

The Potential for Personal Development and Transformational Outcomes in Women Earning Online Degrees

Gail Weatherly and Toby Egan
Texas A&M University

The purpose of this article is to review the personal development and transformation of women earning an online degree and to what extent their goals were met through earning the degree. Eighteen adult women who earned a fully online master's degree at least one year ago from a university affiliated with the Southern Regional Education Board were interviewed. Analysis of the data indicates earning the degree resulted in greater-than-expected transformational change, personal development, and autonomy.

Keywords: Women, Online, Degree

Historically, women have been constrained in their professional progress by expectations that they, more so than men, must prove their performance capabilities in order to advance (Bierema, 2001; Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Cunningham, 2006; Euben, 2001; Noe, 2002). Online education offers a growing number of women the opportunity to fulfill personal educational goals and attain credentials needed for professional advancement (Carnevale, 2002; Kramarae, 2001); yet, there is insufficient research documenting the personal and professional change in the lives of women who earned fully online degrees. Despite indications that women are pursuing online degrees in growing numbers (Carnevale, 2002), elaboration regarding the outcomes for women who earned an online degree is lacking (von Prummer, 2000). The need to know more about women who have enrolled and completed online degree programs is the impetus for this study.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The primary purpose of this study was to illuminate the outcomes of earning an online degree and the possible transformation experienced by women graduates in the contexts of their families, their professional lives, and their personal development. From the standpoint that these women designed their non-traditional educational paths, the researcher sought to understand the influence of self-determination and the degree to which the women may have sought greater levels of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci and Ryan, 2000). The researcher also sought to investigate the altered “ways of knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) which resulted from completing a fully online degree. The primary research question was: How have the lives of women selected to participate in this study been transformed by earning online degrees?

Theoretical Framework

The literature exploring women in distance education commonly describes the challenges women face while completing an online degree, barriers of access to online education, gender issues, and differences between the learning styles and behaviors of female versus male online students (Barrett & Lally, 1999; Blumenstyk, 1997; Burke, 2001; Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005; Kramarae, 2001; von Prummer, 2004). In addition, the literature indicates that students enrolled in distance education courses may be highly motivated (Meyen & Lian, 1997) and may even feel there is “no stereotyping or bias...we are unable to judge people by appearance” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 139).

von Prummer (2000) studied the impact of distance education on German women from working-class backgrounds and found many were “employed in dead-end, boring jobs which provided a basic income and ... security, but did not offer career prospects of intellectual challenges” (p. 205). Furthermore, she added, “In choosing to study for a degree at a distance these women could pursue a dream of upward occupational and social mobility and of personal development which would not have been possible in any other university setting” (p. 205). Regarding actual versus expected outcomes of German women earning a distance education degree, von Prummer (2000) noted, “As far as these women are concerned, I have no way of knowing how their plans progressed and whether their hopes were eventually realized” (p. 205). In light of the fact that there is growing demand for distance

education among women (Kramarae, 2001; Waits & Lewis, 2003), additional research is needed to determine whether the educational goals and expectations of American women who earned an online degree were realized and what changes resulted in their personal and professional lives.

Barriers to Higher Education Which Lead Women to Seek Online Degrees

Online learning has grown in popularity among women as a means to fulfill educational goals, achieve desired outcomes, and defy barriers that traditionally prevented them from earning a degree (Furst-Bowe & Dittman, 2001; Kramarae, 2001; von Prummer, 2004). A U.S. Department of Education study of distance education found “that older women with families and jobs were more drawn to undergraduate distance education programs during the 1999-2000 academic year than were members of other groups” (Carnevale, 2002, p. 1).

