

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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With a constant barrage of role ambiguity, time pressures, and seemingly never-ending social problems affecting daily life, stress has become a significant aspect of many individuals' existence. Coping has become increasingly recognized as one of the major interceding variables involved in the effects of stress. The present study investigated the relationship between stress and coping strategies in a university population. Participants were 86 undergraduate student volunteers: 50 traditional students (25 men and 25 women) and 36 nontraditional students (15 men and 21 women) enrolled in introductory and developmental psychology classes. The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) was used to assess three different coping strategies: task-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping, and avoidance coping. Results indicated that traditional students utilized avoidance coping strategies significantly more than nontraditional students. There were no significant relationships between gender and coping strategies. Despite having had more experiences with varied life stressors, the relationship between nontraditional students and coping appears to be less direct than predicted. Future research investigating this area should consider including a larger number of participants within each group in order to ensure greater generalizability.

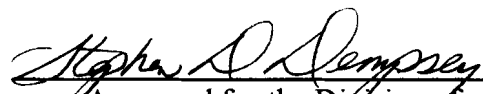
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE COPING STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY
TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

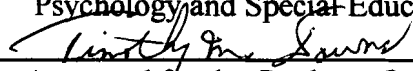
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With a constant barrage of role ambiguity, time pressures, and seemingly never-ending social problems affecting daily life, stress has become a significant aspect of many individuals' existence. The stress response appears to have developed so that individuals can exercise some degree of control in physically and mentally threatening situations (Paterson & Neufeld, 1995). Researchers have recognized the potentially powerful and pervasive impact that stress can have upon both an individual's behavior and physiology. Stressful life events increase the possibility that physical illness as well as psychological ailments will emerge. Supportive evidence, however, is somewhat contradictory. A positive relationship between the amount and severity of stress in an individual's life and declining health have been continually noted and investigated for years (Pelletier & Herzog, 1989; Steptoe, 1989). On the other hand, Kessler, Price, and Wortman (1985) demonstrated that not all individuals who find themselves confronting burdensome and draining life stressors will automatically become markedly affected. Thus, some individuals are more affected than others by stress.

Coping

While research into the association between individuals and stress has examined several different areas, the concept of coping has become increasingly recognized as one of the major interceding variables involved in the effects of stress. Broadly speaking, coping involves an individual's cognitive and behavioral actions used to manage the demands, both internal and external, of a stressful or interrupting occurrence that may strain one's capacity to adjust (Zeidner, 1994). A commonly held notion is that how individuals experience and cope with daily problems will ultimately determine the extent to which they are affected (Terry, 1994).

Coping strategies play a significant role in adapting to stressful life events.

Coping is viewed as a stabilizing factor that can aid individuals in sustaining

psychosocial adaptation during perceived periods of stress (Abella & Hesslin, 1989; Valentiner, Holahan, & Moos, 1984). Several different styles of coping strategies have differential effects on emotions and emotional outcomes (Cantazaro & Greenwood, 1994). For example, some coping strategies are considered to be active, in that individuals confront a problem or source of stress directly. Active coping strategies are often seen as having a more positive effect on an individual's well-being. However, other coping strategies may entail avoiding or not confronting a specific stressor, thereby leading, in the long run, to a poorer or meager adaptation to stress. Thus, coping style may dictate successful adaptation to stress.

When examining the nature of the relationship between stress and coping, the academic environment readily presents itself as a context wrought with day-to-day challenges and demanding stimuli directed at the individual student. During their experience in the university setting, adults of all ages must learn to live and cope with anxiety related to attending lectures, completing assignments, and taking tests. Such anxiety results in stress related to feeling overloaded, being pressured for time, having divided loyalties, and experiencing challenges to self-confidence. The relationship between stressful events and coping suggests that how these students deal, or cope, with these unsettling situations will interact with intellectual ability to affect performance. Because of the situation created by the academic environment, university students are a prime accessible population to study when examining stress and coping.

Certain coping strategies utilized in academic environments have a tendency to buffer the effects of daily academic challenges, allowing for less susceptibility to the adverse impact of continuous environmental stressors. As many as 84% of college students applying for mental health services report presenting problems arising from stressful circumstances and difficulties coping with these circumstances (Cantanzaro & Greenwood, 1994). A better understanding of the relationship between coping and

academic related stress could help influence the coping strategies students utilize in dealing with academic stressors and assist them in employing the most adaptive response.

