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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Faye Tanner Barr entitled "Role Transition of Reentry Women." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Sociology.

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ROLE TRANSITION OF REENTRY WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities are reporting increasing numbers of married women who are pursuing a delayed education. Sociological research related to the transition of reentry women into the student role is limited. Very little is known about the effects of the woman's additional role on her marriage and family life. This study is an exploration of the role transition of reentry women with particular attention to the factors associated with the presence or absence of role strain resulting from role accumulation.

Through a combination of theoretical and snowball sampling, twenty-six women enrolled at Clayton Junior College in Morrow, Georgia, were selected for inclusion in the study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

Four categories of transition experiences were identified based on the subjects' perception of their husbands' response to the wife's student role. Central to the ease with which the role transition was achieved was the reported agreement between spouses concerning the woman's role as wife and mother. The women for whom role strain was minimal revealed more modern views concerning their family roles. The transition by these women was facilitated by the attitudinal and behavioral support from their husbands. The women who revealed more modern role orientations but perceived their husbands as remaining more traditional were found to have experienced greater difficulty in adjusting to the student role.

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CHAPTER I

THE THEORETICAL PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

More and more attention is being directed to the presence of "non-traditional" students on our college and university campuses. While this "non-traditional" category consists of older male and female students, it seems to be the female or "reentry" woman who has attracted the most attention, not only from college administrators and counselors, but from researchers as well. The fact that women have been the focus of more attention is, in part, a result of the increase in their numbers. Breneman (1983:17) reports that between 1970 and 1978, the number of female students twenty-five to thirty-four years of age increased by 187 percent. The non-traditional male student is less often considered an educational anomaly, perhaps because he is more typically and easily classified as a veteran pursuing a delayed education or as one who is experiencing a mid-life career change. The growing numbers of reentry women, particularly those who are married and have children, has stimulated more complex explanations involving consideration of broader, historical socio-economic factors: changing gender roles, a shortening of the child-bearing, child rearing stage of the woman's life, the economic instability of recent years, and the growing demand for female workers, particularly in the service sector.

As Astin (1976) points out, we can classify the returning female student into one of two groups: those who are motivated by general interest and have no plans for seeking employment, and those who do have employment intentions. The second category includes a diverse group in itself; some may be seeking or updating skills for employment, some hoping to enhance job advancement, some preparing for mid-life career changes, and, for others, work has become a viable option as family demands and responsibilities have lessened.

Research on the reentry woman has been relatively extensive focusing for the most part on such things as the effects of age and marital status on academic performance (Embse and Childs, 1979), perceptions of husband support and family role change (Berkove, 1979), husbands' attitudinal and behavioral responses (Hooper, 1979), and gender role identification and psychosocial development of women leaving the traditional homemaker role (Amstey and Whitbourne, 1981). While these are undeniably worthwhile foci for research, there remains a number of questions unanswered, particularly those related to the dynamics involved in the transition to the student role.

We have learned to exercise caution in viewing the increasing number of women entering the labor force as reflective of changing gender roles in our society for a large proportion of these employed women are working out of economic necessity. Furthermore, we are aware that even though more and more women are adding this role, the role of their husbands remains traditional and unchanged, resulting in strains and added burdens for the working wife and mother

(cf. Bird, 1979; Pleck, 1979; Rallings and Nye, 1979; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1978; Holmstrom, 1972).

To draw a parallel between the working wife and the married reentry woman may be misleading. Female labor force participation is not without its problems by any means; however, it does have its rewards for other members of the family in the form of added income. In contrast, entering the academic market place, while intrinsically rewarding for some, represents a form of deferred gratification as the tangible rewards may not be realized until some future time.

Certainly, for the traditional husband this change may present a dilemma. He may see himself as being called upon to make sacrifices, compensation for which may not be recognizable. If he is not in agreement with his wife's decision to return to school, his dilemma is further intensified. His position is being threatened not only by his spouse's reluctance or failure to yield to him, but perhaps more significantly by her pursuit of resources of her own which he may interpret as a prelude to her eventual greater independence. The lack of support by her spouse may be a source of role strain complicating her transition into the student role.

The purpose of this study is to explore the various facets of the transition of the woman into the role of college student with particular attention to those factors related to the presence or absence of role strain.

Review of the Literature

The increasing number of reentry women has been subjected to varied responses and interpretations, among which is the view expressed by Katz (1976:89) when he notes "there are many who think that we have entered a period in which male and female roles are being defined in a revolutionary way" and reminds us that "education is both a vehicle for and an expression of the changes occurring in the society at large." Smith (1979) makes a similar assessment based on research conducted by the Urban Institute on the changing social and economic status of women and families.

> We are undergoing a revolution--at times obvious, at times only dimly perceived--the traditional relationship of women to work, money, marriage and family. One indicator of this revolutionary change is that in less than a generation the size of the female labor force has more than doubled and now includes the majority of working-age women . . . . But while the ranks of wage-earning women are highly visible, this phenomenon is not easily grasped as a whole--not in its origins, nor in the predictability of its course, nor in its consequences. This is a subtle revolution (Smith, 1979:ix).

While Smith's comments are clearly in reference to the number of women entering the labor force, it seems quite appropriate to substitute "women returning to school" and draw the same conclusion of a lack of a full understanding of "origins," "predictability," and "consequences." While some see these women as pursuing a new position in society, others may be inclined to perceive the phenomenon as evidence that more equalitarian marital roles have already been established. It is more reasonable to accept the former observation that the delayed pursuit of higher education is part

of a broader process, the redefinition of the woman's place in society. Such a focus raises an interesting question: how does this changing definition of gender roles take place in family life at the level of interpersonal relations? The addition of student role to the woman's roles of wife and mother represents not only a transition for her personally, but potentially one for her husband and children as well. This role transition, or process of entering (or leaving) a social role, represents a change in role expectations or norms, and thus in behavior patterns (Burr, 1973). The transition by the reentry woman into the student role has significant implications for a redefinition of the family roles and, concomitantly, for family power relations. The ease with which this role transition occurs may be influenced considerably by the extent to which family roles are redefined.

Clarification of Terminology

Understanding these implications requires clarification of the concepts introduced in these observations. Most basic to the discussion is the notion of "role." In reviewing the diverse definitions of role, Biddle and Thomas (1966:29) observe:

> The idea of role has been used to denote prescription, description, evaluation, and action; it has referred to covert and overt process, to the behavior of the self and others, to the behavior an individual initiates versus that which is directed to him. Perhaps the most common definition is that role is the set of prescriptions defining what the behavior of a position member should be.

In accord with this "most common definition," role is herein defined

in terms of normative prescriptions associated with a particular social position. Prescriptions are seen as reflecting both responsibilities or duties and rights or privileges.

The addition of some roles may have little or no effect on existing roles, but this is seen as most unlikely in the case of the reentry woman who is adding student role to her roles as wife and mother.* The new role duties may encroach upon the time, energy and sense of commitment encompassed in on-going role performances. The husband may view changing performance as unrewarded costs. How effectively the multiple roles are managed is a major determinant of the ease with which the transition into the newly acquired student role is achieved. "Ease of transition" denotes the degree of difficulty of moving into the student role. Through a review of theory and research related to the notion of role transition, Burr and his colleagues (1979) develop a causal model of role transition. The variables influencing a role transition include three factors which will be incorporated in this study: anticipatory socialization, role strain, and the "amount [the] role facilitates goal attainment" (Burr et al., 1979:84-89). Anticipatory socialization is defined as the process of learning the various facets of a role before being in a position to enact that role (Merton, 1968). Having had an opportunity to observe others in the student role may serve to clarify

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*For discussions of the role of housewife, see Lopata (1971), Bernard (1972), Oakley (1974), Burk and Berheide (1977, and Vanek (1978).

the expectations associated with that role. The facilitation of goal attainment is drawn from Cottrell's (1942) suggestion that adjustment to a role is easier to the degree that the role allows realization of goals supported by one's subcultural groups. Role strain, "the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations" (Goode, 1960:483), is seen as being particularly salient for the reentry woman's transition. For this reason and because role strain itself is derived from a number of sources, more detailed attention must be directed to this particular concept.

Role Strain

Role strain is a consequence of two overlapping but analytically distinct problems: role conflict and role overload. Although Goode (1960) introduced the term "role strain" to designate the difficulty in meeting role expectations, Merton (1957) had preceded him in examining the phenomenon. There are differences in the foci of the two theorists. Merton's discussion rests on the observation that by virtue of occupying a single status, the individual has numerous role partners and thus a "complement of role-relationships" which constitute the "role-set." Assuming the inevitability of conflicting and contradictory expectations, Merton identifies the "social mechanisms" which operate to "articulate" role-sets or to minimize the instabilities inherent in them. These are all based on social structural features and not a matter of individual choice. This discussion implies that role strain is a normal consequence of role conflict (conflicting expectations).

The conflicting expectations of role sets are just one source of role strain identified by Goode (1960). Goode's discussion of why "[T]he individual is . . . likely to face a wide, distracting, and sometimes conflicting array of obligations" (1960:485), incorporates the inconsistencies and contradictions which may emerge within a single role, between separate roles or among the obligations of a role-set. Here it is role overload which is of central concern: ". . . the individual's total role obligations are over-demanding" (p. 485).

The reduction or avoidance of role strain calls for both individual and social responses. The individual may utilize certain techniques for determining involvement in role relations: compartmentalization, delegation, elimination of role relationships, extension, obstacles against indefinite expansion on the role system and barriers against intrusion (Goode, 1960:486-487). "Role bargains," which are continually renegotiated in relationships, shape actual performance and investment of resources. Role bargaining mechanisms serve to make the complex of roles more manageable as the individual attempts "to demand as much as he can and perform as little. . . ." (Goode, 1960:495). They thus involve a form of exchange in which each participant seeks to maximize outcomes. The product of this exchange is the "role price." Goode describes the individual's role price as the degree and quality of involvement in a role. It is influenced by

> the interaction between three supply-demand factors: (a) his pre-existing or autonomous norm commitment--his desire

> to carry out the performance; (b) his judgment as to how much his role partner will punish or reward him for his performance; and (c) the esteem or disesteem with which the peripheral social networks or important reference groups ("third parties") will respond to both ego's performance and to alter's attempts to make ego perform adequately (p. 489).

There are differences between Merton and Goode in terms of scope and emphasis, yet these should not overshadow the shared assumptions of the inevitability of role strain. The arguments of both theorists are relevant for the reentry woman. In accordance with their observations we would expect the woman's transition into the student role to be a difficult one, complicated by and conflicting with responsibilities she already has by virtue of her existing roles. Furthermore, we would anticipate her utilizing some of the mechanisms suggested by Goode for reducing the role strain she is experiencing. Her degree of involvement in the student role, relative to her roles as wife and mother, may be seen as a consequence of the negotiated role prices.

Much of the literature on working wives (cf. Hoffman, 1961; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1978) and college reentry women (cf. Katz, 1976) reports role strain to be "typical," but there seems to be no focused attention on those cases in which such strain is not present or at least minimally so. A recent direction in role theory which challenges some of the theoretical assumptions reflected in the works of Goode (1960) and Merton (1957) promises to fill that gap.

This new direction has been provided by Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977). Responding to the emphasis by role theorists on negative consequences of role accumulation and the neglect of possible gratifications, Sieber directs attention to the possibility that positive outcomes of multiple roles may outweigh the negative. While performing numerous roles may be demanding, the costs involved in meeting those demands may be negated or compensated by the fact that those same roles may provide privileges and overall status security, enhance one's status and enrich one's personality. Research is therefore called for which would determine ". . . what kinds of personalities suffer or thrive under what kinds of conditions when confronted with what kinds of multiple roles" (Sieber, 1974:576). While an examination of personality types is beyond the scope of this study, this research responds to the latter part of Sieber's challenge through an examination of the "conditions" under which multiple roles are rewarding or costly.

That some individuals may "thrive" with role accumulation is also suggested by Marks (1977) in his criticism of the assumption of earlier theorists that human energy is limited or something to be "spent." Suggesting "energy creation" and "social time" theories,* Marks sees socially constructed time and energy as flexible and expansive, shaped by the individual's total range of commitments.

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*For other discussions of "social time," see Sorokin and Merton (1937) and Lewis and Weigert (1981).

One role may be defined as more important than others because it is more enjoyable or rewarding. Consequently, commitment to that particular role is stronger; that is, there is a greater desire "to carry out a more or less elastic cluster of performances" associated with that role (Marks, 1977:929). An individual's "commitment system" must be taken into account to determine the importance of a role relative to other roles. Commitment systems are not defined solely in individualistic terms, however. Such systems are derived from culturally patterned systems. A society may define all activities as equally important or highly valued, all as equally unimportant or unworthy of interest, or some activities as more important than others. In the third ideal typical system, role strain is most likely to occur as the individual is over-committed to certain roles and under-committed to others (Marks, 1979:931-932). What should be emphasized here is the "under"-commitment. The role is not defined as unimportant, but as less important. LaRossa (1983), for example, provides a case analysis of a couple's transition to parenthood utilizing the notion of "social time." The scarcity of time for the marital role and resulting role strain (marital strain) defined by the pair are seen to be a consequence of a greater commitment by the husband to his career and by the wife to her home than to the marriage. Thus, as suggested by Marks, for those activities to which one is strongly committed, time is found and energy created.

Given the arguments of Sieber and Marks one should exercise caution in assuming that a multiplicity of roles inevitably produces

role strain. These arguments are seen as complementing rather than refuting those of Merton (1957) and Goode (1960). What is called for, therefore, is an approach which would allow identification of the conditions under which such strain is or is not experienced. Thoits (1983) sees the distinction between "segregated" and "non-segregated" identities as providing the means for specifying the expansive effects of multiple roles suggested by Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977). "The self is conceptualized . . . as a set of discrete identities--self-definitions in terms of occupied social positions" (Thoits, 1983:175). Where there is overlap among identities (non-segregation) multiple roles have the effect of maximizing time and energy, as suggested by Marks (1977). In contrast, Thoits argues that if multiple roles (or identities) are segregated, the positive effects noted by Sieber (1974) are more probable. Rewards derived from one role may benefit another role.

The applicability of Thoits' assertions to the reentry woman depends on the extent to which the student role "carries over" into her other roles such as wife, mother and friend. Acceptance of her new role--and identity--by her significant others (segregation vs. non-segregation) would thus influence both the manner and the degree to which this additional role is rewarding.

For the woman who has added "college student" to her repertoire of roles and identities the question becomes one of her perception of the costs and benefits of her multiple roles (Sieber) and her definition of time and energy (Marks). Particular attention should

be directed to her system of role commitments. If commitment level to the student role is high, does that role overlap with or infringe on her other roles (Thoits)? If the latter is the case, how does she respond to the conflicting demands and resulting strain? Is she in a position to carry out effective role bargains?

Conflicting Interests

Recalling Goode's assertion of the normalcy of role strain, role bargains are also "normal" as one seeks a manageable role system. Yet, role partners are simultaneously seeking the "best deal." The "cumulative pattern of all such role bargains" thus contributes to social stability (Goode, 1960:495). Goode's theory of role strain is representative of the consensus-equilibrium approach which is criticized by Sprey (1969, 1971, 1975, 1979) as inadequate. Sprey offers a conceptualization of the family as "a system in conflict" and the family process "as an ongoing confrontation between its members, a confrontation between individuals with conflicting interests. . . ." (Sprey, 1969:702).