Motivation to Succeed

The pursuit of an online degree and the motivation to complete the degree were examined from the perspective of cognitive learning theories. Self-determination theory purports the need for competence, relatedness and autonomy as motivators for goal pursuit (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The desire for competence, relatedness and autonomy may support the pursuit of professional advancement. Many women are motivated to improve their wages since “approximately 16 million U.S. women, or 39%, earned low wages in 1998, and low-wage female workers tend to be disproportionately young, less educated, and single” (Bierema, 2001, p. 54). Barriers in the work place are still evident. “Women make up [more than] half the human race and over half the U.S. workforce” (Bierema, 2001, p. 53), yet they still trail men in pay, promotion, benefits, and other economic rewards (Bowler, 1999; Elder & Johnson, 1999; Knoke & Ishio, 1998). Others are motivated to fulfill their educational goals by a sense of mission or a disorienting dilemma in their lives that leads to intense self-examination (Kroth & Boverie, 2000) and critical assessment of knowledge belief systems, power, social relationships, and presuppositions (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Kroth and Boverie (2000) studied the relationships between adult learning and life mission, and their findings suggested the following:

The stronger and more focused a person’s life mission, the stronger and more focused the learner’s self-direction; a person’s mission provides a source of meaning to learning activities. (p. 147)

Women may seek an online degree to satisfy an innate psychological need to reach a goal previously set for themselves as part of their life mission.

Potential for Transformation

“Rather than a change in what we know, transformation is a change in the way we know (Kegan, 2000, p. 49); it is a dramatic shift in the foundation upon which we judge, make decisions, and act” (Kilgore & Bloom, 2002, p. 124). “According to Mezirow, the process is most often set in motion by a disorienting dilemma, that is, a particular life event...that a person experiences as a crisis” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 321). Although women may begin an online degree with a specific goal for professional advancement in mind, personal transformation may be an unexpected byproduct. Palloff and Pratt (1999) described the potential for transformation among online learners as follows:

Transformative learning is, to many participants, an unanticipated result of the online learning process. If students were informed in advance that a process of transformation would be the outcome of their participation in an academic course, is it likely that they would enroll? Intellectual growth is anticipated, but personal growth is not necessarily a reason students engage in a process of online learning. (p. 130)

This study sought to determine whether the women who earned an online degree emerged from their experience with altered views of self and the world.

Human Resource Development Theory

HRD borrows from several disciplines (Weinberger, 1998) and is supported by several underlying theories, including: “learning: adult learning – organizational learning – learning organizations; performance improvement; systems theory; economic theory; and psychological theory – with the emphasis on learning” (Weinberger, 1998, p. 80). This study was informed by psychological theory, particularly transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). “In the constellation of psychological theories relevant to HRD, it is cognitive psychology that exclusively focuses on the internal processes of individuals” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 103). Personal development is one aspect of earning an online degree. Development is meant to “expand the capabilities of people, to increase their ability to lead long and healthy lives, to enable them to cultivate their talents and interests, and to afford them an opportunity to live in dignity and with self-respect” (Moghadam, 1994, p. 860). The expansion and utilization of educational opportunities for and by women are within the purview of human resource development, “a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise” (Swanson, 1995, p. 208), and are bound by an emergent world view:

How an entity becomes constitutes what the actual entity is, so the two descriptions of an actual entity are not independent. Its being is constituted by its becoming. (Lee, 2001, p. 330)

Methodology

This study was conducted using the heuristic research design to investigate a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). Derived from the Greek word *heuriskein*, the word *heuristic* means to “discover or to find” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9), and the researcher is expected to “obtain qualitative depictions that are at the heart and depths of a person’s experience” (p. 38). The researcher seeks to “discover the nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself and to illuminate it from direct first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience” (Moustakas, p. 38). This method of inquiry emphasizes connectedness and relationship and begins with a desire to “more fully reveal the essence or meaning of a phenomenon of human experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 42). The researcher is “intimately and autobiographically related to the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 43) and is to engage in self-reflection, self-dialogue, and introspection in the process of investigation. A necessary component of the study is that the researcher must “know what is known” (Polanyi, 1962, p. 312). All of the 18 participants, as well as the researcher, were women who had earned a fully online degree at least one year prior to the beginning of the study from a university affiliated with the Southern Regional Education Board, and they were able to earn the degree of their choice only because it was offered online. Furthermore, this study sought to examine “personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects” (Riessman, 1993, p. 70), aspects of “human will and transformative action” (Giroux, 1983, p. 13,) as well as “underlying meaning of or ways of experiencing” (Akerlind, 2004, p. 364) the phenomenon of being a woman who had earned a fully online degree.