Models of Stress

The experience of stressful life events is an important factor in individual functioning. Because of its importance in both psychological and physiological health, a sizable amount of research has been directed at the issues surrounding the concept of stress. It is generally believed that the stress response developed as an adaptive measure for individuals to use in exercising control in physically or mentally threatening situations. The link between stress responses and one's perceived control over a particular situation has become a central issue in stress research (Paterson & Neufeld, 1995; Valentiner et al., 1994). The process of coping appears to be the intermediate variable that is most important in this relationship; hence, the central aspect of situational control is dependent on the coping response.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed a transactional model of stress to describe the dynamic interaction between an individual's cognitive assessment of a situation and the coping response which follows. In their paradigm, the primary appraisal of harm/loss, threat or challenge influences one's coping response to a stressful event. They further postulated that cognitive appraisals are influenced by such factors as values, goals, and motivation/personal commitment. Thus, stress is a process or transaction between the individual and the environment, leaving the actual stimulus to be regarded as simply one aspect among many. They conclude that cognitive appraisals explain why individuals express differences in assessments and reactions to similar stressful events.

Santiago-Rivera, Bernstein, and Gard (1995) followed up on the transactional model of stress by proposing an additional element known as "centrality." This concept takes the dynamic person-environment interaction into account and attempts to explain individual differences in the appraisal of and reactions to similar life events. Centrality is the degree of importance given to certain fundamental issues that are triggered by

situations and events. Such fundamental issues are formed through the dynamic developmental processes encompassing an individual's cumulative life experience. Thus, centrality is a factor that is associated with an individual and contributes to the type of cognitive appraisal that is made. When using the central or fundamental issue of "achievement" within an undergraduate college population, it was found that this central issue interacted with or seemed to elicit a "challenge" oriented cognitive appraisal from the students, thereby being more predictive of direct and planned coping strategies. Thus, Santiago-Rivera et al. (1995) concluded that college students who identify achievement as highly important seem to use more problem-solving or task-oriented coping strategies when faced with a stressful situation appraised as challenging.

When examining the relationship between stressful environments and situational control, an individual's perception of having situational control seems to be contingent on the availability of a choice between different coping options (Paterson & Neufeld, 1995). Having available choices between different options seems to help in reducing the impact of a stressor and seems to be somewhat more adaptive. A primary determinant of anticipatory stress is the extent of the impact of the least threatening of the alternatives available. Therefore, individuals will tend to select and act upon the coping option with the most pleasing outcome, simply because less attractive options offer them relatively little sanctuary from the perceived threat of the stressor and its consequence.

Assessments and Determinants of Coping

Endler and Parker (1994) have differentiated among three basic stress coping styles: task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance coping. Task-oriented coping or "approach" coping as it is sometimes called, refers to managing or solving a problem by removing or taking some sort of action upon the stressor. Emotion-oriented coping refers to regulating, reducing or eliminating the emotional arousal surrounding the stressor. Avoidance strategies refer to managing stress by either person-oriented strategies, which

involve the seeking of others in order to evade a task, or engaging in a nonrelevant task in order to avoid a target task.

In general, more "approach" or task-oriented coping strategies are associated with better psychological outcomes and greater adaptability. Emotion-oriented and avoidance coping, on the other hand, are often equated with poorer outcomes, simply because they often fail to address the stressful stimulus (Holahan & Moos, 1987).

Some investigators have proposed that an individual's choice of coping response is heavily influenced by social support. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define social support as the resources an individual "draws on in order to cope" (p. 158). Thus, social support can be viewed as a form of coping assistance. For example, advice and encouragement from a friend or companion could, perhaps, increase the likelihood that an individual will rely on logical analysis, information seeking, or active problem-solving. Holahan and Moos (1990) found that individuals with more personal and social resources were more likely to rely on approach or task-oriented coping styles and less likely to use avoidance coping.

Valentiner et al. (1994), however, proposed that the adaptive significance of approach or task-oriented coping versus avoidant and emotion-oriented coping strategies may depend on the controllability of the stressors that are confronted. Event controllability may lessen the role of coping in reaction to stress by both shaping the choice of one's coping strategies, thereby influencing outcomes. Evidence suggests that when stressors are viewed as more controllable, individuals will utilize more approach or task-oriented strategies and less avoidance or emotion-oriented coping. Moreover, it is suggested that psychological outcomes are influenced by the fit between appraisals of controllability and the choice of coping strategies.