For anyone not familiar with a conflict perspective, the terms "conflict" and "confrontation" may suggest the family as a combat zone. Attention should therefore be directed to the last phrase of Sprey's observation, "with conflicting interests." As noted by Duke (1976), the most basic assumption of conflict theory is that "conflicts of interests are normal, inevitable, and ubiquitous in social life, primarily because of the scarcity of valued goods and services" (p. 235). A significant distinction exists between

"conflict of interest" and "conflict behavior" or the "overt actions used by persons in response to a conflict of interest" (Strauss, 1978). The "ongoing confrontation" to which Sprey refers, therefore, does not suggest the inevitability of violence or rancorous dispute within the family since individuals may confront one another through more "peaceful" means such as bargaining and negotiation.

The range of "conflicting interests" is clarified by Deutsch (1973) in his enumeration of the types of issues about which conflict may arise: control over resources, preferences, values, beliefs, and the nature of relationships between individuals. The woman's transition into the student role may involve any or several of these issues, which may contribute to, or result from, the role strain she experiences. That some of these issues are more salient and potentially more consequential than others is noted by Sprey (1979) when he distinguishes between "instrumental" issues and "structural" issues--labeled "issue oriented" and "relationship oriented" conflicts respectively by Raush, Barry, Hertel and Swain (1974). Instrumental issues which involve routine decisions faced daily in our family lives can be negotiated without disturbing or challenging the established marital or family order. In contrast, because structural issues involve issues of privilege and autonomy, they pose a threat to that order. Sprey notes:

> Much of what falls into the category "conflict" in marriage and families actually involves confrontations about rules and status privileges. What is negotiated inside such families . . . seems basically the competitive interests of members and member categories in privilege, authority, and individual autonomy (1979:143).

The family is thus seen by Sprey (1969) as a "negotiated order," a view which requires focusing on how family members come to deal with these differences or, more specifically, how they come to manage this conflict. Understanding this "conflict management" requires use of such notions as "strategy, bargaining and exchange."

Negotiation

While some may be inclined to think of negotiation and bargaining as taking place only in the context of international conflict or labor-management disputes, its place in marriage and the family is receiving increasing attention (cf. Gowler and Legge, 1978; Scanzoni, 1978; and Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). As indicated by Cromwell and Olson's (1975) thorough review of multi-disciplinary approaches to family power, there is a trend toward eclectic approaches often using aspects of exchange, conflict, resource and negotiation theories. Simultaneously, negotiation theorists are citing marriage and the family among the potential settings for negotiation (cf. Zartman, 1976; Strauss, 1978).

Close examination of negotiation will clarify Sprey's description (1969) of the family as a "negotiated order." Negotiation, according to Zartman (1976:7), is "one of the basic processes of decision-making." Similarly, Rubin and Brown (1975) view bargaining as synonymous with negotiation. "Bargaining relations are a subset of those social relationships concerned with the resolution of conflict" (Rubin and Brown, 1975:3). Negotiation, therefore, serves as an alternative to such methods as coercion,

manipulation and persuasion as a means of solving conflict (Strauss, 1978).

This study is based on the assumption that the wife's return to school is a catalyst for such negotiation in some cases. If the family is viewed as a negotiated social order as earlier suggested by Sprey, then the wife's assumption of the student role can be seen as precipitating a recordering or restructuring of that order. At the very least, it will lead to what Zartman (1976) refers to as "discussion" through which spouses discover or develop consensus. The wife indicates to her husband that she has been considering going to college and he agrees that it is a good idea. There is no conflict of interest to be negotiated. Instead, they have "discovered consensus." Or, even if there is some reluctance on his part, they are able to develop consensus through discussion. In either case, what Hill and Scanzoni (1982) refer to as "spontaneous consensus" is apparent and negotiation is not required. However, given the modifications required in the daily routine of family life, negotiation may ultimately be needed, particularly if the woman is highly committed to the student role and, as suggested by Marks (1977), her involvement in that role begins to encroach on her other roles. If so, her transition to this non-traditional role may require a series of role bargains which involve a restructuring of family tasks and activities. Agreements concerning household tasks, leisure activities and even such seemingly mundane issues as use of the car, may have to be submitted to negotiation. The question is, what

factors contribute to the effectiveness of the negotiation? Perhaps more significantly, if she is successful in the restructuring of family roles, does that involve, or lead to, a redefinition of power?

Power

This study is based on the assumption that the role transition of the reentry woman clearly involves the issue of power, if not in the initial assumption of the student role, certainly in reference to the negotiation which may transpire as she attempts to facilitate that role transition. In support of this argument, clarification of "power" is in order as is some attention to the history of so-called "family power" studies.* These studies have proliferated since the landmark Blood and Wolfe study (1960) with most researchers following Blood and Wolfe in defining power as "the potential ability of one partner to influence the other's behavior" (p. 11); in concluding that "the balance of power will be on the side of the partner who contributes the greatest resources to the marriage" (p. 12); and in finding the husband's power to vary positively with his socio-economic resources--income, education, and occupational prestige. Power in this research tradition is measured in terms of decisions made in a number of specified content areas. While many have followed Blood and Wolfe closely, others have offered extensions and

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*"Family power" is the most frequently used designation in the literature, but many studies are concerned with "marital power" (McDonald, 1980).

modifications of resource theory (Heer, 1963; Rodman, 1967, 1972; and Burr, 1973).

The methodological and conceptual problems plaguing many of these studies have been noted in numerous critiques (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970; Sprey, 1972; Cromwell and Olson, 1975; and McDonald, 1977, 1980). A careful review of the criticisms reveals an emerging emphasis which is reflective of a trend in the discipline of sociology as a whole, viz., an increasing attention to a conflict perspective. As suggested earlier in reference to Goode's theory of role strain, many assumptions of the equilibrium model of society have been challenged as has the consensus model of the family (Sprey, 1969; LaRossa, 1977). Further evidence of the challenge is offered by Gillespie (1971), who draws attention to structural obstacles limiting female access to power-based resources, and more generally by Collins' observation (1975) that power relations within the family are gender-linked just as they are in the larger society. He asserts: "The family is a structure of dominance like anything else, and we are beginning to see that it enforces a great deal of inequality" (p. 225).

While a comprehensive examination of the criticisms of family power studies is beyond the scope of this paper, some attention must be directed to certain aspects of those criticisms, particularly to those related to the meaning of power. While most definitions may be seen as Weberian derivatives generally conceptualized as the ability of one to realize his or her will even against the wishes

of others, numerous conceptual and measurement problems persist.* In reviewing these various problems, Cromwell and Olson (1975) conclude that the most promising approach is to define family power as a property of a family system and as the "ability--potential or actual--of individual members to change the behavior of other family members" (p. 5). However, as noted by Scanzoni (1979), because the definition rests on change as the intended effect, it is inadequate for dealing with the converse situation of preventing change. Dyke (1976) explicitly presents power as involving a struggle between those seeking change and those resisting change.

Such a struggle may ensue in the case of a family confronted with the wife's/mother's return to school. If she attempts to get her husband and/or children to assume some of the household responsibilities, the interests of these other family members may motivate them toward resisting any redefinition of the division of labor. This conflict of interests--desired change vs. commitment to the status quo--has already been presented as a catalyst to negotiation. What becomes apparent then, is that power is a basic element of negotiation.

Given the purpose of this study--i.e., to examine role transition (a process) and the attempted reduction of role strain through negotiation (a process)--it seems only appropriate that

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*For a summary of definitional problems related to power in general, see Duke (1976); for definitional problems related to family power, see McDonald (1980).

power should be defined as a process. Olson and Cromwell (1975) observe that, among the three "domains" of power--bases, processes and outcomes--processes has been the most neglected.

A similar call for a more dynamic conceptualization of power has been made by Luckenbill (1979). Observing that interactionists have failed to develop an adequate definition of power, he suggests that power be seen as "the process in which one party exacts compliance from another party, despite a conflict of interests, through the actual or proposed manipulation of resources . . ." (p. 98). Following our earlier discussion, the "compliance" may represent change or stability and may reflect individualistic interests or collective interest. And, "manipulation of resources" not only clarifies resources as crucial to the power process, but also incorporates exchange into that process. Furthermore, resistance or opposition--conflict of interest--is seen as an inherent part of the power process.

But, is conflict a necessary condition for power? This question brings us to what McDonald cites as "one of the most crucial debates in family power research . . ." (1980:843). In response to Rollins and Bahr's argument (1976) that power becomes relevant only when conflict exists, McDonald notes the possibility that the absence of conflict may, in fact, be the result of power. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to refer to the absence of perceived conflict. Since most conflicts within the family are handled by an "established authority structure" which Sprey describes (1975)

as "culturally legitimated power," many of these conflicts may not emerge as such. They remain latent (Deutsch, 1973:14). Such latent conflicts are those which have been "repressed, displaced, or misattributed" or ignored. Only under certain conditions is a level of awareness achieved by which these conflicts become conscious and, as a reult, the legitimacy of authority and/or of the rules of exchange challenged. This involves what Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) have described as crossing the boundary between "silent arrangements" and explicit negotiation.

I propose that the transition of the married woman into the student role typically involves crossing that boundary. This role transition, particularly if it is characterized by role strain, may represent a consciousness-raising experience whereby previously latent conflicts become conscious conflicts providing the stimulus for negotiation. Since education serves as a significant means for an expansion of roles and resources, the addition of the student role may precipitate a redefinition of family power as the woman seeks to reduce role strain by bargaining with new power resources.

This focus on "power as process" offers an opportunity for a more complex model which might specify, as suggested by Sprey (1972), the causes and consequences, e.g., "costs" of power. Recognizing the "consequences" would perhaps reveal that an "outcome" may, in itself, be a precipitator of additional consequences. Only if we deal with power as a process can we begin to discern such implications.

Scanzoni makes a similar point in observing "that effects were arrived at is not, in and of itself, anywhere nearly as important as knowing how the actor got there" (1979:302). We might expand on that and add, nor nearly as important as knowing the consequences as well. Thus, simply knowing that a married woman has returned to school, the "effect," tells us nothing about the possible complexities involved in that decision, e.g., whether her return is with her husband's "blessings" or is in spte of his protests. Nor does that effect reveal the ultimate consequences of that outcome.

Research on reentry women has focused on the degree of family acceptance and some of the outcomes of her return, yet we know very little about the processes of role bargains or powering by which realignments are achieved and role strain avoided or reduced. More needs to be known about how roles and attitudes come to be redefined (Katz, 1976), if in fact they are. Within this context it may be possible to clearly discern the reciprocal use of power as suggested by Sprey (1975). Where there is a conflict of interests--wife wishes to become a college student and husband disapproves--how does she go about influencing her spouse? What motivates her in attempting to satisfy or protect her interests? How does her perception of her husband's response influence how she goes about achieving that goal? What are the circumstances under which negotiation is demanded?

Gender Roles

While there certainly is no simple answer to these questions, gender role attitudes may be one important variable in the study

of marital power, decision-making and negotiation. Observing the variation in terminology reflected in the literature, Scanzoni and Fox (1980) chose to conceptualize gender role attitudes as "subjective orientations" representing "preferences or . . . tastes" which, when treated as variables, "reflect the degree to which individuals prefer the sets of rewards and costs that flow from current patterns of gender stratification and division of labor" (p. 744).

Evidence that these preferences have undergone some modification is provided by a number of recent studies (Parelius, 1975; Mason et al., 1976; Scanzoni, 1976). Perhaps most significant is the evidence that changes in attitudes of women have been more extensive than those of men. For example, Tomeh (1978) found among his sample of college students that "women favor a role-sharing model in which opportunities and responsibilities between the sexes are shared whereas men show resistance to this life style" (p. 341). Similarly, Komarovsky (1976) notes a strong commitment by males to the traditional pattern. The opposition of men to the non-traditional wife-mother role is seen as suggesting a fear by men that the interests of the husbands and children will be neglected.

To comprehend and appreciate the full implications of these shifts--or stabilities in the case of males--in attitudes, a clarification of "traditional" and "modern" is called for. Scanzoni (1979) has provided one of the more detailed elaborations of the terms and one which best links the notions to marital power, decision-making and negotiation. "Traditional," one end of the gender role continuum,

is defined in terms of the woman's personal interests being subordinate to those of her husband and children. The term is thus synonymous with "familism" denoting that the good of the family holds top priority. Roles and interests are clearly defined by "spontaneous consensus." At the opposite end of the continuum is "modernity," depicting the woman's interests as equally important to those of her family. Interchangeability in roles and activities becomes a notable feature. Overlapping interests are more likely to occur and, as one may wish to reconstruct roles within a particular sphere, negotiation becomes a necessary element.

What is most significant here is not the dimensions--"traditional-modern"--per se, but the degree of congruence between spouses on these dimensions. Where one spouse's preference is traditional and the other's modern, this disparity increases the likelihood that elements of exchange, power and conflict become critical issues. Noting possible congruence or disparity, however, does not reveal all. The lack of fit between attitudes and behavior has long plagued researchers and we are not granted an exception here. Gender role preferences seem to be changing faster than the gender-related division of labor. Thus, while one might espouse modern preferences, these preferences may not be accompanied by behavioral manifestations (Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). The husband who readily endorses his wife's desire to attend college may not so readily exhibit behavioral support such as assuming some of the housekeeping and/or child care responsibilities. Thus,

while initial consensus may exist, conflict may ultimately emerge. Here again, the flow in the "final-say" or outcome technique is revealed. The outcome may be relatively short-lived and thus, decision-making and perhaps negotiation continues.

Gender role preferences then may be viewed as central to the development of conflict and similarly, central to its management through negotiation. The gender role orientations become a part of what Strauss (1978) refers to as "parties' theories of negotiation" or what Rubin and Brown (1975) present as "behavioral predispositions of bargainers." The traditional woman is more likely to utilize strategies directed toward the family's well-being. In contrast, the strategies of the modern woman reflect concern for her own interests alongside those of her husband and children (Scanzoni, 1978; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980).

The complexity of both decision-making and the influence of gender-role orientations is poignantly reflected in the description of decision-making by one of Rubin's working-class husbands (1976:110).

> It's kind of a joint effort up to a point. We'll talk it over and, if we agree, we do it. But if I say a flat "forget it," that's it.
> What happens if she says no to something you want?
> Then she has to convince me. But she very seldom says no if I want it. Maybe that's because she knows she'd have a hard time convincing me.

The superficial "joint effort" could be misinterpreted in a number of ways if consideration is not given to underlying dynamics. Is it equalitarian or husband dominant; traditional

based on spontaneous consensus? Is there an absence of conflict or latent conflict?

Rubin's observations (1976) are reminiscent of a number of points made previously. That "working-class women generally seem to accept and grant legitimacy to the husband's authority" reflects the spontaneous consensus and subordination of the wife's interests associated with the more traditional gender norms. And, as suggested earlier, that acceptance or absence of conflict, in fact, may be a result of power. However, Rubin continues:

> In muting her own needs to be responsive to his, she is left dissatisfied--a dissatisfaction that makes her so uncomfortable she often has difficulty articulating it even to herself (1976:113).

