externalize challenge? What is mode of handling situation? What makes them see something as challenging?

Coping with Above Challenges

Pick representative samples of some of the challenges. Try to think about your behavior and psychological reaction during them. What kinds of things make you perceive it as a challenge (e.g., past experience, the community, reality)? How did you handle the challenges (talked with other people, got depressed, avoided it, comforting actions or thoughts that have helped)?
Generalizations about Nature of Coping

Difficulty of coping? Can you see patterns in way of coping? How did you experience challenge (run away from, learn from, enjoy it)? How do you deal with challenge psychologically (defense mechanisms)? How do you act toward the challenge (do things about situation, getting help)?

General Coping

In the past few weeks how have you found out about this area, school, etc? Has the community around you done anything that has been helpful for your adjustment? Are there any people who have been particularly helpful? When you have been upset lately what do you do? Is there anything that makes you stop being unhappy? Assuming that you have felt anxious in the past week, what has precipitated the anxiety, what have you done about it? Do your fellow students ever make you anxious, how? Do you ever compare yourself to other students? How does this make you feel when you do compare? Have you noticed any norms set up by your class? How do they affect you? What kind of pressures have you felt from the class?

Preparation for Challenges

In the weeks prior to coming here, what were your fantasies about being here? Did you think it would be difficult making this change in your life? What were you afraid of? What were you looking forward to? What were your reasons for going to graduate school? Are you aware of any particular strengths in yourself that may make it easier for you to
adjust here? How about any weaknesses that may make it difficult? Did you do anything particular to prepare for coming to graduate school either emotionally, physically, or in life style?

Support

Can you define what support means to you? Who are the closest people to you right now? What makes them supportive rather than others? Are there particular people who make you anxious, how about who make you feel good? Can you characterize these people, what they do to make you feel that way? What makes a person supportive rather than others? Is it possible to behaviorally describe what is supportive, actions or verbalizations? In the past few weeks has there been a situation where someone was particularly supportive (not supportive)? Describe the situation.

Is there anything this program could be doing that would be more helpful to your adjustment? Is there anything the area is doing to hinder your adjustment?