Call for Participation

In March 2006, the researcher submitted a call for participation to directors of online programs at universities affiliated with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). The call for participation outlined the procedure for prospective participants to contact the researcher by email to determine eligibility to participate. From March 2006 to May 2006, participants were contacted via email to establish eligibility and to schedule an interview date and time with the researcher. Participants in the program represented six unique online degree programs offered by five universities affiliated with the SREB. All of the universities had traditional campuses and had developed online degree programs to supplement their on-campus programs.

Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants met the criteria for the study. Participants were eligible for the study if they could not have earned the degree of choice at the time they entered the online program had it not been offered online, if they earned the online degree at least one year prior, if they earned the online degree from a university that is a member of the SREB, and if they agreed to be audio taped during a personal interview lasting approximately two hours. Of the 23 initial respondents, 18 were found to be eligible for the study. Interviews took place at a location specified by the participant with the exception of three participants who arranged telephone interviews due to scheduling conflicts. Within the sample, participants represented distinctly different geographic regions and different academic disciplines.

Data Collection

Data was collected from participants from June 8, 2006 until August 4, 2006 through conversational interviews that lasted approximately two hours. The interviews were conducted face-to-face (n=14), by Interactive Television (n=1), and by telephone (n=3). Open-ended questions were used during the interview. The researcher added an entry to a reflexive journal after each interview to maintain a record of the investigator’s thoughts and reactions following the interview session (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Although participants lived in Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Oregon, New Mexico, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and, in the case of one participant, a country outside the United States while completing their online degrees, by the time they participated in this research study, travel was required in seven states within the continental United States.

Data Analysis

Data analysis, or “taking constructions gathered from the context and reconstructing them into meaningful wholes” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 333), was conducted on an on-going basis throughout the study. The researcher transcribed the data. Examination of the data, as well as the researcher’s notes, led to the emergence of major themes from the interviews. Units of data were placed within these themes for categorization purposes. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

Results and Findings

This heuristic inquiry follows the model of recreating “the lived experience...from the frame of reference of the experiencing person” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39) with “verbatim examples” (p. 54). As a whole, all of the women in this study were, in retrospect, somewhat amazed by the opportunities that came their way as a result of having

earned the online degree. For some, change meant a new job, for others, it meant seeing themselves in such a radically new way that they altered the course of their lives and embarked on an entirely new, independent journey.

Open-ended questions during each interview included: Why did you choose to earn an online degree? Describe the changes you've experienced as a result of earning the online degree. What opportunities have come your way as a result of earning the online degree? Other topics emerged as each interview was conducted, but Table 1 provides the starting point of the discussion with each woman and indicates why she sought a non-traditional online master's degree rather than a traditional on-campus degree.