One might ponder at what point and under what conditions do these needs become articulated and conflict become conscious? Is a strong commitment to the student role, which may conflict with the woman's domestic roles, sufficient for her to express her needs and initiate role bargains or negotiation? When these needs do surface, what strategies are utilized for satisfying those needs? Under what conditions and by what means does the emerging conflict come to be managed? It is the purpose of this study to explore the answers to these questions, thereby enhancing our understanding of role transition, role strain and family powering.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The current stage of research on the education reentry woman suggests a need for learning more about the adjustments involved in the transition into the student role. What is called for, therefore, is an exploratory, hypothesis-generating study. A qualitative design based on what Glaser and Strauss (1967) have described as "grounded theory" is most appropriate for gaining insight into the phenomena of role transition and the concomitant family powering, offering an opportunity for a richer, more detailed analysis of the complex issues which they entail. While the literature reviewed in the previous chapter has served to suggest certain concepts and relationships, the research is quasi-inductive in nature rather than a discovery of grounded theory in its purest form. The constant comparative method of data analysis, advocated by Glaser and Strauss, has been utilized for the generation of "categories, properties and hypotheses" (1967:104). The data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

The Sample

The sample (N=26) was drawn from the population of married women enrolled at a junior college in metropolitan Atlanta. Three criteria were used for selecting those to be included: that she be at least twenty-seven years of age; is a mother with children

living at home; and, that she had not worked full-time during the year prior to her enrollment.

While the minimum age was somewhat arbitrarily used, it was believed that the woman who was at least twenty-seven would have had sufficient time to have "settled into" a homemaker role and the decision to enter or return to college would represent a significant transition in her life. The ages of these women ranged from twenty-seven to forty-four. Within that range fourteen were under thirty-five and twelve were thirty-six and older.

Women without children were assumed to experience significantly different and less complex, if not easier, transition into the student role by virtue of having fewer family members to be affected by their decision and thus were excluded from the study. Of the twenty-six women who participated in the study five had only one child, three of whom were under six years of age. Fifteen of the women had two children, two had three and four had four. The ages of the children living at home ranged from two to twenty-two.

The "non-working" criterion was applied as a further guarantee that the new student role is, in fact, a major transition for the woman and her family. Having recently worked full-time may have already atuned the family to a restructuring of its previously established order. Even if a woman had worked previously, it was assumed that a year's hiatus would mean the return to school would necessitate a new set of adjustments and accommodations. For the majority of the women studied that hiatus was far greater than a

year. Only six had worked full-time at some point since the birth of their children and ten had worked part-time. Altogether, nine had not worked since either before marrying or having children.

While the researcher is well aware and appreciative of the criticisms that have been directed toward the self-report, particularly "wives-only," approach (Safilios-Rothschild, 1969; Cromwell and Olson, 1975), excluding the husbands from this study is justified. One could offer the now-standard rationale that temporal, monetary and logistical considerations precluded the possibility of conjoint interviewing. Although this rationale is quite applicable to this research, of equal significance was the conviction that the very nature of the problem called for initial research to be focused on the wife. A major objective of the research was to gain insight into the process of the woman's role transition. It is she who was believed to be the "initiator," the principal "actor." It is her subjective response to change, i.e. her "definition of the situation" which is of importance. How she defines her family's response to her student role, how she feels about and reacts to that perceived response, how she defines the strain resulting from her multiple roles, how she attempts to negotiate changes in the family situation and how she views the success (or failure) of those negotiating strategies are the issues at hand. This study is the first step toward comprehending the complexity of these phenomena, a step which will provide direction for future research which might include the spouses of reentry women.

Given the quest for comparative information and the subsequent need for "strategic cases," random sampling was viewed as an undesirable approach. Since the study is exploratory in nature and designed as hypothesis-generating, the results are intended to be of heuristic value rather than generalizable to the population of interest. Even if a random sampling approach were considered appropriate and desirable, it would have been precluded by the unavailability of a listing of those women who satisfied the sample requirements. While records on students at the target institution include age and marital status, information on motherhood and work history is not included. Therefore, a combination of theoretical and snowball sampling was applied. Given the diverse nature of the population of interest, theoretical sampling as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) offered greater potential for learning more about various theoretical categories.

Through theoretical sampling, general considerations served to guide the initial data collection. That initial stage of data collection was based on the assumption that the goals of these women are quite diverse as are the circumstances of their personal lives which serve as the backdrop to their student role. General criteria thus called for selecting women who were at different stages of their educational pursuit, who had varying educational goals (one year certificate, associate's degree, bachelor's degree and perhaps, graduate degree), who had differing family situations (such as number and ages of children) and who represented different socio-economic

statuses.* The coding and analysis of the early interview data suggested additional theoretical categories. For example, it became apparent that a distinction needed to be made between educational goal (type of degree or major) and the motivation for a college education, that is, her reasons for becoming a student (personal enrichment, immediate financial need for sharing the wage earner role, or for future security).

For further generation and comparison of theoretical categories, sampling was not limited to those women who were currently enrolled, but included women who had been previously enrolled but who had either withdrawn or had failed to return. Of the women who participated in the study, four were not attending at the time of the interview. In a similar manner Holmstrom (1972) selected a small number of couples among whom the wife was not working to serve as a comparison group for her dual career couples. Her objective was the same as that operating for this study: to accentuate the characteristics of those subjects who are of major concern. Including some who had dropped out or withdrawn allowed identifying characteristics of those who are the successful "copers" or "negotiators." Yet, this was soon recognized as limiting the study to two categories of women: first, those who were maintaining the three roles of wife, mother and student; and, second, those who had given up the student role.

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*Because only a small percentage (6.9) of the total enrollment at the target institution is nonwhite, the decision was made to limit the sampling to white women.

Again, what Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe as "the joint collection, coding and analysis" of the data paved the way for subsequent selection of cases. An attempt was made to identify those women who had retained the student role but who had "given up" the role of wife. Unfortunately, only one such case has been included in the study. Several women were identified as having divorced since coming to college, but all of these either had no children or had worked full-time prior to becoming a student and were not qualified for inclusion.

Potential subjects were identified through the contact the researcher has with many of these women in classroom and advisement settings, and through colleagues who were aware of the research. The subjects themselves were asked to identify other women who met the specified criteria. Altogether, thirty-one women were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the study. Three of those women did not meet the criteria and two, although qualified and interested in participating, could not be interviewed because of insurmountable problems in scheduling the interviews.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews or what Holmstrom (1972) has described as "free-style" with a core of topics or questions suggested by the review of literature. The objective was to gather some standardized information while not being so structured as to inhibit the freedom and flow of expression by the respondents. Since the major focus of this study is "process," what was desired was a detailed description of the process of role

transition. Such a description could best be provided by these women in their own words. Allowing them to express themselves yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the transition into this new role.

The interview questions* were directed toward four major areas of concern: specific problems related to the adjustment to the student role; the support network; negotiation strategies; and, the relative importance of (and commitment to) the student, wife and mother roles. Facets of the role transition were dealt with by questions regarding problems adapting to the student role, changes in family life and regular routine. Additionally, the women were asked to identify the biggest or major problem they had faced, and to describe how they see their lives right now and in the future.

The role and importance of the support network called for questions concerning the husband's feelings about her decision to attend college, and his response (behavioral and emotional) since her return. Her feelings about his response were explored through the question "What would you want him to do or be like?" Similarly, the interviewee was asked about the response of her children, relatives and friends. Further inquiries concerning changes in family routine (household tasks) and attitude were aimed at learning about negotiation strategies and their effectiveness.

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*The interview guide used in this study is reproduced in the Appendix.

Several questions were designed to determine the relative importance of the respondents' multiple roles. Examination of the commitment to the student role was based on responses to questions concerning the decision to go to college, educational goal and feelings related to an inability to achieve that goal. As an indication of the orientation to her family roles, the interviewee was asked to describe her view of the woman's roles as wife and mother, and how she felt her views compared to those of her husband and of women she knows.

Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the subject either on campus or, if she preferred, in her own home. Four of the women chose to be interviewed at home to avoid having to make child-care arrangements. The sessions were approximately one and one-half to two hours in duration, and were recorded by both audio-tape and notes taken by the researcher. The interview had been pre-tested on four subjects with the results necessitating only minor and relatively few changes in the instrument.

To say that these women were willing to participate would be an understatement as many seemed quite anxious to do so. By their own admission some found the interview session therapeutic: "talking about these things has helped me see things more clearly." * For

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*This response points to the role ambiguity of the researcher in conducting qualitative studies. For a discussion of this and other ethical issues in qualitative family research see LaRossa, Bennett and Gelles, 1981.

a few, their participation seemed to be synonymous to a contribution to "the movement": "I'm really glad you're doing this study; people need to know what it's like and something needs to be done."

Data Analysis

While for the purposes of a research proposal it is possible to distinguish between the "collection" of data and the "analysis" of data, in the actual conduct of qualitative studies such a delineation does not exist. Instead, there is a significant and meaningful overlap between the two (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lofland, 1971). As indicated earlier, analysis is an ongoing process which commences with the initial stage of the data collection and thus becomes a major influence in the direction of subsequent phases of that collection.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. provide a narrative description of what is happening (behaviorally and subjectively) in the lives of these educational reentry women;

2. describe, from the respondent's point of view, the process of role transition, role strain and the negotiation involved;

3. determine the causes of role strain. Why is strain experienced by some and not others;

4. develop a typology of transition outcomes;

5. examine the conditions underlying the various transition outcomes;

6. examine unity and diversity of responses related to the above-cited issues.

In reporting the general tendencies in responses, the approach suggested by Cuber and Haroff (1965:17) has been utilized:

Few:	recurrent but reported by more than 5 to 10 percent of the interviewees.
Some:	a greater frequency than few, but not exceeding 25 percent.
Many:	a substantial minority, more than 25 percent, but less than a majority.
Most:	more than a majority.
Typically:	used interchangeably with most.

Analytic Avenues

The constant comparative method advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was the principal means by which the materials were analyzed. This approach entailed coding information into as many categories as possible, comparing it with other information which had been previously coded in the same category. As additional information was being categorized, the researcher began to recognize the range of types of that category, "its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relations to other categories, and its other properties" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:106). By constantly comparing the different cases, similarities and differences became more apparent and "lower level categories" began to emerge. As the collection-coding-analysis process continued, "higher level, overriding and integrating, conceptualizations" (Glazer and Strauss, 1967:36) became discernible. For example, during the early phase of the research some respondents

reported guilt feelings about neglecting aspects of their family roles. Initially, this guilt appeared to be present almost exclusively among those women whose husbands had less than a college education. Yet, when other women whose husbands were college educated reported similar guilt feelings, the overriding factor was seen as the motivation these women expressed for coming to college in the first place. Thus, expressions of guilt were far more characteristic of those who were attending college out of a desire for personal enrichment than of those who were motivated by a need to contribute to the financial security of their families.

Once categories appeared to be yielding no new insights, hence "theoretically saturated," attention was directed toward new cases for data on other categories. As Glaser and Strauss (1967:62) point out, the objective is to "maximize the differences in groups in order to maximize the variety of data bearing on a category." This theoretical saturation or maximation of differences is made possible through theoretical sampling as the continuing analysis allows the identification of new cases to be selected for examination.

Analytic Mechanics

As soon as possible following a scheduled interview, the interview was reviewed and, within a week, was transcribed. A folder on each respondent was established containing the original, completed interview guide as well as a summary sheet. A cumulative listing of interviewees containing key characteristics and demographic data

was maintained and frequently reviewed to determine the direction further sampling should take.

The transcribing, coding, filling and cross-referencing processes were facilitated by the use of a personal computer and software programs. A word-processing program was used in the transcribing of the interviews and multiple copies of each interview were printed. One copy was retained intact for the subject's folder.

Information provided by each interviewee--comments, quotes, descriptions of events or episodes--was categorized, and through a "cut and paste" procedure, transferred to five-by-eight index cards. Using the word-processing program, that same information was summarized for each subject according to significant properties--e.g. age, number of children, husband's education--and major categories--e.g. motivation for attending, husband's response, and guilt. These summary data for all respondents were then stored on a disk.

Another program allowed summarizing and organizing these same data for all interviewees in a table format. Examination of rows revealed characteristics and "properties" for each respondent and examination of columns revealed variable responses across all subjects. A most valuable feature of this program is a "selection" procedure whereby all cases whose responses were the same on a maximum of three categories could be identified. That information could then be printed out in tabular form. Illustrating this procedure is a table which would present only those cases which met all of

three criteria: husband's education was "less than high school," changes in household tasks was coded "none" and expressions of guilt was "none." For comparison purposes additional tables were produced with variation in any one of these response categories. For example, following through on the above illustration, subsequent tables were produced for subjects whose husbands had a high school education and for those whose husbands had a college education. Examination of these tables allowed identifying not only additional similarities but also differences among these particular subjects. These multiple and constant comparisons necessary for the identification of significant relationships were therefore achieved with a minimal "shuffling" of index cards.

This procedure was supplemented by the use of a "find" command of the word-processing program. This feature expedited the location of all occurrences of a particular category from the summary data which had been stored on a disk. For example, when the analysis revealed that expressed feelings of guilt had significant implications for the student's transition, all occurrences of such expressions were easily retrieved through the use of this feature. Once those particular subjects were identified, the full context of those guilt expressions was located on the corresponding index cards. The selection of specific reports to be cited in the analysis of data was facilitated by this process.

Presentation of Data

In the pages to follow is a narrative description of what is happening in the lives of these women. While the respondents have been allowed to "speak for themselves" the major thrust or objective is to develop a theoretical conceptualization based on their accounts and descriptions (cf. Holmstrom, 1972; Rubin, 1976; and LaRossa, 1977). The material to be presented, therefore, is not simply for the purpose of describing the process of role transition and negotiation, but more importantly for arriving at some understanding of why this transition is experienced differently by these women. The focus is on the respondents' "construction of reality"; how this transition to the student role and the powering it entails are socially organized and constructed.

CHAPTER III

A PROFILE OF THE WOMEN

Before examining the varied facets of the role transition experienced by the twenty-six women of this study, some attention must be directed to the various socio-demographic factors which provide the backdrop for their adjustment to the student role. Their experiences take on special meaning only when viewed in relation to the milieu in which they occur (Mills, 1959). This chapter provides an examination of that milieu including the personal and familial characteristics which are most salient for the role transition of these women. In light of these characteristics, attention is directed toward those factors which contributed to the decision to attend college, the educational goals these women expressed and, in turn, how these particular factors influence the extent of time and degree of involvement in the student role.

Their Personal Lives

As previously noted, the ages of these women range from twenty-seven to forty-four. Their marriages vary in duration from four to twenty-six years and, with the exception of three who had been married previously, are first marriages. As would be expected, the number and ages of their children will be shown to be of major significance. The role of mother takes on different meaning altogether when contrasting a women with an only child who is fifteen

with the woman who has three or four children all under the age of twelve. Thirteen of the women studied had no children over the age of twelve and five of these were mothers of children who were under six years of age. Thus, for one-half of the sample, child care responsibilities represent a special area of concern.

A husband's level of education was expected to be a critical factor in relation to both his initial receptiveness to his wife's interest in becoming a college student and his subsequent response to her actual transition into the student role. Although the sampling procedure described earlier did not allow for selecting the participants in terms of their husbands' education, by chance one-half of these men had no more than a high-school level of education. Six of the women reported their husbands to have some college experience, two of whom are currently attending college on a part-time basis. Seven hold college degree, including one who has pursued some graduate work and one who has earned a master's degree.