Head and Lindsey (1987) asserted how an individual experiences and copes with environmental stressors is multiply determined and is a function of the ongoing transaction between the individual and environment, contextual and personal

determinants of coping behaviors, and anxiety. University environments and examination situations are commonly viewed as rich opportunities and promising areas of research for understanding how people cope with ego-threatening social evaluations or how coping impacts affective and cognitive outcomes. Zeidner (1994) examined the coping strategies that were utilized by undergraduate college students in an examination situation. Data revealed that utilizing task-oriented coping behaviors in a stressful situation tended to buffer the effects of day-to-day academic challenges and anxiety in the college community. However, emotion-oriented coping behaviors were typically associated with poor adaptation to stress, mainly because such strategies often involve a total failure to ever confront the stressful event. Thus, the study concluded that particular coping responses were predictive of different levels of emotions (namely, anxiety level) and adaptive outcomes (enhanced overall coping to day-to-day hassles).

Dispositional variables have also been explored in relation to choice of coping responses among college students. Cantazaro and Greenwood (1994) examined coping responses in relation to negative moods, negative expectancies, and negative life events. Active or task-oriented coping responses were found to be utilized more frequently with positive moods, expectancies, and life events, whereas more avoidant responses seemed to be prevalent with college students experiencing negative moods, expectancies, and life events. Staats, Atha, and Isham (1990) found that negative affect declines as young to middle-aged adults grow older. They argued that cognitive appraisal and coping skills are enhanced as a function of experience.

Nontraditional Students

Over the previous decade, the number of older students pursuing higher education has been surpassing that of younger, more traditional aged students (Heretick & Doyle, 1987; United States Department of Education, 2000). Between 1990 and 1997, the United States Department of Education estimated that enrollment of persons 25 years of age and older grew by 6%, a trend expected to continue throughout the new decade.

Thus, the university system is turning its attention towards identifying the needs, concerns, and interests of a group known as "nontraditional" students. Nontraditional students are individuals 25 years of age and older who are undertaking a college education for the first time or returning to college for additional undergraduate work (Yarbrough & Schaffer, 1990).

In examining the relationship between nontraditional and traditional students, Kasworm (1982) asserted that nontraditional students have different psychological, psychosocial, and behavioral needs. Although nontraditional and traditional students share some similar needs, nontraditional students are more often confronted with problems relating to multiple life roles and the dilemmas that often result from the roles of spouse, parent, and employee. With a variety of simultaneous life roles, it is not uncommon for the nontraditional student to experience substantial amounts of stress related to role confusion and divided loyalties. Query, Parry, and Flint (1992) found that unmoderated stress can result in feelings of anger, frustration, guilt, and even depression.

In examining the relationship between age and vulnerability to stress in a university population, Clarke (1995) found older students to be significantly more vulnerable to the effects of stress than younger students. The researcher concluded that despite positive reports as to the benefits of life experience (Staats et al., 1990), older students tended to have worse health habits such as diet and significantly less social support than younger students, thus making them significantly more vulnerable to stress.

Yarbrough and Schaffer (1990) found that nontraditional students tend to have more anxiety over numerous aspects of the college experience than traditional students. The researchers assert that the heightened anxiety level appears to be related to a lack of confidence in current academic skills and to fear relating to a decline in ability since last attending school. Although nontraditional students acquire valuable skills through more varied life experiences, these skills are not always congruent with those measured in academia.

University counseling centers and other intervention specialists would greatly benefit from the exploration into the relationship between stress and coping strategies within this particular subpopulation. By increasing our knowledge of the coping responses most often utilized by nontraditional students as well as traditional college students, individualized stress-management interventions and counseling could be enhanced, thereby allowing for more positive and adaptive outcomes within the academic environment.

Gender

Ptacek, Smith, and Zanas (1992) reported that a current trend in coping research encompasses the issue of gender. Two major hypotheses have directed much of the gender-related research. The socialization hypothesis is founded on the general notion that women and men are socialized to deal with stressful situations in different ways. It is suggested that due to sex role stereotypes and differing role expectations, men are socialized to deal with stress instrumentally, while women tend to express more emotion and engage in emotion-focused coping methods. Banyard and Graham-Bermann (1987) assert that traditional sex-role socialization instructs women to be more frequently passive and accepting of stressful situations than men.