Table 1. *Why Participants Chose an Online Degree*

Pseudonym	Explanation
Participant 1: Regina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She worked full time and needed the degree to get a job teaching and training teachers. The degree she sought was not offered at local colleges.
Participant 2: Adah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She moved to new location because of husband's job, and the degree she sought was not offered near her. She became pregnant with her first child and suffered bouts of all-day sickness during much of her pregnancy. "I would throw up in a trash can, go back to the course, throw up again, and return to the course. It was terrible, but I was so grateful that I could continue with my coursework; if the program had not been online, there is no way I could have completed my degree."
Participant 3: Paige	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She was told she would have to wait a year-and-a-half before she could <i>apply</i> to the master's program at a prestigious university. Angered, she found two universities offering the same degree program online, contacted both universities, and applied for acceptance to the university that showed genuine interest in her as a prospective student. Within two weeks, she had taken the entrance exam and was accepted into the program. She smiled broadly, "I like to tell people that I had my entire degree and also had a job teaching at a university by the time I would have been allowed to apply to the program at the elite university."
Participant 4: Dedra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She wanted to relate technology to academic content and needed the master's to clarify what was emerging in educational technology. However, she did not live near a university that offered the degree.
Participant 5: Denise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She lived in a rural geographic location and had young children still in school. Most importantly, she said, the online degree was "minimally invasive into my home life." She enrolled in an online degree to "learn the material so I could be more successful in my job."
Participant 6: Marion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She lived in a rural area where there were no institutions providing the master's degree required by her job. She enrolled in an online program at a university located in another state, but her employer paid all costs so she didn't worry about the out-of-state tuition rate.
Participant 7: Alex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The job she had as a teacher of history in a museum had no future. The city supporting the museum suggested lowering the pay of the museum employees. "That was the moment I realized I had to do something." She worked and had small children at home.
Participant 8: Diana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She was a single parent who didn't want to miss time with her two children. She worked, but needed a higher paying job. She was afraid of driving two hours at night alone on a road that was under major construction to reach a university.
Participant 9: Kim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She had dropped out of a traditional master's program because class meetings were controlled by domineering personalities who ridiculed those with disparate views. She wanted a learning environment that was more democratic and less likely to be controlled by strong personalities in class. She wanted to enroll in a program that was flexible and would allow her to continue her job.
Participant 10: Aileen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She lived 80 miles from the nearest university. As a single parent, the drive would have required her to be away from home and her child. "That was not an option."
Participant 11: Lauren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She lived an hour away from an institution. She had two children still at home and worked full time as director of technology staff development at the local school. She described herself as shy. "Being behind a computer screen, I had more confidence." She wanted an opportunity to interact with people far away from her small town. "It was a personal choice to see if I could do it."
Participant 12: Martha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She admitted an aversion to traditional education. "I don't like sitting in class. I like to clep things. The thought of having to sit through classes was not acceptable. A very big thing to me was to be able to earn the master's on my time, my terms, at my pace." She lived approximately 100 miles from a university. She had a 6-year-old and a 4-year-old at home and wanted to show her children that education is important.
Participant 13: Taylor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She lived two to three hours from a university and had small children. "I liked being at home; I could be with my children, and I could cook supper. I spent more time with my kids because of the nature of online. I didn't have to spend the time driving."
Participant 14: Meira	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She had a personal goal. "I always wanted to earn a master's degree. My husband was in the military, so we moved a great deal." She worked full time at a university that did not offer the degree of her choice.
Participant 15: Belle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She lived at least an hour away from a university and had a six-month-old baby when she started the online degree. She was working full time, and her husband was in school and working full time. The online degree accommodated staying with her family.
Participant 16: Cara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The highly specialized degree she had always wanted was finally offered online by one university in the country.
Participant 17: Gillian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She worked full time, had a child in school still living at home; the university nearest her didn't offer the degree she wanted.
Participant 18: Stella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She was an American living in a foreign country and managing her own business there. She could not get the degree necessary for a desired career change through the educational system of that country.

Although geographic distance played a significant role, other considerations, as described in Table 1, aligned with barriers categorized as *institutional* – exclusionary higher education institution practices; *situational* – sociological,

familial, financial, residential, and personal factors; and *dispositional* – attitudes, motivation and personality factors (Ekstrom, 1972; Redding & Dowling, 1992).

Several themes emerged from this study. Women who earned the graduate degree were, indeed, better positioned to capitalize on career opportunities not previously available to them; yet, there was considerable emphasis by study participants regarding meaningful personal changes beyond acquisition of course related knowledge skills and credentials. These changes included heightened self-confidence, credibility among peers, sense of belonging in their professional community, greater autonomy, and, as defined by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), a heightened sensitivity to their own capability for constructing knowledge independent of the culturally-defined roles they had been given. Whether or not others noticed their new-found “sense of knowing,” the women felt they realized new capabilities within themselves that changed the way they looked at life. All of the 18 participants reported facing situational barriers. The most common was that of residence: geographic location away from an institution that offered the desired master’s degree. Another situational barrier was that of familial concern: expecting a child, small children at home, time away from children, or time away from the home itself. Another common concern was that of job retention or career advancement.

Other barriers were institutional in nature. This was especially clear in the case of Paige, who was told she would have to wait at least a year-and-a-half to apply to a master’s program at an elite institution 30 minutes away from her home. Paige described her encounter at the university: “It was January, and I was met by a prominent woman who quickly sized me up. She seemed elitist.” Paige applied instead to an online master’s program. She added, “Elite institutions seem to think they have to throw up barriers; it is a form of hazing.” Another participant, Cara, was unable to access the degree she sought until a university offered the program online in 2003. Stella lived in a foreign country, and institutions there did not offer the degree she sought.