While the educational attainment of the husband was considered significant because of its generally assumed "liberalizing effect," his occupation was seen as more significant as indicative of the social class therefore of the lifestyle manifested by his family. Gans (1962:243), for example, has suggested that social classes be seen ". . . as strata in the larger society each of which consists of somewhat--but not entirely--distinctive social relationships, behavior patterns, and attitudes." That such variations do indeed exist has been demonstrated, among others, by Rubin (1976), LeMasters

(1975), Holmstrom (1972) and Komarovsky (1967). Typically, such works follow the convention of conceptualizing "social class" according to a dichotomization of occupations into middle- and working-class categories. The sampling process in this study was therefore characterized by a concern for maintaining a balance between middle- and working-class occupations.

When an interviewee suggested a potential subject for the study it was much less awkward to inquire about the occupation of her husband than to ask, "How much education does he have?" Typically, when an informant suggested someone for inclusion in the study, that person was known well enough to be aware of the husband's job but not of his education. The occupational dichotomy which emerged consists of fourteen middle-class (white-collar or professional-managerial) positions and twelve working-class (skilled/blue-collar) positions. Although there is a dichotomization of both the education and occupation categories, these do not perfectly coincide, as shown in Table I. For example, five of the husbands who are in the professional-managerial occupational category have had no college and, in fact, one has less than a high school education. As will be considered later, being married to a man who has realized occupational success without a college education may have significant implications for the woman who has decided to become a college student.

The educational aspirations of most of the women sampled exceed the educational achievements of their husbands and their parents.

TABLE I

HUSBANDS' OCCUPATION, INCOME AND SOCIAL CLASS ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level of Education	Occupation	Income Range	Social Class
Less than high school	Truck driver	$20,000-25,000	Working class
	Maintenance engineer	25,000-30,000	Working class
	Regional manager	35,000-40,000	Middle class
High school	Army staff-sergeant	15,000-20,000	Working class
	UPS driver	20,000-25,000	Working class
	Heavy machinery sales	25,000-30,000	Middle class
	Telephone repairman	25,000-30,000	Working class
	Truck driver	25,000-30,000	Working class
	Materials' planner	30,000-35,000	Middle class
	Service station owner/mechanic	30,000-35,000	Working class
	Machine shop foreman	35,000-40,000	Working class
	Physical security specialist	35,000-40,000	Middle class
	Construction company owner	45,000-50,000	Middle class
Some college	Parking garage manager	15,000-20,000	Working class
	Electronics technician*	20,000-25,000	Working class
	Merchandise manager	20,000-25,000	Middle class
	Automobile mechanic*	25,000-30,000	Working class
	Airplane mechanic**	40,000-45,000	Working class
	Air traffic controller	50,000+	Middle class
College	District sales manager	25,000-30,000	Middle class
	Accountant	35,000-40,000	Middle class
	Data processing manager	35,000-40,000	Middle class
	Army captain	35,000-40,000	Middle class
	Systems analyst	40,000-45,000	Middle class
	Electrical engineer	40,000-45,000	Middle class]
	Printing company treasurer	40,000-45,000	Middle class

*Currently attending college part-time.
**Post-secondary vocation-technical education.

Only four of the subjects reported having one parent who had completed a college education and in only one case was it the mother. At the opposite end of the education scale are four women who indicated that neither parent had completed high school. Since the institution from which these women were selected is a community college, most of its enrollment is comprised of first-generation college-attenders. Therefore, that so few of the parents of the women studied had college degrees was anticipated.

Although the college experience was far from common in both their families of orientation and procreation, fourteen of these women had attended college prior to their current pursuit. However, for one-half of these students, their previous college experience was at least seven years ago and, overall, was of short duration with women dropping out to get married, to have a baby or to go to work.

Marriage and motherhood took precedence not only over college, but over working as well, thereby reflecting the more traditional orientations expressed by many throughout the interviews. When questioned about their work history, two indicated they had not been employed since marrying and eight not since before their children were born. Ten have periodically worked part-time and six full-time since "motherhood." Among the six women of this study who had worked full-time two had been the wage-earners while their husbands were in college. Four are currently working part-time, adding yet another role to their repertoire of wife, mother and student.

Their Reasons for Attending

When asked what led to the decision to attend college, rarely in the course of the interviews did a respondent reply with a single, clear-cut reason. Many unhesitatingly gave multiple reasons, suggesting perhaps that it was a question which had been frequently posed. Anticipating that their husband's receptiveness and support would in large part be affected by why these women wanted to attend college, a deliberate effort was made during the course of the interview to ascertain what could be considered the primary motivating factor.

The responses fall into three major categories: preparation for employment (N=16), personal satisfaction (N=7) and future security (N=3). That these are not mutually exclusive is illustrated by the response of a nursing student:

> I needed something other than just to be a mother and wife. . . . I want to do something for others . . . I can make life a little easier for my husband. [He] thinks of this basically as insurance. If anything happened, this would help. I can make a decent salary . . . take some of the pressure off him . . . send the children to college.

An examination of specific motivation factors reveals that while preparation for employment was the most typical response, the diversity of their comments suggested three distinct subcategories among those with employment intentions. The first subcategory is represented by seven women whose prospective employment was seen as offering discretionary income to enhance their family's economic situation and/or insure the means for financing their children's

college education. Concomitantly, most of these women expressed a sense of obligation to assist their husbands in the provider role. Summing up this attitude is the comment by one: "The whole burden of responsibility is on the man and its not quite fair . . . a man can't do it all by himself." In contrast, the second subcategory consists of five for whom economic necessity rather than fairness has precipitated their preparation for the work world. Finally, there are four students whose husbands' incomes suggest a comfortable lifestyle and who are attracted to the job market for the intrinsic rewards of employment.

For this category as a whole, employment outside the home will not be a new experience as most of these women have worked at some time since the birth of their children. It was that experience which played a part in the motivation to attend college. Having worked for minimum wages they have come to recognize the value of a college education in reentering the job market. The statement by one woman, "I don't want to be a peon the rest of my life" was echoed by many of the others.

The second major motivation category consists of seven women who indicated that they were attending college for personal enrichment or self-satisfaction reasons. "I was bored just sitting at home"; "I need something besides just being a wife and a mother"; "I felt like I was wasting away" were comments typical of the responses given to the inquiry about their decision to come to college. These women clearly are the ones for whom the homemaker role alone is no longer challenging or satisfying, but who either have no interest in

entering the job market or were influenced by their husband's preference that they attend college rather than go to work. This group is almost equally divided between those who have a work history since marrying and those who do not.

The data revealed another category consisting of a very few subjects (N=3) who were primarily motivated by a felt need to make an investment in the future. These are the ones for whom education primarily represents an insurance policy to draw on if future circumstances deem it necessary. Each of these cited unique justifications for this perceived need including a recent near-fatal illness of the husband, a husband's job insecurity because of threatened employee lay-offs, and an unstable marriage with an uncertain future.

Comparison of these general categories reveals very little variation in the number and ages of the children, and with one exception, no significant difference in the ages of the women themselves. The median age, thirty-eight, of those who are seeking the intrinsic rewards of employment, is somewhat higher than those of all the other categories. There are differences, however, in the educational attainment of their husbands, as indicated in Table II, and in their families' income levels. With one exception, the husbands of all women whose employment intentions are based on financial need have no more than a high school education. The mean income of this group is $25,500. Both the "discretionary income" and "college for personal enrichment" categories represent a balance of high school and college educated husbands and have a mean income of $31,786. Among those attracted to the work world for its intrinsic rewards the mean income

TABLE II

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REASON FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE AND HUSBAND'S EDUCATION

Reason for Attending College	Husband's Education		
	High School of Less	Some College	College
Employment:			
Financial need	4	1	0
Discretionary income	3	1	3
Intrinsic rewards	1	2	1
Personal enrichment	3	1	3
Future security	2	1	0
Total	13	6	7

is $41,250, and all but one of the husbands have at least some college.

As subsequent and more detailed analysis will show, those women who were found to have the least difficult transition into the student role are disproportionately drawn from the "discretionary income" and "college for self-satisfaction" motivation categories. In contrast, the most difficult transition was found to be experienced by those women whose assumption of the student role was accounted for by a financial need to seek employment. Understanding these relationships requires that attention first be given to the implications of their motivations for their degree of involvement in the student role.

The Student Role

Just as most women responded without hesitation to the question "What led to your decision?" the inquiry concerning their educational goals yielded responses of equal certainty. Twelve are seeking a bachelor's degree and a few of these students have expressed a desire to pursue a graduate degree. Thirteen subjects are pursuing an associate's degree in a career program, that is, a two-year degree in either business, nursing or dental hygiene. Only one woman was enrolled in a one-year, certificate program.

The significance in this diversity of goals lies in the implications it holds for the variation in the length of time required for realizing those goals. Considering the program requirements alone, that time ranges from one year for a certificate to at least four years for the bachelor's degree or beyond. The speed with which these women are moving toward their goals is not being established by them alone. The data revealed a significant distinction between students who have the option or in some cases, the luxury, of pursuing an education at a slower pace and others who do not have such an option. Among the latter are women in career programs which are characterized by a more structured curriculum requiring that specified courses be taken in a particular sequence and, typically, that a full academic load be carried quarterly. For some subjects in this category the streamlined nature of these programs is well-suited to their personal needs. As indicated in Table III these are the women who revealed a sense of urgency about

TABLE III

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REASON FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE AND EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Reason for Attending College	Educational Goal	
	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Employment:		
Financial need	5	0
Discretionary income	4	3
Intrinsic rewards	3	1
Personal enrichment	0	7
Future security	2	1
Total	14	12

completing their education because of a more immediate financial need to assume a wage-earning role. Nine of the students who are in programs requiring no more than two years indicated economic reasons for their employment plans.

Table III reveals a comparable association between bachelor degree aspirants and attending college for personal enrichment or security for the future. These same women constitute the majority of those who have more flexibility in their college career. The anticipated length of that career was found to be influenced by factors other than the type of degree each woman was pursuing. For some of these students the length of their college experience is a result of factors not necessarily of their own choosing. Most salient for these women is the issue of role overload;

the simultaneous responsibilities of wife, mother and student have led to the realization by many that they can handle only two courses per quarter.

The significance of the relative commitment to multiple roles is most apparent for these women (Marks, 1977). The nature of the distribution of their time and effort between home and school is influenced considerably by the orientation they revealed toward their roles as wife and mother. For those who adhere to a more traditional orientation, particularly to the mother role, being available to their children is most important and their personal educational pursuits take second priority. Interestingly, some of their comments revealed that their hierarchy of commitments is more of a chronological than a value ordering: "My family comes before school, only because they were the commitments I made before school." These are the subjects who exhibited more of a "laid-back" attitude about reaching their goals. "There is no big rush; if I sense that my family feels neglected, I'll drop out for awhile." "I started out taking three courses, but dropped one because of the time demands. . . ." Such comments represent the more traditional attitude among women that as long as their families are doing well, they are doing well (Scanzoni, 1978). Although they are committed to the student role, their continuation in that role is dependent on their families' satisfaction with the situation.

In contrast to these women are the students who are strongly committed to the student role and who feel either that they have a right to pursue their personal interests or that their attendance

is in the family's best interest and consequently, that family members will simply have to adjust and make the necessary sacrifices. The strength and effect of that commitment is poignantly reflected in a comment by one of the women for whom an education represents insurance for the future:

> I'm so motivated that if the kids became critically ill, the doctor would probably have to write down that they have three months to live. It would have to be something really serious for me to give it up.

Equally determined is the woman who, after having five children, wants to enter the nursing profession. She reports telling her family that since she has become a "liberated woman" they will simply have to learn to live with it.

This is not a selfish attitude, but one which is founded in the conviction that if she is personally satisfied, her family is ultimately the beneficiary. Herein lies a facet of the more modern woman whose guiding philosophy is "if I do well, my family does well" (Scanzoni, 1978:116). It was a combination of that more modern philosophy and the need to supplement her family's income which prompted the following comment by another interviewee:

> I've definitely had to put my husband's needs and my child's needs on second priority a lot of times. It makes me feel badly, but its the choice I have. Its either that or flunk school.

The significance of the foregoing discussion lies in the implications these factors offer for the nature and extent of negotiation employed by these women to secure the cooperation and

assistance of family members in order to facilitate their transition into the student role. Those women who have been characterized as exhibiting a more relaxed attitude regarding their college goals and who are more traditional in their role orientations have made little or no effort to bring about any change in their family's routines or allocation of household tasks.

In contrast, there are those women who either desire or truly need a change in the family. These actually represent two distinct subgroups. The first subgroup consists of the students who have begun to develop a more modern role orientation and are no longer inclined to assume a subservient role to their husbands and children. All of the previously noted reasons for attending college are reflected by the women of this subgroup. Thus, irrespective of the reasons for their college attendance, they are more inclined to negotiate changes in the family routine. The second subgroup consists of those women who are attending in preparation for a wage-earning role to relieve the financial strain which their families currently face. Among these subjects are some who subscribe to the more traditional roles and others who are more modern in their philosophy regarding their rights and responsibilities. For those who adhere to more traditional attitudes regarding their roles, negotiating changes is more problematic even though their college attendance is for the future economic well-being of their families.

Perhaps the most intriguing and in many ways the most revealing are those women who are transitional in their role orientations. These are the ones who were socialized to the more traditional family

roles and have structured their lives accordingly, but who have recently begun to experience a change in attitude. Because there has been no concomitant change in attitude by their husbands, the success of the negotiation directed toward facilitating the transition into the student role is more problematic.

Anticipating that the passage of time would influence the adjustments made by these women and their families (Burr et al., 1979), a deliberate attempt was made to select women who were at different stages of their college career. Only one was interviewed during her first quarter of attendance, three were in the second quarter and four in the third. A total of twelve were in their second year and six had been attending for at least three years. One woman in this last category has prolonged her college career because of an early decision to alternate quarters in attendance to "maintain tranquility at home."

While some are carrying a full academic load--a minimum of 12 quarter hours, a few take only one course per quarter. But, two courses or even one course, are experienced quite differently by these women than by the typical student. The acadenic role is taken seriously as reflected by the high grade point averages which these women maintain.* Additionally, for those who are pursuing allied health degrees which involve clinical experience, the

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*See, for example, Embse and Childs (1979) for an examination of factors related to the academic achievement of reentry women.

required time investment goes beyond that typically assumed for studying and attending class. For example, a dental hygiene student reported that during one quarter her weekly schedule included seventeen classroom hours, four lab hours and twelve clinic hours.

This chapter has provided a brief glance into the personal lives of the twenty-six women of this study: their ages, the number and ages of their children, the educational and occupational attainments of their husbands and the history of their own work experience. Their reported educational goals were shown to be related to the factors which motivated them to add the role of student to their already existing familial roles. Also demonstrated were the implications those goals have for the degree to which these women "embrace" the student role. Realizing that such involvement is influenced considerably by their families' responses, attention is now directed to that particular facet of the role transition. The next chapter provides an examination of the actual decision with particular attention to the nature and degree of involvement by these women's husbands.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECISION TO BECOME A STUDENT

In the previous chapter attention was directed toward the relationship between the reasons the women interviewed had for wanting to attend college and their chosen area of study once they got there. There is, however, a facet of that sequence--communicating that desire to their husbands--which must be given special attention. For an unmarried woman, attending college is typically viewed as a right. In contrast, for the reentry woman who is a wife and mother it represents an option which, as suggested by Scanzoni (1978:24), may be ". . . limited or constrained by certain contingencies such as the interests of husband and children." In view of these possible constraints there may be the responsibility of demonstrating the legitimacy of the desired action. Thus, no matter what the motivation is, exercising the option to become a college student is not done irrespective of other family members and it very well may require some justification. This chapter focuses on the nature of the husband's involvement in and his receptivity to the idea that his wife take on this additional role.