Both Folkman and Lazarus (1980) and Billings and Moos (1981) assert a second hypothesis about gender differences which focuses on the structural aspects of the environment. Specifically, gender differences in coping may be linked to contrasts in the different kinds of stressors with which women and men are confronted. Since it is believed that specific categories of stressful situations require distinctive methods of coping, women and men should appear to cope differently. Women often experience more stress related to health and family while men often experience more stress related to work and finances. When confronting the stress, men often demonstrate more active, direct coping while women engage in more passive, emotion-focused coping and social support (Hamilton & Fagot, 1988; Stone & Neale, 1984).

However, when examining the processes involved in coping with stress, Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) noted that a number of strategies are specifically utilized to different extents by male students and female students as early as adolescence. Female adolescents have a tendency to use more social support, direct action, and more emotional expression. Additionally, female adolescents generally attempt to problem solve and are more self-reliant. Male adolescents, on the other hand, use more withdrawal and acceptance when confronted with stress.

When examining the amounts of stress experienced by both male and female students at the academic level, Yarbrough and Schaffer (1990) found that nontraditional female students, in particular, often face more numerous and conflicting roles. This stress appears to be related to the role confusion often created from balancing the responsibilities of mother, employee, and homemaker (Yarbrough & Schaffer, 1990).

Rationale

Recently, the concept of coping has become increasingly recognized as a major variable involved with stress. An individual's coping response to stressful life events can be a critical component in determining the impact of the event upon one's functioning. Therefore, it appears that one's style of coping can be either adaptive in addressing stressful situations or inadequate and predictive of poor situational outcomes.

By obtaining knowledge about the differing coping strategies being utilized by traditional and nontraditional students, perhaps the most beneficial strategies and productive coping responses to stress could be employed to achieve more adaptive and positive outcomes. Such an approach would allow university students and university intervention specialists to employ a more preventative approach to aversive stress outcomes, thereby providing vast implications for stress management and other combative strategies.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationships between stress and coping strategies in a university population. Although all students experience

some degree of stress and engage in subsequent coping strategies, the study specifically focused on which strategies were being utilized by traditional and nontraditional students. Additionally, possible gender differences in coping strategies were examined. Four hypotheses were investigated:

1. Nontraditional students will utilize active or task-oriented coping strategies more often than traditional students.
2. Traditional students will utilize avoidance coping strategies more often than nontraditional students.
3. Traditional students will utilize more emotion-oriented coping strategies than nontraditional students.
4. Male students, regardless of traditional or nontraditional status, will utilize more task-oriented coping strategies, while both traditional and nontraditional female students will utilize more emotion-oriented and avoidance-coping strategies.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 86 undergraduate student volunteers: 50 traditional students (25 men and 25 women) and 36 nontraditional students (15 men and 21 women) who were enrolled in introductory and developmental psychology classes at Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas. Traditional students were defined as those individuals who were under 25 years of age and did not have children. Nontraditional students were defined as one or more of the following: (a) those individuals who were 25 years of age or older; (b) individuals who had not undertaken formal education for a minimum of 2 years; or (c) individuals who had children. Participants received class points for participation.

Design

The independent variables for this study were student status (traditional or nontraditional) and gender. The dependent variable was the participant's score on the task, emotion, and avoidance-oriented coping subscales comprising the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations.

Instrument

The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) was used to assess three different coping strategies consisting of task-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping, and avoidance coping. Developed by Endler and Parker (1990), the CISS measures multiple dimensions of coping and is based on their original instrument called the Multidimensional Coping Inventory. The CISS is a 48-item scale and consists of three 16-item scales assessing task, emotion, and avoidance-oriented coping. Two additional subscales are provided in the avoidance-oriented scale which assess methods of coping by using distraction and social diversion. The normative samples consisted of 537 English speaking North American adults (249 males and 288 females), 1242 English

speaking North American undergraduates (471 males and 771 females), and 302 psychiatric inpatients (164 males and 138 females). Participants are asked to indicate how much they engage in various behaviors when confronting a stressful or upsetting situation. Items are assessed on a 1 (Not at All) to 5 (Very Much) Likert scale.