There were also dispositional barriers related to attitudes, motivation, and personality. More than one participant described herself as shy and emphasized the need to participate in a learning environment that was safe and democratic. Lauren commented, “Being behind a computer screen, I had more confidence.” From a learner’s perspective, Meira said she preferred the online environment because “the instructors respected what we needed, and I didn’t feel that in the face-to-face environment. In face-to-face classes, the emphasis is on the instructor’s delivery.” For Kim, anonymity in the online environment “was actually pretty important ... it gave me the courage to come out with new ideas and even to contradict what people were saying.” For Marion, anonymity was critical. “I am an African American woman with an ethnically neutral voice,” she revealed to me near the end of our telephone interview. She explained that the online environment freed her from prejudice and bias often encountered in the face-to-face classroom, and she added this comment: “It wasn’t until I went to the campus to defend my thesis that my advisor found out I was African American. He said he thought I was blonde-haired and blue-eyed.”

Opportunities that Occurred as a Result of Earning the Online Degree

The women in this study had many opportunities come their way as a result of earning their degrees, and most of the opportunities were beyond their expectations. In retrospect the women realized the online degree provided them the qualifications and confidence needed to seize unexpected opportunities.

New career opportunities. Adah completed her online program while enduring nine months of all-day sickness in her pregnancy. After graduating, she was offered a teaching position at a local university:

Because I had the degree, I could say, “I’ll do that.” The most important outcome of the degree is that it enabled my career. I have a job I could not have gotten without the degree, and I have a degree I could not have gotten if it had not been offered online.

Six months after earning her degree, Cara was offered a job that didn’t exist at the time she started the online program: “I got this job, and it is perfect for me. I have a full time income now rather than part time. I get to do a professional, exciting job at home most of the time.”

Global connectedness. Paige was hired to teach at a private university and is now working with students from all over the world and conducting research that is international in scope. “I am very happy with the research I am doing. Without the Internet, none of this would have happened. The degree led to this research and my meeting people in other countries. I might have traveled to Europe, but not in this role.”

Promotion and advancement. Earning the online degree led to Martha’s promotion in her job at a school district:

I was able to move into a different position within my first year in the district. No one questioned the degree. They very quickly saw my work, my research, and knew I was doing good work. Doors opened immediately. I don’t think they would have let me walk into that position without the degree.

Transformational Change as a Result of Earning the Online Degree

After completing the online degree and looking back at their progress, these women realized they succeeded in achieving the initial goals that led them to choose an online degree, and they also recognized changes in their view

of themselves and the world. For some, the change in their perspective led to change in their actions and the directions of their lives. Selected discoveries and subsequent actions of these women are categorized in this section.

Self-actualization. Paige described how online learning changed her:

As an introvert in a classroom, I communicate much better when writing. I was excellent online. I felt like I had been underachieving up to that point. When I look back on it, I realize it elevated me to a higher level. I self-actualized by getting the degree.

There are other elements that make the online learning environment unique, Paige added: “All judgments are left behind. You are left with pure ‘mind-to-mind’ communication.”

Self-respect and confidence. Earning the online degree gave Marion a heightened sense of self-respect and “the right and ability to counsel others and say, ‘You can do it. The online master’s degree was a trajectory and a stepping stone to the Ph.D. I said to myself, ‘I did that [earned the master’s], so I can do that [earn the Ph.D.], too.’” Meira said of the online degree, “It increased my knowledge base, and I gained new skills. All of what I learned was useful to building skills to be more confident in the workplace. I can compete with people who are 20 years younger.”

Autonomy. The online degree transformed Dedra’s life personally and professionally. Earning the degree gave her confidence and convinced her she was a highly capable person, which was the opposite of what her husband had told her about herself throughout their marriage. She learned to trust her instincts, and this led her to quit her job and divorce her husband. “I remember very well the day I realized I could put on a new pair of shoes. It was very liberating for me.” She relocated to a beach-side home where she now teaches online courses for a public university. The autonomy Dedra gained through earning the online degree was not something she could have gotten in an “on-ground” degree, she said.