Most of the women studied did involve their husbands, and in a few cases their children, in the actual decision to become a college student. Examination of that decision-making will reveal the extent to which they were faced with the necessity of justifying their interests. These "decisioning" accounts thereby offer an

opportunity for gaining some insight into the nature of their marital relationships, insight which is critical for an analysis of their transition experiences. The probable ease or difficulty of the transition into the student role for some of these women is predicated on their husband's response at the commencement of that transition. The discussion which follows attests to the dynamic nature of "decisioning" as attention is directed to the manner in which these women proposed college attendance to their husbands, the husbands' responses and, in some cases, the wives' counter-responses.

The Proposal

The circumstances surrounding the decision made by these women are quite varied. In a few cases it was the husband, rather than the wife, who initially suggested that she attend college. All but one of these men were, themselves, college-educated. This one exception involved the husband who, faced with the prospect of being laid-off his job, suggested that his wife earn a degree which would enhance her job marketability.

In sharp contrast to these whose husbands were given the credit--or in one case, the responsibility--for initiating the idea, are a few who chose to "act and then tell." These are the women who acted independently and did not inform their spouses of the decision until after applying for admission to college or after registering for classes. Typically, such unilateral action was their way of coping with their insecurities and self-doubts. In only one of these cases was it because of anticipated opposition,

the response which, in fact, she did receive. In her words, "He went beserk; he didn't want me to go. . . ." To what extent his anger represented a "self-fulfillment prophecy" rather than a direct reaction to the issue of college itself, is indeterminable.

Another interviewee acknowledged a real hesitancy in approaching her husband with the subject of college, but she ultimately presented him with the proposal. "At first I was afraid to say to him either I want to go to work or I want to go to school. I was afraid to bring up any of those." There had always been an implicit agreement that she would perform the traditional roles of wife and mother, but after eleven years of marriage she found those roles too limiting and unsatisfying. Although hers was one of the rare accounts of such a reluctance to cross what Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) refer to as the "invisible boundary" established by such implicit arrangements, others revealed a similar reluctance in reference to suggesting changes after becoming students.

Although these few episodes suggest something about the nature of the marital relationships of the women involved, it is the more typical cases, those involving explicit decision-making between spouses, which are more revealing. Most of the women of this study did in some way convey to their husbands their interest in college and involved them in making the final decision to attend. While the reported responses are varied and reflect considerable range in intensity, the data suggested the appropriateness of dichotomizing those responses into "positive" and "negative"

categories. This categorization is seen to coincide with the distinction made in Chapter I between "discussion" and "negotiation." Discussion involves an exchange of ideas or viewpoints which leads to a realization of agreement or what Zartman (1976) refers to as "discovery of consensus."

Since there is essentially no opposition in this sequence, the husband is seen as positive in his response. Such a response is reflected in the acounts of seventeen of the women sampled, inclusive, of course, of the five who reported it was the husband who initiated the idea of college. For the other twelve, "no opposition" does not necessarily imply an immediate enthusiastic response. While four described their husbands as "very positive," eight indicated their spouses thought it was "okay." Typical of the responses these women received were inquiries such as, "why do you want to go?" or "do you think you can handle it?" Satisfied with the answers their wives provided, the exchange between spouses was relatively brief and cooperative in nature.

In contrast to discussion which yields a positive response, is negotiation which is necessitated by opposition or a conflict of interests (Rubin and Brown, 1975). Nine of the women reported much more involved decision-making because of the negotiation required to overcome the initial resistance or opposition from their husbands. This category includes those women whose husbands responded either explicitly or implicitly with a "yes, but" (N=6) or with an explicit "no" (N=3).

Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) have suggested a model in which the "yes, but" is seen as another form of discussion through which consensus is "developed" or, in some cases, negotiated. The data generated by these interviews suggest that it is more reasonable and meaningful to treat the "yes, but" as a negative response. These responses range from a more general, all-encompassing lack of support--"okay, but don't bother me about it"--to a more circumstantial and qualified support--"yes, but it better not interfere with our plans for the holidays." These and other comments which fall between the extremes all signify some degree of opposition requiring negotiation or bargaining.

The Opposing Arguments

Just as the reasons these women gave for wanting to attend college were diverse, so were the reported reasons for their husbands' opposition. For some husbands it was the feeling that the wife should be home with the children; that she already had enough to handle. For other men, as would be expected, the issue of finances provided the foundation of a negative response, for two reasons. On the one hand was the cost that college would entail, and on the other was the viewpoint that she should be working instead of going to school.

Particularly for the women who were seeking self-fulfillment through higher education, there was little empathy displayed by their husbands. These men simply could not understand why their wives would be interested in attending college just to be going. Although a few of the women suggested sensing that their husbands felt

"threatened," only one reported that her husband articulated the fear that his wife would "find some young stud" and would "be smarter."

Before exploring the negotiation which transpired in the wake of this opposition, an examination of the differences between the two types of responses is in order. Review of the data revealed two major factors associated with these differential responses: the husband's level of education and the woman's reason for attending. That these particular variables are of significance is not surprising in light of the discussion in the previous chapter revealing their interrelatedness. For the man with a lower level of education, his wife was more likely to be attending college for employment purposes to supplement the family income.

As indicated in Table IV, the responses of those men with at least some college were overwhelmingly positive while the responses of the men who had no more than a high-school education were almost equally divided between "negative" and "positive." Among the seventeen husbands who responded positively, eleven had at least some college. In comparison, among the negative response category, seven had no more than high school and two had some college.

Relative to the wives' reasons for attending, financial need for employment was found to be associated with negative responses in four out of five cases, as shown in Table V. In contrast, six of seven women who plan to work to acquire more discretionary income received positive responses. And out of ten students who are

TABLE IV

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUSBAND'S EDUCATION AND HUSBAND'S RESPONSE

Husband's Education	Husband's Response	
	Positive	Negative
No more than high school	6	7
At least some college	11	2
Totals	17	9

TABLE V

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WIFE'S REASON FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE AND HUSBAND'S RESPONSE

Wife's Readon for Attending College	Husband's Reponse	
	Positive	Negative
Employment:		
Financial need	1	4
Discretionary income	6	1
Intrinsic rewards	2	2
Personal enrichment	6	1
Future security	2	1
Totals	17	9

attending for personal enrichment or future security, eight received positive responses.

Overall, a husband's negative response is associated with a lower level of education and a wife who is motivated by financial need to work. The interplay of these two factors is all too apparent. A lower level of education is frequently found associated with a more traditional role orientation by the male (see, for example, Scanzoni, 1975), who exhibits a closer adherence to the instrumental role as provider or wage-earner. The prospect of his wife's entry into the labor force to share that role with him may be threatening as it is perceived as suggesting failure on his part. Similarly, if a woman expresses a desire to work for personal rather than economic benefit, there is a failure or inability to understand why the wife-mother roles were not sufficiently satisfying. Again, for the less-educated man, such a choice by his wife may be taken as a personal affront.

The Counter-responses

Negotiation was clearly mandated in the case of the "no" responses received by three of the women, unless, of course, the women had automatically acquiesced to their husbands' wishes. In only one case did a subject reveal that her husband's opposition was strong enough to cause her to "drop the subject." Temporarily, the conflict between them was regulated by the husband (Sprey, 1979). Eventually, she found some way to overcome her husband's initial opposition just as the other "no" recipients had. The desire or

perceived need for these women to attend college was obviously strong enough to preclude their giving in to their husbands' negative responses. These, as well as the women who received a "yes, but" were ultimately able to gain at least some modicum of acceptance.

Implicit in the proposal-response sequence thus far presented is the assumption basic to the choice and exchange orientation: "Humans avoid costly behavior and seek rewarding statuses, relationships, interaction, and feeling states to the end that their profits are maximized" (Nye, 1979:2). That these women are seeking such maximization of profits was seen earlier in the examination of the reasons they offered for attending college. In turn, the objections reportedly presented by some of these men reveal their desire to avoid not only the financial costs of a wife being in college, but the social costs as well. Typically, the husband's opposition is indicative of his desire to maintain the status quo, thereby protecting the rewards which accrue from that arrangement.

The manner in which the nine women responded to their husbands' objections illustrates power as an inherent feature of negotiation. Power is conceptualized as the ability to gain compliance through the manipulation of resources (Luckenbill, 1979). In those cases where financial cost was reportedly the husband's stated objection, their wives found alternative ways for financing their education: income from a part-time job, a loan from a relative, or money received as a Christmas gift. But power resources are not always tangible or monetary in nature. Of considerable, if not equal, importance--

but often neglected in family power studies--are affective, expressive companionship and "service" resources (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976). For a few of these women it was the manipulation of such intangible resources that played a part in their negotiation strategies.

Reflected in the arguments these women presented to their husbands are the different styles of verbal strategies noted by Scanzoni (1978): principled--"you've got things; a woman needs things too"; individualistic--"it's something I want to do"; and collectivistic--"it would benefit all of us." Additional strategies involved assurances of being home when the children were or that the family would always come first and going to college would just be on a trial basis.

Follow-through Responses

While all the women were able to gain acceptance or agreement at the time, it is important to remember that it was a negotiated agreement. Unlike a negotiated union contract, for example, there is no specified time frame during which the agreement is in effect. Once again, a shortcoming of the "final-say" technique is apparent. The significance of the decisioning which has transpired does not end there. More important than the objective arrangement itself, "outcome" is more appropriately defined as the evaluation by the "decisioning parties" of their negotiations (Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). If the results of the decision, in this case making the transition into the student role, prove to be too costly for the husband, or other family members, he may eventually alter his

response. Such may be the case for both the "spontaneous positive"--the husband who was in agreement from the start--and the "converted positive"--the one who was swayed by his wife's arguments. In other words, a husband's initial or eventual agreement is no guarantee of follow-through in like manner. For these reasons the outcome of the initial decision was found to be both an inadequate indicator of the nature of the marital relationship and a weak predictor of the ease or difficulty that the woman would have in making the transition into the student role.

Although the initial data collection and analysis suggested that the husband's response would provide the major "frame" (Lofland, 1974), subsequent research revealed that analysis of the data should be based not only on that initial response but also on the husband's follow-through or subsequent response. Table VI illustrates the four-fold classification derived from that relationship and indicates the distribution of the women studied.

Implicit in this conceptualization are the major foci of this study. The typology which it yields suggests a basis for describing the different transition experiences reported by the women sampled. That typology is presented in Figure 1 as a continuum representing the varying degrees of ease with which the transition into the student role was experienced by the reentry women of this study.

The woman, for example, whose husband was not only initially positive about her return to school but who has remained supportive throughout her education career (positive-positive) is seen to have

TABLE VI

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUSBAND'S INITIAL RESPONSE AND SUBSEQUENT RESPONSE

Husband's Subsequent Response	Husband's Initial Response	
	Positve	Negative
Positive	8	4
Negative	9	5

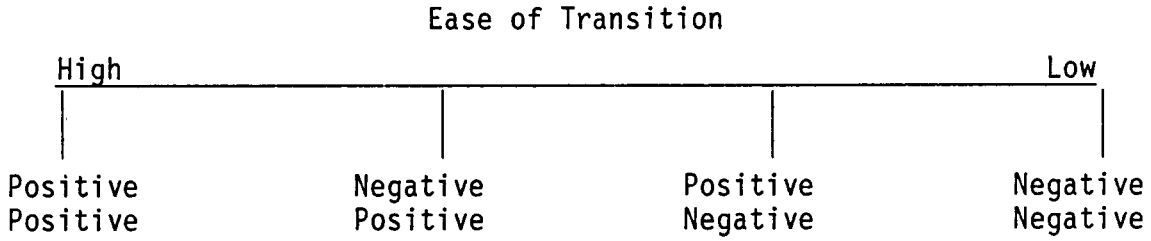


FIGURE I

Role Transition Continuum

experienced a much easier transition than that of her counterpart whose husband has been consistently negative (negative-negative). Between the two extremes are the woman who has gained her husband's support in spite of his initial opposition (negative-positive) and the woman who, in contrast, has experienced declining support (positive-negative). Implicit in the "ease-of-transition" continuum are varying degrees of role strain. However, the data revealed certain intervening factors including the effect of role orientations, guilt feelings, and the issue of "separatedness-connectedness" of the spouses.

Representative Cases

Perhaps the most challenging facet of research is to convey to the reader the significance of the interplay of these various factors. Certainly, a presentation of all twenty-six cases to achieve that objective would be detrimental to the research objective. Yet, remaining faithful to the "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959) requires attention to the "biography and history" of these women. An in-depth examination and analysis of a few select cases is therefore deemed essential to gaining the insight for deriving meaningful conclusions about the transition experiences of these women (cf. Giles-Sims, 1983; LaRossa and LaRossa, 1981).

Four cases have been selected to reflect the suggested continuum and its concomitant diversity in the perceived behavioral and attitudinal responses of the husband and children of the women in this study. Each of the cases represents one of the four types

presented above and each represents a different reason for attending college. Furthermore, their accounts will serve to demonstrate how the degree of role strain associated with the transition into the student role may be viewed as the balance of the rewards and costs produced by that transition. Since the sample included a few women who were not enrolled at the time of the interview, one of the cases is a "role retreater" who has indefinitely withdrawn from the student role.

The examination of these four cases does not imply that the remaining subjects are no longer relevant for the study. To the contrary, the themes introduced through these cases are apparent to varying degrees throughout the accounts of the others. It is appropriate, therefore, to consider the differences in the personal and familial characteristics of the women in these various categories.

As shown in Table VI, twelve women experienced relative ease in their transition into the student role in comparison to fourteen whose transitions were more difficult. The extremes of that transition continuum provided the loci for thirteen women whose husbands' responses were either consistently positive or consistently negative. The intermediate positions negative-positive and positive-negative, were reflected by four and nine women respectively.

Among the significant contrasts among the women is variation in socioeconomic characteristics. The husbands providing the sustained support are higher educated--five hold college degrees--whereas four of the "sustained negative" husbands have no more than a

high school education. Occupationally, husbands with middle-class occupations were more likely to provide sustained or converted support. In contrast, a sustained negative response and declining support were more typical of those husbands in working-class jobs.

The average age of the women is approximately the same across the categories with one exception; for the positive-negative category the average age was thirty-two, four years younger than the others. This particular category contained all of the women of the study who were under thirty years of age. Expectedly, therefore, the children in this category were fewer in number--none had more than two children--and were younger with an average age of 8.2 years.

Relative to the student role the most significant difference in the motivation for attending college was found between the two extreme categories. Women who had the greatest ease in the transition were attending for personal enrichment or in preparation for jobs to improve the margin in their families' economic standing. Financial need, on the other hand, provided the primary motivation among those at the more difficult end of the continuum. This category is also significantly different in terms of educational goal. Whereas the women in each of the other categories were equally divided between career and bachelor degree programs, with one exception the students in the sustained negative category are in career programs.