Scores from the three coping subscales of the CISS are created by summing together the weighted responses to the items endorsing each subscale from participants' answer sheets. Scores for each subscale range from 16 to 80. Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the coping strategy represented by the subscale. The total CISS score is converted to a standard T-score ($M = 50$, $SD = 10$) using a hand scored profile form created by the test publisher to enable comparisons between the different coping styles.

The CISS is reliable across a variety of different situations and populations and valid for the three coping subscales. The CISS has demonstrated eight week test-retest coefficients for the task, emotion, and avoidance subscales of .74, .66, and .68, respectively (Endler & Parker, 1994). Cronbach alphas have been found to range from .76 to .91. Its factor analytic structure has proven to be consistent for adolescents, college students, normal adults, and psychiatric groups. Factor analyses, utilizing a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation for each sample, rendered congruence coefficients for the three subscales of coping to be above 0.97, which suggests that factor structures are consistent across populations (Endler & Parker, 1990). The supplement to the Thirteenth Mental Measurements Yearbook (1999) reports that the CISS is the best instrument of its kind available for assessing the multidimensions of coping, due specifically to its reliability and factor structure.

In addition to the CISS, a demographic form requesting information concerning age, gender, classification, marital status, and number of children was used in order to better verify the aforementioned criteria necessary for participation in this study. Students were requested not to place their names on the form.

Procedure

Potential participants were recruited through the use of posted sign-up sheets. Interested individuals signed up for one of four group meetings scheduled at different times on the same day and at the same location. Each sign-up sheet listed the specific criteria required of each participant to be included in a particular group meeting. Thus, individual participants were required to meet the criteria for only one of the four groups: (a) male, less than 25 years of age, no children; (b) female, less than 25 years of age, no children; (c) male, at least 25 years of age and/or who has not undertaken formal education for two years and/or who has children; (d) female, at least 25 years of age and/or who has not undertaken formal education for two years and/or who has children. The latter two groups consisted of criteria relevant to meeting the definition of 'nontraditional student' for the purposes of the present study. Each sign-up sheet recruited a range of 15 to 25 participants for each group meeting.

Participants later attended the particular group meeting for which they signed up. Each student was given an informed consent form and instructed to read the printed directions on the form (see Appendix A). Students willing to participate in the study signed and returned the consent form to the researcher. After all of the consent forms had been returned to the researcher, all participants were given a booklet which included a demographic form on page one (see Appendix B), directions for the CISS (see Appendix C), and the CISS (not included due to copyright laws). Each booklet contained a participant identification number in the upper right corner of the page. The researcher instructed all participants to complete the booklet at their own pace, beginning with the first page of the booklet. Participants were informed that booklets would be collected by the researcher when everyone had finished.

After booklets had been collected, participants were asked not to discuss any events that took place in the group meeting (neither the general procedure nor the booklet

material) with any other individuals. Individuals were then thanked for their time, each given their research participation validation slip, and dismissed.

All directions and instructions from the researcher were delivered to the participants in the group meeting, from a previously prepared script. No time limits were imposed for each group meeting, but the testing procedure required approximately 20 minutes for the total administration.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

A series of independent-samples t tests were performed to evaluate the four hypotheses. Table 1 lists means and standard deviations derived from analyses with coping strategies and traditional/nontraditional students.

A t test was conducted to evaluate Hypothesis 1 that nontraditional students would utilize active or task-oriented coping strategies more often than traditional students. The t test revealed no significant difference between these two groups, $t(84) = -.81$, $p = .42$. Thus, the nontraditional students in this sample did not utilize more active or task-oriented strategies than traditional students.

A t test was conducted to evaluate Hypothesis 2 that traditional students would utilize avoidance coping strategies more often than non-traditional students. The results were significant, $t(84) = 2.99$, $p < .01$, indicating traditional students utilized more avoidance coping strategies than did nontraditional students, thus supporting Hypothesis 2.