Inner strength to be a role model. Denise echoed the sentiments of many of many participants when she said, “The most important outcome of earning the online degree was the example set for my children.” Marion realized an education for herself was a contribution to her whole family:

Some in my own family won’t acknowledge the degree. They act as though it is something a mother should not do. Getting past that is important; it is important to know what earning an education does for my family. I am doing something that no one else in my family has done. It’s like holding up a mirror to the others of what they haven’t done for themselves. They think I’m ego-tripping.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although women still face significant barriers to achieving higher education, this study indicated women are adding the pursuit of education to their busy lives and doing quite well at balancing the added responsibility. They are motivated by such factors as the desire to succeed in a competitive work place, instill a love of education in their children, improve the lives of their family, seek more gratifying careers, prove to themselves they can succeed academically, or achieve autonomy. Yet, the overarching consideration is family.

There is further evidence that higher education is not responding to the needs of women. Many of the 14 women in this study who said they are waiting to enroll in a doctorate are doing so because they want to enroll in an online Ph.D. program, and higher education, for the most part, has not met this demand. Stalker and Prentice (1998) noted that even though women comprise the majority of all undergraduate students (56.1%), they are only awarded one-third (35.4%) of the doctorates. The women in this study voiced their desire for online doctorate degrees offered by accredited universities. One participant said:

Most working adults can’t just up and leave their jobs. Why should I be limited to what is offered here? If there is a degree offered at another university, shouldn’t I be able to get that degree, too? I want a Ph.D. from a university that is accredited, has a brick and mortar school, and has a reputation.

If higher education is to meet current and future societal demands for education, it must, as outlined by the Spellings Commission (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), “adapt to a world altered by technology, changing demographics and globalization, in which the higher-education landscape includes new providers and new paradigms, from for-profit universities to distance learning” (p. viii); “harness the power of information technology by sharing educational resources among institutions, and use distance learning to meet the educational needs of rural students and adult learners, and to enhance workforce development” (p. 24); use information technology to “improve student learning, reduce instructional costs, and meet critical workforce needs” (p. 24); expand the reach of higher education “to adults through technology such as distance learning, workplace learning, and alternative scheduling programs” (p. 25); provide students “clearer pathways among educational levels and institutions” (p. 17); and “remove barriers to student mobility and promote new learning paradigms (e.g., distance education, adult education, workplace programs) to accommodate a far more diverse student cohort” (p. 17). Studies such as this

which gather input from former graduates of online programs serve as a model that could better inform the design and implementation of future models of higher education.

Contributions to New Knowledge in Human Resource Development

Swanson and Holton (2001) suggested that “as we enter the twenty-first century, two overriding phenomena rise to the top of the list of challenges facing HRD: globalization and technology” (p. 379). Rajasingham (2006), referring to information and communications technology as a means for women to connect to universities, access education, and capitalize on information and knowledge, said, “Women must therefore learn the skills of using this technology so that they can participate successfully in the knowledge economy” (p. 36). The information gained through this study of 18 women who earned a fully online degree is not definitive; rather, it contributes to a growing body of knowledge in human resource development and distance education that will better equip educators and institutions of higher education to develop online programs in the number, quality, and design that maximizes support of online learners. HRD seeks to improve “knowledge, expertise, learning, renewal and growth” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 107) that influence and drive the “pattern of work-related experiences that span the course of a person’s life” (Noe, 2002, p. 452). Therefore, the information shared by these women about their learning may be used by other individuals or organizations to encourage development.