The implications of these differences and similarities are reflected in the case studies to be presented in the next two chapters. These accounts reflect the centrality of their husbands'

responses by revealing specific manifestations of those responses and, in turn, the implications of those manifestations for role strain.

CHAPTER V

TRANSITION EXTREMES

This chapter is devoted to those subjects who are representative of the polar extremes of the ease-of-transition continuum, the facilitated transition and the impossible transition. Through these cases the significance of the husband's perceived response to the wife's student role will be explored and additional factors which serve to facilitate or hinder the role transition will be examined. The significance of these factors for the intermediate categories cannot and will not be ignored.

The Cases

Abby and Dale have been selected to demonstrate the potential variation in role strain and consequently the variation in the ease of the transition into the student role. Abby represents the eight women whose transitions have been relatively free of difficulty. These are the subjects of the "positive-positive" category, signifying the consistently positive response of their husbands. There is, of course, variation among these women in the degree to which their husbands have been supportive. The range in response is reflected in the comparison of one subject who described her husband as 105 percent supportive with another who said, "He didn't care; if I wanted to go he'd be supportive."

This "positive-positive" category is predominantly middle class. Five of the men have college degrees and six are in professional-managerial occupations. The relative financial security of the families represented is reflected in the motivations these women had for becoming college students. Three view college as a source of personal enrichment and four are intending to seek employment as a source of more discretionary income. The attendance by one is in response to the prospect of her having to go to work in the event her husband loses his job. Four of these women are enrolled in career programs and four in bachelor-degree programs.

The opposite end of the continuum, the "negative-negative" category, consists of five women who are represented by Dale. The husbands of these subjects have been consistently negative, but to varying degrees. Three of these men are in blue-collar, "working-class" jobs and four have no more than a high school education. Only one of these women is attending college for its intrinsic rewards. The oldest subject of this category is preparing for work for reasons of personal satisfaction. Her husband's negative attitude is more reflective of an inability to understand her interest in college. His occupational success has allowed him to provide quite well for his family, thus precluding the "need" for her to go to work.

Three subjects did express a financial need to be employed and are enrolled in career programs. For one of these women education is of vital importance in being able to support her two children.

Her decision to attend college antagonized an already unstable marriage and her husband's opposition contributed to the dissolution of the marriage. For this woman the transition into the student role has been quite stressful because it has coincided with her transition out of the marital role.

The primary source of the diverse locations of these reentry women on the ease-of transition continuum is variation in role strain, a major factor affecting the transition into a newly acquired role (Burr et al., 1979). That variation is reflected in the following summary assessments made by the women who are spotlighted in this chapter. Abby, thirty-four years of age, mother of four, attends night classes in pursuit of an associate's degree in office management, and during the day works part-time caring for preschool-age children in her home. Her reflections on her first year as a college student:

> I'm learning my limits as a human being and its been very painful because there are times when I feel like I should be in two places; there are times when I feel like I should have studied harder; there are times I felt like I should have been at that Brownie meeting and I feel conflicts in that area, but when I stop and take an overall view and I see that my children aren't neglected, my husband still seems happy with me . . . , my house is reasonably clean and orderly, I make enough money to help support my family and I'm still on the dean's list. Now that's a lot to be proud of; something I never dreamed I could accomplish and I feel good about me.

As indicated by her remarks, her transition has not been without its difficulties, yet for Abby there have been rewards which have served to minimize the role strain often associated with role

accumulation (Sieber, 1974). The mention of such rewards is conspicuously absent from the comments made by Dale, a forty-year-old mother of four, who was seeking a one-year certificate as a word-processing specialist:

> I put a lot of pressure on myself . . . trying to excel. My chest and back hurt so bad; I tried so hard. The kids wouldn't help; they weren't willing to do anything because Mom's always done it. It seemed they would sabotage my study. My husband wouldn't back me up. . . . I pushed myself more; I felt guilty about pursuing my own thing. . . . My marriage changed; we were like strangers.

There is a striking contrast between the narratives given by Abby and Dale and the outcomes of their educational pursuits are themselves strikingly dissimilar. Abby, at the time of the interview, was at the mid-point of her college career with one more year to go. Dale had withdrawn from college after successfully completing one quarter and attending for four weeks of the second quarter.

The Decisions to Attend College

One commonality shared not only by Abby and Dale, but also by many of the other women of the continuum extremes, were decisioning episodes which strongly suggested that their husband's follow-through response would be consistent with his initial response. Consider, for example, the report by Abby: "My husband has been behind it for years; he encouraged me before I thought seriously about it." The positive response Abby received from her spouse, an electrical engineering manager who completed one year of graduate study, is an interesting contrast to her father's refusal to finance her college

education when she graduated from high school. Believing that "girls only grew up and got married and had babies," he felt it was her brothers who needed to be educated. Two marriages and four babies later, Abby decided to pursue that delayed education and needed only to get her husband to "pledge his support" on the nights she would be attending class. Honoring that pledge he has been consistent in his support of Abby, both behaviorally and emotionally.

When Dale approached her spouse with the prospect of college it was quite clear from his response that similar support would not be forthcoming:

Dale: "If I can get my own money, could I go?" He said, "Yes, you can go, but you'll never finish."

Understanding the "mixed messages" (Galvin and Brommel, 1982) Dale received from her husband requires a closer look at her personal life. Dale's husband, who has a high school education, is a materials' planner for an airlines company and holds a second job to which he devotes an additional eight to twenty hours weekly. Dale has not worked full-time since her first child arrived twenty years ago. During that time she was a full-time wife and mother and it is that history which paved the way for considerable role strain as she attempted to adjust to the additional role of student.

Going beyond telling her she'd never make it, Dale's husband told her she wasn't to bother him with it, that he didn't need more pressure. The financial strain caused in part by drug therapy for one of the children had necessitated his taking a second job and

he simply did not want to face any more stress. "The more I want to get out on my own, the more problems we have." Acknowledging the apparent contradiction with a short nervous laugh, she continued:

> Instead of coming to school, he wanted me to get out and get a job, just like that. It is very hard to explain to him that it is very hard, after staying home fifteen years, just to go out and get a very good-paying job. I feel like I'm capable of much more than that, have more to offer.

Obviously, the expression "out on my own" suggests a pursuit of more individual interests, a pursuit which was incongruent with the relationship Dale and her husband had established through twenty-two years of marriage. She expressed a dual purpose in attending college: to prepare for sharing in the wage-earning role and for personal enrichment. The latter was expressed through comments concerning the social isolation and confinement she was feeling by continuing in the traditional wife/mother roles. That traditionalism and its concomitant power dependence (Emerson, 1962) were reflected earlier in her request for permission from her husband to enroll in college. In spite of the conflict of interests between her and her husband, Dale borrowed the money for college from her grandmother, and entered the word-processing-specialist program which she felt "would qualify her in the shortest amount of time for starting at a higher salary." She saw this as only a beginning, as her ultimate goal was to move into office management.

Thus, although Abby and Dale both had economic motivations for attending college, the specific circumstances and content of

those motives are significantly different. These differences reflect the contrast between the two categories they represent. As noted in Chapter III, most of the women of the "positive-positive" category are motivated by either a desire to provide their families with more discretionary income or a desire for personal enrichment. Accordingly, Abby believes that the degree she is seeking coupled with her seven years of secretarial experience will enhance her opportunity in the business world, thus providing the family with a more comfortable economic cushion. In contrast, the educational pursuit by Dale reflects the pattern of the "negative-negative" category as a response to a more urgent financial need; for Dale it was to share the provider role with her husband. As indicated earlier, those women who had economic need as the primary motivation for attending college were found to have had more difficult transitions than those women whose objective was to work for discretionary income or for whom college or work was primarily for self-satisfaction. Explication of these relationships will be presented after first directing attention to the introduction of these women to the college scene.

Becoming a College Student

"A woman my age coming to college is the most unnatural thing in the world." These words were spoken by a student, a married woman in her late twenties, in the course of a conversation prior to the commencement of this research. "Unnatural" was highly emphasized to suggest a turmoil in violating the highest law of nature. Such

is the success of the internalization of the norms governing our behavior. A wife and mother should be at home dutifully conforming to those roles, or, if necessary, serving as a coprovider with her husband. She should not be sitting in a college class; college is the place for young people, a part of their anticipatory socialization, preparing them for productive roles in society.

The designation "non-traditional" student often seen in the literature and used by many institutions further reflects the "unnatural" feature of the phenomenon. A few of the interviewees themselves reported reactions from friends and relatives which suggest that they are seen as somehow deviant. Much more common, however, were the comments revealing that they define themselves as different. Various statements such as "I stood out" and "I felt like I didn't fit in" were summarized by one subject who said, as if she were the spokeswoman for the entire category of reentry women, "We're scared' we're afraid everybody else is going to be young." The relief in realizing that such fears are unfounded was expressed by a thirty-seven-year-old mother of two:

> The first two weeks were sort of difficult because in my class I was the only one my age. The end of the second week I ran into a lady my age and we just looked at each other and laughed. She said, "oh, isn't this horrible?" I said, "oh, no; I think its just wonderful, but it sure is good to see a face the same age."

Their own reported fears and doubts about becoming students reveal that this transition represents far more than the simple addition of another role. Hirsch (1981:156) describes the transition

as one in which women are assuming a "highly ambiguous role as they enter a competitive . . . social institution." The variation in the impact of adapting to the student role is revealed through their responses when asked to identify the problems they had in becoming a student:

Abby: "Taking the SAT. I'm going with a friend and neighbor. We study together. Its been great."

Dale: "Self-discipline; a new schedule . . . getting up early. I put a lot of pressure on myself. Study came first . . . aspiring to excel. I felt a little odd at first, being older; most of the others are the same age as my son."

Overall, among all of the women interviewed, the most frequently cited problems related to studying--learning how to study and the time required for studying. Next in frequency were responses reflecting the difficulty in assuming the identity of student: "I felt out of it, isolated"; "I had problems relating to other students and to faculty." Such replies concerning identity confusion cut across all four transitional categories and were reiterated in response to the question, "What has been the major problem you've faced?"

Although the issue of studying, particularly the time devoted to studying, was typical of all of the subjects, that theme was found to manifest itself quite differently along the transition continuum. These manifestations are attributed to the variation in anticipated expectations and demands of the student role and, consequently, in

the implications of those demands for the family routine. It is the unanticipated scarcity of time, that highly valued resource, which is at the heart of the conflict which is particularly characteristic of those women in the "positive-negative" category to be examined in the next chapter.

The difference lies not in the amount of time that the women of the various categories devote to studying but in their anticipation of the time required and consequently in their responses to the time demands. That some were far better prepared for this specific facet of the transition is evidence of the significance of anticipatory socialization for facilitating a transition into a new role (Burr et al., 1979).

For the reentry women of this study, anticipatory socialization is seen as exerting not only a direct influence on their transition but also an equally significant indirect influence through its effect on role strain. Most of the husbands who had college degrees had earned those degrees after marrying so their wives had an opportunity to acquire a clear understanding of and appreciation for the role of college student. Many of the potential conflicts were anticipated and thus were averted through advanced planning. In fact, one subject whose husband recently completed his college education had initiated a restructuring of the household tasks more than a year before she entered college. She "conditioned" her children by rewarding them for the household tasks they performed and repeatedly told them that by the time she started classes it would be assumed they would

continue in assuming those responsibilities without compensation. By the time she began her studies the children and her husband were well into the new routine. As she expressed it, "It's like running my own little business."

This is also where Abby clearly had the advantage. Like most of the women she represents, she is married to a college graduate. Moreover, Abby's husband has completed one year of graduate study and has, on occasion, been a part-time college instructor. She, therefore, realized in advance the need to reorganize her schedule. Abby's husband is representative of the ones who are college-educated and who not only accept their wives' goals for academic achievement but also support and assist them in their efforts. However, a few of the women whose husbands had college degrees, along with most of the ones whose husbands had no more than a high school education, felt that their spouses did not demonstrate that acceptance. In other words, there was a lack of consensus between spouses on expectations of the college student.

Such a lack of consensus over expectations is another factor which has been identified as contributing to role strain thereby affecting a role transition (Burr et al., 1979). Accordingly, disagreement over how much study is enough and therefore over the importance of good grades was found to be a major source of strain for some of the women interviewed and is one of the major factors associated with the declining support by those husbands who were initially positive about their wives' return to college.

Typically, reentry women are academic achievers for various reasons. For some of the subjects, particularly those who have had little opportunity to experience a sense of accomplishment outside the domestic context, such achievement is a source of self-satisfaction. Many of the interviewees referred to the "pressures" to do well. One woman expressed the fear of failing: "I was fearful that I would fail and have to face friends . . . plus the ones who really didn't think it was a good idea for me to go." For others, maintaining a high grade point average is a way of justifying the sacrifices which they feel are demanded of their families.

For some, especially those for whom educational costs create a strain, financial considerations represent an added motivation. By doing well they can qualify for scholarships, grants or loans. For a few of the women, the prospect of financial assistance was a bargaining resource for gaining support from their husbands. For example, one subject reportedly reminds her husband that if he wants her to make "A's" so she can earn a scholarship, he'll have to do his part. For two of the interviewees who are veterans, the prospect of losing their educational benefits is a source of leverage in maintaining spouse support.

Aside from financial considerations, academic achievement was also seen to affect negotiation effectiveness. Self-esteem is frequently cited as a significant factor in the use of bargaining power (cf. Rubin and Brown, 1975; Scanzoni, 1978; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). Many of the responses of the subjects revealed

the extent to which academic achievement has been a source of enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence. The latter "reward" was often cited as a source of more satisfactory management of marital conflicts. However, while there was evidence of self-pride among most of the subjects, some echoed the complaint that their husbands do not share that pride. A few reported that although their husbands brag to others about their "smart wives" they do not bestow that praise on the wives themselves. These are the women who have had a more difficult transition in part because of the difficulty in assuming the identity of a college student.

The Support Network

In terms of acquiring that student identity anticipatory socialization can be seen to have the most significant direct effect on the role transition. Pointing to the relationship between social identity and roles, Hirsch (1981:161) says that the "viability of a social identity depends significantly on its recognition in the social network." Abby had very little difficulty assuming that identity largely because of her family and friends' acceptance and praise of her decision to take on the student role. Most of her friends have college degrees and serve as a reference group which endorses her efforts. Overall, most of the subjects reported positive responses from friends; or, as a few indicated, the friends who matter the most are supportive. Associations with those who are critical of the new role have reportedly either declined or, if maintained, the topic of college is avoided. Some of the women spoke proudly

about the new friendships which they have established with other students. One interviewee offered a nice summation of the significance of such friendships:

> Family is wonderful, but it is not like having a friend who is in school with you. We have the same problems, know what it is like to stay up all night studying and how frustrated you are when you miss a question. She can really empathize with you.

Abby has the benefit of a close friend and a supportive family both of whom are instrumental in the reinforcement of her student identity. She discusses course-related problems with her husband and shares the dining room table with her children for studying. Most significant of all the sanctions she has received is the one from her daughter who chose Abby as the topic of a written assignment which concluded with the wish that "'someday she could be just like her mother and do all the things her mother does.'"

Rarely did a respondent indicate negative responses from her children. A few of the women who have preschool children did reveal guilt over the adjustment problems their children have had to make. One student, who also works part-time, recalled being asked by her four-year-old son, "Why do you always go to work and leave me an orphan?" However, the overall picture portrayed by these women is one in which their children are quite pleased about their mothers' new student role. In many cases, as illustrated by Abby, they study with their children and report an improvement in their children's grades. One woman noted it has made her children realize

adults have to work for things too, and another subject reported a heightened sensitivity to the pressures her children feel in their school work.