To evaluate Hypothesis 3 that traditional students would utilize more emotion-oriented coping strategies than nontraditional students, a t test was utilized. The test revealed no significant difference between these two groups, $t(84) = 1.72$, $p = .09$. Thus, traditional students did not utilize more emotion-oriented coping strategies than nontraditional students.

t tests were utilized to investigate the final hypothesis that male students, regardless of traditional or nontraditional status, would utilize more task-oriented coping strategies than women, while both traditional and nontraditional female students would utilize more emotion-oriented and avoidance-coping strategies than men. The analysis conducted to explore the relationship between gender and task-oriented coping strategies revealed no significant difference between genders $t(84) = -.04$, $p = .97$. Thus, male

Table 1

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for Coping Strategies and Traditional and Nontraditional Students

Coping Strategy	n	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Task-Oriented			
Traditional	50	55	10.8
Nontraditional	36	57	10.1
Avoidance			
Traditional	50	48	9.0
Nontraditional	36	42	9.1
Emotion-Oriented			
Traditional	50	48	9.3
Nontraditional	36	44	12.0

students did not utilize more task-oriented coping strategies than female students. The analysis exploring the relationship between gender and emotion-oriented coping revealed, no significant difference between these two variables, $t(84) = 1.04$, $p = .30$, suggesting female students did not utilize emotion-oriented coping more than male students. Finally, a t test exploring the relationship between gender and avoidance coping revealed no significant difference, $t(84) = 1.23$, $p = .22$, indicating female students did not utilize avoidance-coping strategies more than male students. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for this series of analyses.

Table 2

Summary of Means and Standard Deviations for Gender and Coping Strategies

Coping Strategy	n	M	SD
Task-Oriented			
Men	40	56	10.2
Women	46	56	10.9
Emotion-Oriented			
Men	40	47	9.4
Women	46	45	11.7
Avoidance			
Men	40	47	9.1
Women	46	45	9.7

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Statistical results provided support for only one of the proposed relationships between coping style and traditional and nontraditional status. Additionally, no significant relationship was found between gender and coping strategy. In fact, scores for groups of participants were near the norm for the CISS. Thus, the overall relationship between nontraditional students, gender, and coping appears to be less direct than predicted.

Support was not found for Hypothesis 1, the prediction that nontraditional students would utilize more active or task-oriented coping strategies than traditional students. Despite having had more experiences with varied life stressors, nontraditional students may tend to have more anxiety over the numerous aspects that accompany the college experience than traditional students. In fact, Yarbrough and Schaffer (1990) found that nontraditional students often face apprehensions related to a lack of confidence in their current academic skills, as well as a fear of decline in ability since their last academic experience. Perhaps the same insecurities and apprehensions relating to the college experience led the participants involved in the current study to engage in less optimal coping strategies than might have been predicted by their life experience. Thus, despite having acquired experiential-based coping skills in other realms of life, nontraditional students' skills might not necessarily be congruent with the skills required to optimally manage the associated stressors of academia.

Additionally, since nontraditional students are more often burdened with managing multiple roles while engaged in educational pursuits, the notion of sufficient social support becomes important. Clarke (1995) concluded that older students often have less social support than younger students, a circumstance which can leave them more vulnerable to the effects of stress. Thus, despite nontraditional students' varied life

experiences with stressors, one can theorize that a lack of social resources while trying to negotiate aspects of academia might lead to more debilitated coping strategies than might be expected.

As predicted by Hypothesis 2, traditional students reported utilizing avoidant coping strategies more often than did nontraditional students. Thus, despite the lack of a significant relationship between nontraditional students and a greater utilization of task-oriented responses, as predicted in Hypothesis 1, traditional students did report utilizing more avoidant strategies, and thereby less adaptive strategies, than nontraditional students when confronted by stressful situations. More specifically, traditional students endorsed stress management techniques which dealt with either utilizing others in order to avoid specific tasks or avoiding tasks altogether by engaging in other non-relevant activities. Santiago-Rivera et al. (1995) proposed that the accumulation of life experience by individuals accounts for the degree of importance given to certain fundamental issues. Specifically, life experience is related to the cognitive appraisal of value, motivation, and commitment directed to specific topics and issues. Furthermore, they concluded that college students who identify achievement as highly important seem to use more direct problem-solving and task-oriented coping strategies when facing stressful situations. Thus, perhaps the circumstance of more limited life experience for traditional students, when compared to nontraditional students, and its relationship to achievement motivation, accounts for greater utilization of less adaptive coping strategies.