References

- Akerlind, G. S. (2004). A new dimension to understanding university teaching. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 9(3), 363- 375.
- Barrett, E., & Lally, V. (1999). Gender differences in an on-line learning environment. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 15, 48-60.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women’s ways of knowing: The development of voice, self, and mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bierema, L. L. (2001, Winter). Women, work, and learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 92, 53-62.
- Blumenstyk, G. (1997, October 31). A feminist scholar questions how women fare in distance education [Electronic version]. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 44(p. A36). Retrieved March 30, 2003, from <http://chronicle.com>
- Bowler, M. (1999). Women’s earnings: An overview. *Monthly Labor Review*, 122(2), 13-21.
- Burke, C. (2001). Women, guilt, and home computers. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 4(5), 609-615.
- Carnevale, D. (2002). Distance education attracts older women who have families and jobs, study finds. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49(11), A33.
- Cohen, P. N., & Huffman, M. L. (2003). Occupational segregation and the devaluation of women’s work across US labor markets. *Social Forces*, 81(3), 881-908.
- Cunningham, W. H. (2006). Women in corporate America in the 21st century. In D. Olcott, Jr. & D. Hardy (Eds.), *Dancing on the glass ceiling: Women, leadership, and technology* (pp. 25-36). Madison, WI: Atwood.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268.
- Dooley, K. E., Lindner, J. R., & Dooley, L. M. (2005). *Advanced methods in distance education*. Hershey, PA: Information Science.
- Ekstrom, R. B. (1972). Barriers to women’s participation in post-secondary education: A review of the literature. Princeton, NJ: Education Testing Service. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 072 368).
- Elder, S., & Johnson, L. J. (1999). Sex-specific labour market indicators: What they show. *International Labour Review*, 138(4), 447-464.
- Euben, D. (2001). *Show me the money: Salary equity in the academy*. Retrieved November 19, 2006, from the American Association of University Professors Web site: <http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2001/01/ja/ja01eube.htm>
- Furst-Bowe, J., & Dittmann, W. (2001). Identifying the needs of adult women in distance learning programs. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 28(4), 405-413.
- Giroux, H. A. (1983). *Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition*. New York, NY: Bergin and Garvey.
- Gouthro, P. (2005). A critical feminist analysis of the homeplace as learning site: Expanding the discourse of lifelong learning to consider adult women learners. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24(1), 5-19.

- Kegan, R. (2000). What "form" transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 35-69). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kilgore, D., & Bloom, L. R. (2002). "When I'm down it takes me a while": Rethinking transformational education through narratives of women in crisis. *Adult Basic Education, 12*(3), 123-133.
- Knoke, D., & Ishio, Y. (1998). The gender gap in company job training. *Work and Occupations, 25*(2), 141-167.
- Kramarae, C. (2001). *The third shift: Women learning online*. Washington, DC: The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation. Retrieved May 3, 2003, from <http://www.aauw.org>
- Kroth, M., & Boverie, P. (2000). Life mission and adult learning. *Adult Education Quarterly, 50*(2), 134-149.
- Lee, M. (2001). A refusal to define HRD. In M. Lee and J. Woodall (Eds.), *Human Resource Development International, 4*(3), 327-341.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyen, E. L., & Lian, C. H. T. (1997). Teaching online courses. *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities, 12*(3), 166-174.
- Moghadam, V. M. (1994). Building human resources and women's capabilities in Afghanistan: A retrospect and prospects. *World Development, 22*(6), 859-875.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Noe, R. A. (2002). *Employee training and development*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. (1999). *Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Polanyi, M. (1962). *Personal knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rajasingham, L. (2006). Crashing through the glass ceiling: A cross-cultural perspective. In D. Olcott, Jr. & D. Hardy (Eds.), *Dancing on the glass ceiling: Women, leadership, and technology* (pp. 25-36). Madison, WI: Atwood.
- Redding, N. P., & Dowling, W. D. (1992). Rites of passage among women reentering higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly, 42*(4), 221-236.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Stalker, J., & Prentice, S. (1998). *The illusion of inclusion: Women in post-secondary education*. Halifax: Fernwood Press.
- Sullivan, P. (2002). "It's easier to be yourself when you are invisible": Female college students discuss their online classroom experiences. *Innovative Higher Education, 27*(2), 129-144.
- Swanson, R. A. (1995). Human resource development: Performance is the key. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 62*(2), 207-213.
- Swanson, R. A., & Holton, E. F. (2001). *Foundations of human resource development*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2006). *A test of leadership: Charting the future of U.S. higher education*. Washington, D.C.
- von Prummer, C. (2000). Women and distance education: Challenges and opportunities. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- von Prummer, C. (2004, September). Perspectives from global research for women in e-learning Power Point presentation delivered at the meeting of the *International Forum for Women in E-Learning*, Phoenix, AR.
- Waits, T., & Lewis, L. (2003). *Distance education at degree-granting postsecondary institutions: 2000-2001*. Retrieved January 2, 2006, from National Center for Educational Statistics Web site: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/peqis/publications/2003017/>
- Weinberger, L. A. (1998). Commonly held theories of human resource development. *Human Resource Development International, 1*(1), 75-93.