In contrast, Dale's primary social network, her family, was never willing to recognize her identity as a college student. The observation made by Hirsch (1981:163) that the withholding of such recognition may be an attempt to protect "the (perceived) self-interest of network members," is quite applicable to Dale's situation. The anger and frustration with which she spoke of her family's non-supportive relationships which are a potential source of support may, in fact, be a major source of stress (Eckenrode and Gore, 1981).

Dale's unmet need for a strong support network is reflected in her responses when asked how she thought the college could make the transition easier for women like her: "publicize 'anxiety-coping' workshops more; organize a 'club' which would allow women to share their problems. If a student is withdrawing, someone should call or write the student."

Whereas most of the other women who have had more difficult transitions echoed Dale's desire and need for a support group, those subjects whose transitions were comparatively easier indicated no need for such a group. Some expressed opposing sentiment: "I wouldn't have gone; we find each other" and "If I need support of others, I want it to be my own idea." These are the students whose families and friends have been quite supportive and therefore instrumental in facilitating the transition. Dale was not on campus long

enough to develop friendships that might have provided her with the support and encouragement she needed. While she had gotten to know a few of these other women, many of them she described as already having their own cliques.

The family as a support network plays a critical role in the facilitation of the transition for reentry women not only in its attitudinal response, but also in its behavioral response. The behavioral response of the family is important because of the unavoidable overlap between the student role and the wife/mother roles. When asked about the problems faced in adapting to the student role many of the subjects referred not only to difficulties related to the student role itself, but also to conflicts with their familial roles. As attention is directed to another potential source of role strain we once again find diverse manifestations of that behavioral response.

Adjusting the Family Routine

What does "mom becoming a student" mean for the family routine, the division of labor? As indicated earlier, research on working wives suggests that for the most part employment outside the home is pursued simultaneous to maintaining the usual household responsibilities; there is no significant restructuring of those tasks (cf. Holmstrom, 1972; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1978; Rallings and Nye, 1979). For the women of this study there was considerable variation in the degree of reported changes in the domestic tasks subsequent to their college attendance. It is that variation which

provides a major distinction between the two extremes of the role transition continuum. Major changes were reported by the "positive-positive" category, those who represent the facilitated transition, compared to few, if any, changes reported by the "negative-negative." That relationship is more complex than it seems and requires careful consideration of the issue of role strain.

As previously noted, role strain refers to the difficulty one experiences in meeting role demands and typically involves role overload and role conflict. Presumably, the more role activities expected of one, the greater chance that time limitations will not allow performance of those activities or that the incompatibility of those demands will preclude their enactment (Goode, 1960).

Given this reasoning one might expect the effects of role accumulation to be similar for Abby and Dale each of whom has four children. However, it would be misleading to assume that their roles as mothers are comparable simply because they have an equal number of children. Abby's children, who are considerably younger than Dale's, are still living at home, whereas only two of Dale's are at home on a regular basis. Furthermore, recalling that Abby also works part-time caring for other children in her home, why would it not be Abby who experiences the greatest amount of strain and consequently the more difficult transition into the student role? That her transition has been relatively easy is attributable to a number of factors related to both Goode's (1960) discussion of role strain as well as the more recent challenges offered to some of his assumptions.

Marks (1977, 1979) questions Goode's assertion of the inevitability of role strain, particularly the assumption that scarcity of time and energy is at the core of role strain. Marks proposes that the major determinant of role strain is the degree of role commitment which is based on the assessed value or importance of a role relative to other roles one is performing. For those roles to which one is highly committed, energy is "expanded" and time "created." The bases or sources of commitment described by Marks (1977)--enjoyment, rewards anticipated or punishments avoided--closely resemble the rewards or "positive outcomes" which Sieber (1974) argues might accrue from role accumulation thereby mitigating the effects of role strain. However, Marks, while acknowledging that role commitment may be an individualistic phenomenon, argues that commitment systems are culturally or subculturally patterned. Three ideal types of commitment systems are identified: the first is one in which the roles are seen as of equal importance; secondly, is the system whereby all roles are of equal unimportance; and, finally, is that system in which some roles are more important than others. This latter type which is characterized by over-commitment to some roles and under-commitment to others is what, according to Marks, constitutes the major source of role strain.

What is being offered is not a refutation of Goode's theoretical formulation, but a supplement to his observations which would account for those situations in which a multiplicity of roles does not result in role strain. A return to Goode's discussion

serves to clarify the potential value of the ideas of Marks and Sieber. Assuming the scarcity of time and energy and thus the inevitability of role strain, Goode (1960) delineated a number of ways by which one might reduce role strain thereby achieving a more manageable system of roles. One might psychologically or structurally "compartmentalize" the various roles, delegate activities, eliminate role relationships, extend the performance of one role in order to use it as an excuse for inadequate performance in another, establish "obstacles against indefinite expansion," or create "barriers against intrusion" (Goode, 1960:486-87).

While all of these mechanisms were present in the reports given by the subjects of this study, not surprisingly the more innovative and successful manifestations came from those women experiencing the least difficult transition. For example, many of the subjects have shifted household chores to their husbands and/or children. Child-care responsibilities have been assumed either by husbands or parents. Some of the interviewees do most of their studying on campus either after classes or on weekends. Some have decreased the number of roles by giving up such activities as volunteer community work or teaching a Sunday school class. The most extreme case of role elimination, of course, was the woman whose marriage ended in divorce within six months after becoming a student. Another common tactic, illustrative of Goode's "intrusion barriers," was to retreat into a bedroom or utility room to study, giving explicit instructions not to be interrupted except in case of an emergency.

The most typical technique of avoiding role strain was through a redefinition of roles, either structurally or personally (Hall, 1972). Structural redefinition involves the delegation of activities thereby relieving oneself of those responsibilities. In contrast, personal redefinition involves prioritizing activities and/or lowering performance standards. The students who were seen as experiencing less difficult transitions had effectively utilized both strategies. In contrast, the ones who had had a more difficult transition reported minimal delegation of responsibilities and although they have attempted to lower their standards for maintaining the household, guilt feelings render those attempts ineffective. Such guilt was expressed in the comments by one interviewee: "Its not right to go to school just to become a whole person. I have to earn it." She related her approach to scrubbing the kitchen floor. She mentally divides the floor into blocks and cleaning each block serves as "payment" for each week she has been in school. "I'm doing all the taking. I feel guilty, but that doesn't mean I'm willing to change."

While many of the women interviewed reported attempting one or both redefinition techniques, for various reasons all were not successful in those attempts. Furthermore, there were some women who did not initiate any role bargains. Marks' (1977) notion of role commitment and Sieber's "positive outcomes" (1974) offer an avenue for explaining why such bargaining attempts were not made and for identifying the factors associated with success or failure

when they were. Abby's "success story" contrasted with the experiences of Dale provides the basis for illustrating the applicability of this argument.

Abby is typical of those women who have been able to minimize role strain primarily through the delegation of responsibilities to their husbands and children. Detailing some of the ways in which her husband has been behaviorally supportive Abby said, ". . . he's taken over running the dishwasher, running the Brownie car pool, giving the girls a bath. Anything I did in the evening, he does." The nights she does not attend class and is studying, he knows what to do without asking. This, she explained, is a change from when she "had to pry him away from the television with a 'would you mind doing this?' and it was a favor." Other tasks such as the heavy cleaning and yard work, which he performed only occasionally in the past, he now does on a regular basis.

She admitted that things didn't go quite so smoothly from the beginning, particularly where the children were concerned. During her first quarter in college she tried to do everything since the children were not doing their part. "I had to do a lot of yelling and screaming and times when I'd leave the house or room, I'd be really upset." Eventually she was able to mobilize their support by enforcing a system which was supposedly already in effect. According to that system, the children, upon reaching the age of ten, become responsible for their own laundry and for cleaning their own rooms. Each child has five assigned chores to be performed as

a way of earning his/her allowance. Abby maintains a list of task assignments and on allowance day withholds money for tasks not done and informs the guilty party, "I really counted on you and you let me down. Its not fair I have to clean up the kitchen when it is your job."

As suggested by Abby's account, most of the women who have benefitted from sustained support from their husbands, report little resistance from their husbands when called on to assume some of the household and child care responsibilities. Most of these women believe their husbands could not possibly be any more supportive than they already are. A few expressed the wish that things would be done automatically and not require a reminder or a request.

Among the eight subjects of the "positive-positive" category there are two who are distinctly different. These two interviewees were seen as much more traditional in their attitudes regarding the roles of wife and mother. Household tasks are their responsibilities; their husbands are seen as doing their part as breadwinners and shouldn't be expected to do more. Both women are attending college primarily for self-satisfaction and are committed to the student role only as long as it does not interfere with the family's regular routine. One of these subjects expressed that sensitivity when she said: "If my family felt I didn't spend enough time with them, I'd quit." Thus, as suggested by Marks' thesis (1977, 1979), these particular subjects are sensitive to the potential encroachment of their "under-commitments," the student role, on their "over-

commitments," their family roles. Neither one plans to pursue a job until the children are older, in one case not until her daughters have completed high school. The transitions of these two students have been facilitated in part by their husbands' positive attitude and in part by maintaining minimal involvement in the student role. Only one or two courses are taken each quarter. While they do expect some assistance from their children, they conveyed stronger feelings of guilt about the effects the student role has on the family.

In contrast, the remaining subjects of the "positive-positive" category seemed far less guilt-ridden about the changes that have taken place in their families, particularly the responsibilities their children are assuming. While these women reported varied techniques for negotiating their children's support, they were found to be more likely to utilize what Scanzoni (1978) has classified as "individualistic" and/or "principled" strategies. Both of these approaches are seen by Scanzoni as more typical of the woman who endorses a more modern orientation to her familial roles. Less inclined to subordinate personal interests, she has little hesitancy in pursuing those interests. The right to individualism is reflected in the bargaining strategies and is illustrated by the subjects who reported that they simply say "help me" or "do this for me; I have to study." The "principled" strategy represents an appeal to the fairness of the requests being made and was reflected in reports of reminders that the children live there and have a duty to do their

part or reminders of things that have been done for them in the past. Abby's approach--"you let me down" and "it is your job"--reflects her use of both techniques.

These women conveyed a strong sense of satisfaction about the changes that have occurred in their families. One subject compared her family now--"relating as people to people"--to what it was like before her return to school when ". . . everything was sort of surface." Abby proudly explained that it gives her family a feeling of unity as well as an opportunity for learning more responsibility which will be particularly important in the future when she goes to work full time. "They know I'm not going for selfish reasons, just to find myself; I'm doing it for them. When I go to work its going to benefit all of us." Abby has been successful at organizing her family's participation through the use of daily and weekly lists and summer projects planned in advance. Describing herself as always having been organized, she says she now has it down to a science.

The Lack of Support

Dale remained the primary "keeper of the house," not because of her reluctance to restructure the division of labor, but because of her family's resistance to her attempts to make any changes. And she was far from being a silent sufferer.

The frustration Dale expressed resulted not only from her incompetence in negotiating a change but, to a considerable degree, from her realization that she had built her own trap. That trap

was camouflaged in the traditional role which she had unquestionably assumed for so long. In reference to her roles as wife and mother she noted:

> At first I took care of everybody. He expected it and I accepted the role. Its not the role of a wife to take care of her husband, but I do it, sometimes begrudgingly.

And she elaborated on her children's refusal to help:

> That's mom's fault; I know that's my fault because I should have taught them when they were smaller, but I felt like and was told by my aunts, I don't work and they go to school. They work so I should do all the stuff at home. So I did all this and now they still want me to do it. I've spoiled them. They don't appreciate it; they take it for granted.

Dale's words seem to be an echo from the "worlds of pain" explored by Rubin. Compare Dale's comments to Rubin's assessment (1976:100):

> The women . . . often express themselves with heated frustration--angry that life is thus and wondering how they can change it: "It seems like I do everything. It's just taken for granted that I'm suppose to get it all done--as if it were natural."

Dale did more than just wonder about how to change her life, she tried to implement that change. Only two of her four children were home regularly. Her daughter did some routine things such as making beds, folding clothes and vacuuming. But most sixteen-year-old girls have other things to do, "her own activities," as Dale referred to them, and as a result she was not a regular nor dependable assistant

to her mother. Dale tried to coerce her daughter into helping by threatening to impose restrictions, the loss of phone privileges, but her daughter would challenge the fairness of her mother's expectations: why should she have to do it just because she's a girl? It's not fair!

Only a few of the interviewees articulated any awareness of the extent to which a family's division of labor might be gender-based or specialized along sex lines. Those comments that were made were in reference to attempts made to steer their children away from the rigidities of gender-typed activities, attempts that were not always endorsed or supported by their husbands. Dale was not among those few. It was only "natural" to depend on her daughter for the household activities. The only responsibilities which were designated as her husband's were handling the finances and yard work. No responsibilities were assigned to the nine-yar-old son, but Dale noted that she and her husband had recently decided to offer him an allowance for taking out the trash. When asked if the daughter receives an allowance for her jobs, she replied, "No; she doesn't need it. She gets everything anyway."

Dale's family mirrors the broader society, the strength of tradition, a tradition based on gender differentiation, and society's more recent struggle to establish a more egalitarian system. That transition has been no easier for Dale's family than it has for the broader society. Kolb and Straus (1974:756) describe the dilemma:

> a change toward true sexual equality in the family, like any other drastic change in the social structure, poses problems, at least during the transition period. Individuals socialized to operate in one system of family organization may have difficulty operating under new standards.

That Dale's dilemma is embedded in that transition and that she is caught "between two worlds" (Sexton, 1979), the traditional and modern, is reflected by her self description: ". . . trying to combine the two, the good parts, but I haven't succeeded." That lack of success which Dale described was a major determinant in her position at the "more difficult" end of the role transition continuum, far removed from the position occupied by Abby.

Correlates of Role Strain

Variation in role strain is seen as the major source of the divergence in the locations of these women on the ease-of-transition continuum. Their accounts provide not only the foundation for a further examination of the sources of that strain but also the context for assessing the merits of the ideas of Marks (1977, 1979) and Sieber (1974).

According to Goode's formulation (1960), increased prescribed activities and role incompatibility are concomitants of role accumulation, and thus lead to role strain. If some of those activities are delegated, the role strain is reduced as evident through Abby's experiences. But the analysis must be extended to account not only for Abby's success and Dale's failure but also for those subjects who made no attempt to delegate.

The key to understanding these differences, lies in the diversity in role orientations or role commitment revealed by these women. These subjective evaluations become the basis from which these reentry women construct their responses to the demands of their multiple roles and thus are critical in understanding how they socially construct their transition into the student role.

It is within the context of role orientations that the applicability of "choice and exchange" (Nye, 1979) is elucidated. The variation in the ease with which these subjects have adapted to the student role can be attributed to their attempts to establish and maintain a satisfactory cost-reward ratio. What is "costly" and what is "rewarding" for these women is reflected in, and determined by, the orientations to their various roles. As indicated by Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980:17), role orientations represent preferences for certain ". . . goals, interests, rewards, costs."