Hypothesis 3, which proposed a greater utilization by traditional students of emotion-oriented coping strategies, was not supported. Thus, traditional students did not endorse coping strategies that regulate, reduce or eliminate the emotional arousal surrounding stressors more often than nontraditional students. The results of Hypothesis 3, however, make more sense when viewed in light of the results of Hypothesis 2. Holahan and Moos (1990) relate that emotion-oriented and avoidance coping strategies

are both equated with less adaptive outcomes in coping with stress, simply because both strategies fail to directly address the stressful stimulus. Thus, a lack of support for the proposed relationship in Hypothesis 3 does not necessarily indicate that traditional students are not utilizing less adaptive coping strategies than nontraditional students. In fact, since results from Hypothesis 2 indicate that traditional students are utilizing more avoidant strategies than nontraditional students, traditional students may simply be using avoidant strategies over emotional strategies.

Statistical results offered no support for Hypothesis 4, which proposed that male students, regardless of traditional or nontraditional status, would utilize more task-oriented coping than would female students of either status. Thus, Ptacek, Smith and Zanas (1992) and Banyard and Graham-Bermann's (1987) discussions of the socialization hypothesis and the general notion that men are socialized to deal with stressful situations in a more directive or action-oriented manner than women did not receive support within the present study.

Considering the current trends in American society, however, perhaps the socialization hypothesis needs to be reformulated. Women have moved into the once male-dominated work force at a dramatic pace, leaving many of the roles and responsibilities associated with the stereotypical female either behind or left to negotiation by both sexes. Thus, coping styles associated with gender due to the norms asserted by society may not have held true for participants in the current study. One can theorize that large-scale contextual shifts by the sexes could very well entail some shifts in coping strategies for both men and women.

Although some variation between coping style was found within the present study, the relationship between the stress response and the process of coping within this university population may have limited generalization. Future research investigating this area should consider including a greater number of participants within each group. Students meeting the criteria for the nontraditional conditions were more difficult to

secure in this study. This was especially the case with nontraditional males; only 15 participated in the study.

Lack of differences between traditional and nontraditional students and their coping styles found in this study does not lessen the importance of this research area for university programs seeking to provide services for students. The stress response is believed to have developed as an adaptive mechanism for individuals to utilize in exercising some control in mentally threatening environments and the process of coping seems to be a very important interceding variable within this process. University counseling centers will undoubtedly continue to be integral structures for students seeking to better manage the reality of stress. Thus, future research concerning coping should continue to concentrate on the variables which affect a student's coping response to stress. Specifically, this research should investigate individual variables influencing and contributing to the coping response. Perhaps, integrating other psychometric measures such as the Beck Depression Inventory, California Personality Inventory, or Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 could provide more information into the specific variables governing particular coping strategies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participation Consent Form

Read this consent form. If you have any questions ask the experimenter and she will answer the question.

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the relationship between stress and individual coping styles. Your participation will entail completing the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS)-Adult form, a 48-item inventory assessing various coping styles, and a 5-item demographic information sheet.

Information Obtained in this study will be identified only by code number. Your name will be used only to indicate that you participated in the study and received extra credit for participating. Extra credit will be given to subjects who complete the entire inventory.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to terminate your participation, you are welcome to do so at any point in the study. There is no risk or discomfort involved in completing the study.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, feel free to ask the experimenter. If you have any additional questions, please contact Jennifer Burleson, 343-8185.

Thank you for your participation.

I _____, have read the above information and have decided to participate.
(please print name)

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should I choose to discontinue participation in this study.

(signature of participant)

(date)

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR TREATMENT OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.

APPENDIX B

Participant Identification Number _____

Demographic Information Sheet

Age: _____

Sex: Male Female
(circle one)

Classification: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior
(circle one)

Marital Status: Single Married Divorced Widow
(circle one)

Do you have children? Yes No
(circle one)

Comments: (Optional)

APPENDIX C

Participant Instructions

Your participation in this project will entail completing the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS)- Adult form. The inventory consists of 48-items assessing various stress coping styles. Please flip the page and read the instructions listed at the top of the inventory before beginning.

I, Jennifer Rebecca Burleson, hereby submit this thesis/report to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available to use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without the written permission of the author.

Jennifer R. Burleson
Signature of Author

July 28, 2000
Date

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Utilized by Traditional and Nontraditional
Students

Title of Thesis

Dana Cooper
Signature of Graduate Office Staff

August 4, 2000
Date Received

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