Abby's more modern orientation toward her family roles reflects the value she places on both her family's interests and her own personal interests. By viewing Abby as representative of one who holds equally high commitments to her roles as wife, mother, and student, the implications of such a role commitment system suggested by Marks are discernible. Because energy and time expansion are maximized and role partners are ready to release a person to his other interests, role strain is minimal (Marks, 1977).

Before she actually assumed the student role, Abby had anticipated time limitations presenting a problem and thus unknowingly

shared Goode's "scarcity" perspective. Her comment, "it has not been half as bad as I thought it would be," gives credence to the idea that time is socially constructed. Similar remarks from other subjects who had easier transitions provide further clarification of Marks' argument (1977, 1979) that time and energy are not naturally scarce but are expandable. As one woman put it, "I seem to have a lot more energy. I get less sleep now than I ever have in my life, but it seems like I accomplish more . . . always busy, but more alive."

In contrast are the testimonials of some of the women who have had a less than easy transition. One woman described herself as feeling "like a scale; home on one side, school on the other." She went on to assess her transition: "Its been hard, its been a big adjustment and the more I get into it, the harder it becomes." Similarly, another interviewee noted that the major problem she has had is "just being exhausted all the time and having to keep on going and going. Never having any time for myself."

For some of the women studied, the positive effects of the additional role of student overshadowed the stressful effects of their multiple roles. This was explicitly and succinctly expressed by one woman who said, "The positive things outweigh the gripes and groans." It was the "positive things" which were much more frequently heard from those women for whom role strain was found to be minimal and for whom the transition was considerably facilitated. Among the rewards most often cited were a sense of accomplishment, a strong identity, intellectual growth and an

improved marriage. These factors serve to enhance the commitment not only to the student role but to their family roles as well. Through this spill-over effect, or what Sieber (1974) described as status enhancement, more time is "found" and energy "created" for the various activities which those roles entail. Among some of the women who had less than easy transitions the student role not only represented a buffer whereby they could enjoy a greater degree of status security, but also provided the means for personal enrichment and self-satisfaction (Sieber, 1974).

Thus far, the discussion has focused on what Sprey (1979) classifies as "instrumental issues" revolving around the allocation of household responsibilities. For Abby, the restructuring of those tasks has involved both the husband and the children. This represents a significant difference between an easier transition and a more difficult one. The latter was found to be characterized not only by fewer changes in the division of labor but also by a distinct pattern in which the changes that did occur involved only the children and not the husbands. In contrast, among the women in the "positive-positive" category, the husbands' behavioral responses reportedly extended beyond domestic chores to include child care responsibilities. It was not uncommon to hear that a husband had taken an afternoon off from work to transport the children to doctors' appointments or to be at home when the children got out of school. Abby's husband took the children away for the weekend to grant her an extended study period to prepare for final examinations.

In some cases the children were credited with spontaneous supportiveness such as the daughters of one reentry woman who offered to massage their mother's back while she studied or to bring her something to drink. It is that "supportive and sympathetic atmosphere" more typical of the facilitated transitions which, as suggested by Marks (1977), is conducive to the generation of more energy.

The extent of that supportiveness particularly from the husbands was reflected in the responses of the interviewees when asked what changes they would like to see in their husbands, what would they want him to be like. The frequency of the "no change desired" reply marked another distinguishing feature of the "positive-positive" category. Moving along the transition continuum toward the "negative-negative" end, there were increasingly more desired changes specified. In keeping with previous research (cf. Hooper, 1979), these reentry women do not necessarily define lack of help with household tasks from their husbands as nonsupportive, but they do value verbal support and encouragement. Again we see a difference in the "preferences" expressed by these reentry women.

Dale's faltering perseverance can be attributed to a number of factors, foremost of which was the confusion she was experiencing as a result of her changing role orientations. The contradictory cues she was receiving provided the source of that confusion. Having devoted herself for so long to her family she had become "tired of looking after everybody else's needs and never getting any real stimulation or enjoyment of my own." Thus, there was the

desire to be a "real person." On the other hand was the guilt derived from the traditional attitude that her family's needs held primacy over her own personal needs. However, her commitment to the student role was strong, resting on both its instrumental value in preparing her for joining her husband in the wage-earning role and its intrinsic value as a source of personal enrichment. In his assessment of Thibaut and Kelley's "Comparison Level of Alternatives" (1959), Nye (1979:3) observes that "poor present outcomes" can be endured if they offer the promise of a more satisfactory future. However, Nye continues, because choices often affect other family members, the more desirable outcome may be sacrificed. In this regard, Dale's more traditional orientation influenced her decision to put what she saw as family interests ahead of her own personal desires.

Dale's traditionalism was also evident in the guilt she expressed about her attempts to contract her family roles. Giving priority to class assignments she would neglect preparing meals and the family "didn't like that." The closeness she and her husband had before she became a student dwindled and they became, as she expressed it, "like strangers."

Attempts to reduce the stress by delegating some of the responsibilities were futile. Those to whom tasks are delegated must be willing to assume those responsibilities. As noted by Eckenrode and Gore (1981) there may be both subjective and objective constraints operating against mobilizing potential support. Dale

was confronted by both types of constraints. Subjective constraints are derived from values or beliefs about when or from whom assistance might be expected. In this regard there was a conflict not only between Dale and her children but within Dale herself because of her changing role orientation. Objective constraints precluded her husband's behavioral support. He had made it clear from the beginning that he would not have time to be of any assistance. That "lack of time" would be seen by Marks (1977, 1979) as resulting from the "invidious system" of role commitments. In other words, Dale's husband seemed to be over-committed to the role of breadwinner. Furthermore, because he preferred that Dale find a job instead of attending school, he was not inclined to offer her any emotional support nor to assist her in gaining the cooperation of their children.

The futility of her efforts to negotiate changes is in part derived from the effects of her marginality in relation to her role orientations. Scanzoni (1978) has suggested that effectiveness in negotiation is enhanced through flexible bargaining styles. Raush and others (1979) have similarly observed the effect of "restricted repertoires" in managing interpersonal conflict. Although Dale attempted a variety of strategies for negotiating her children's support, some cooperative in nature and some more coercive, she failed in those attempts. She failed to realize the resources she had available to her. Safilios-Rothschild (1976), for example, argues that power resources should not be viewed as limited to an economic or monetary base; such things as companionship, affection

and services are also significant resources. It was through the manipulation of one of those resources that another subject, more creative than Dale, was successful in negotiating her children's assistance. She would have them "work" for their supper by reading her assignments to her while she cooked.

The "ongoing confrontation of family members" of which Sprey speaks (1969) is all too evident in Dale's situation. The conflict of interests is reflected in Dale's efforts to implement desired changes and her family's efforts to maintain the status quo because of the benefits they derived from the established arrangement.

The problem runs much deeper than the instrumental issues of task performance to the more salient structural issues of status and privilege (Sprey, 1978). Dale zeroed in on that issue in her elaboration of her newly emerging view of the wife's role: "she should try to be independent, be her own person; have a separate life and a life together." Reconciling that emerging belief system with the one that had guided her through the many years of marriage is a challenge she has not yet met. It is that issue of "separateness versus connectedness" which is at the core of the transition experiences of the women presented in the next chapter. Their responses to that issue, while distinctly different in comparison to one another, also differ from Dale's decision to retreat from the student role and therefore from the source of the issue.

The accounts presented in this chapter have revealed a number of factors which are critical in understanding and explaining the

variation in the transition experiences of these reentry women. These factors can be seen as emanating from a central source, the orientation that the reentry women has to her family roles. The preference of some women for the perceived rewards of the more traditional roles of wife and mother accounts in part for the over-commitment to those familial roles and, in turn, for the relative under-commitment to the student role. That commitment system, therefore, has significant implications for the inclination to implement "role bargains" and for time "expansion" and energy "creation."

Through successful role bargains time and energy are "found" for those roles which are valued and therefore to which one is committed (Marks, 1977). Abby and most of the women who, like her, have had easier transitions, have experienced the "expansion" of time and energy as a result of their role bargains. The success of those role bargains is in part accounted for by their commitment to a more modern orientation to the roles of wife and mother.

In contrast, the failure to "bargain" or to bargain effectively, which is characteristic of the women represented by Dale, is derived from the strength of their commitment to the traditional familial roles. The greater role strain which has hindered the transition for these particular women is a result of their hesitancy or reluctance to threaten the primacy of their families and the interest of their families. Responding to the pressures and demands of the student role has been a stressful experience. Balancing the multiple role demands for them has been a formidable challenge. For four

of the interviewees, meeting the challenge was so overwhelming that they chose to give up the student role--two only temporarily and two indefinitely.

For others who have had a difficult transition, positive outcomes of role accumulation have served to some degree to weaken the effect of multiple roles on role strain. The rewards derived from the student role have served to enhance the commitment to that role and some attempts have been made to lessen the involvement in familial roles. For many of these women guilt over "neglecting" the primary commitment, the family, has negated to a considerable degree the rewards emanating from the student role. The significance of the interplay of these various factors becomes even more apparent as attention is directed in the next chapter to the intermediate positions on the role transition continuum.

CHAPTER VI

DISCONTINUOUS TRANSITIONS: SUPPORT GAINED AND SUPPORT LOST

The parameters of the role transition continuum were established by the subjects presented in the previous chapter. The factors identified as facilitating or hindering the transition apply to the women of this chapter as well, but to varying degrees. The conflicts of interest most critical for the subjects of this chapter are less "instrumental" (e.g., who is going to wash the dishes) and more "structural" (e.g., relationship-oriented). The two categories discussed in this chapter reflect distinctly diverse ways of responding to the structural issues and their concomitants.

Introducing the Subjects

Forty-four-year-old Beth, the oldest of all the interviewees, has been chosen to represent the four interviewees who were successful in achieving a conversion in their husbands' reponses to the newly acquired student role. The women of this "negative-positive" category are, on the average, older than the subjects in the three other categories. Beth's husband was the only one who had had any college experience. Two of the husbands had not completed high school. However, in spite of relatively limited education three of these men have established themselves in middle-class, white-collar occupations. Each of these women gave a different reason for attending college with only one indicating that education represented the route to a

job in order to supplement her husband's income.* She, like Beth, is pursuing a degree in nursing while the other two subjects of this category are enrolled in bachelor degree programs.

According to these four women their decisions to attend college proved to be anxiety-producing experiences for their husbands. Beth's case provides the basis for understanding not only the source and nature of these husbands' fears but also the means by which these women have attempted to allay those fears and to benefit from a more supportive home atmosphere.

The same perceived fears and insecurities have affected the role transition of the nine women of the "positive-negative" category. The issues did not emerge until some time after the student role had been assumed and continued to be a source of marital conflict and declining spousal support. Illustrating this pattern is thirty-six-year-old Carla who was delighted over the positive manner with which her husband responded to her expressed interest in college. With the realization that the promised support was not forthcoming, her delight was soon replaced by frustration.

The ages of the women in the "positive-negative" category range from twenty-seven to thirty-eight and the category contains all of the "under-thirty" women of the study. While the husbands' levels of education are fairly equally distributed--two had college degrees,

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*The motivations for attending include employment intentions for discretionary income and for the intrinsic rewards of employment (Beth); one is attending for future security.

three had some college experience and four had high school diplomas--occupationally, this category is predominantly blue-collar. The relationship between the reasons these women had for attending college and their educational goals discussed in Chapter III is strongly represented by these nine women. The four who reported economic motivation for attending are in career programs and the five who are attending for personal enrichment reasons are pursuing bachelor degrees.

Interest in the experiences of Beth and Carla--and the subjects they represent--is not restricted to the contrasts between these two intermediate transition types, but extends to contrasts between them and those subjects who reported sustained responses--either positive or negative--from their husbands. In other words, by focusing on the factors associated with the success of Beth's "conversion" efforts, we can better understand Dale's failure. Similarly, an examination of Carla's experience offers the opportunity for underlining the sources of Abby's facilitated transition.

Beth: Support Gained

Beth is married to an air traffic controller who completed two years of college. She is the mother of five and grandmother of two. Only her two youngest children, boys, ages ten and fifteen, are still living at home. Throughout her twenty-six years of marriage, Beth has never worked outside the home. Her strong commitment to the traditional roles of wife and mother has a dual foundation--Mormon belief and an upbringing by parents who were second generation

Americans of Norwegian stock, a heritage shared by her husband. Consequently, both Beth and her husband had been raised with " . . . old-fashioned Norwegian traditions . . . the woman waits on the man."

Beth's interest in attending college is not a recent one as she attended one quarter ten years ago, and another quarter two years ago. On both occasions she withdrew because of conflict with family needs and interests, thereby demonstrating the more traditional orientation to sacrifice personal for family interests (Scanzoni, 1976). In her words, "I just sort of put me aside." It was the experience of having already "launched" three grown daughters which ultimately led her to ponder, "What do I want to be?" The answer did not come easily because of the conviction of her religious beliefs. She quoted one of the Mormon prophets: "Nothing you accomplish in this life will compensate if you fail in your home in the raising of your family." Although she felt confident that she had done as well as she could in her responsibilities, she reported feeling "such a sense of emptiness, such a sense of loss after the girls left." Like many women facing the postparental family life stage, she was motivated by a desire for a new sense of achievement and identity (Rubin, 1979).

Interestingly, however, recognition of the implications of the postparental stage is not limited to the middle-aged women of this study. Among all of the women interviewed it was not uncommon to hear the younger subjects indicate that a college education was important to them as a detour around the potential detrimental effects

of that life stage. One woman observed, "I'm not always going to have my children." Another one said quite emphatically, "I'm not going to have that empty-nest 'thing' you're always hearing about."

Beth was well aware of the inevitability of change in her role as mother. She finally made her decision to realize her desire to become a nurse and became serious about once again attending college. She presented school to her husband as an outlet, a way of avoiding becoming a "neurotic." Indicating that she felt he did not take her seriously she noted, "It's always been 'you can do what you want to do as long as it doesn't interfere with what we have.'"

What "they had" constituted a "silent agreement" (Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980), an implicit understanding that she would always be available. Because of the nature of his work her husband could, and often did, switch his shift to spend time with her. Devoted to her wife role she had "really put a lot of effort into [her] husband, had put a lot of time," but felt like "somewhere along the line I lost me in the process."

When she started school her husband became what she described as "sulky, like a child." Although, according to Beth, he was not very verbal about it, he was placing a lot of emphasis on the time she was away. In an attempt to avoid being "torn between the house and the books," Beth compartmentalized her roles (Goode, 1960) by staying at the college to study when her classes were over. By the time she arrived home there was less than two hours before her husband was to leave for work and he disliked being at home alone all

that time. Reflecting on that early phase of her transition she noted, "We were at odds for the first time in a lot of years and he didn't really realize what I was feeling." She reluctantly described him as being selfish because of all of the attention he had received from her throughout their marriage.

Disturbed by this perceived unfairness in his lack of understanding, she started "speaking up and speaking back." She said that after so many years, she was "finally emphasizing me in the relationship, as far as what I wanted to do." The catalyst precipitating this explicit challenge to her husband's attempt to maintain the status quo was Beth's poor performance on a test which she attributed to the tense situation at home. When she returned home following the test she "pitched a fit." She recalled expressing the hurt she was experiencing because of her husband's failure to realize the importance of school to her. Although she told him she would quit if it was going to cause so much dissension, she went on to point out that the family wouldn't be happy because she would then be the frustrated one. Beth provided a rather detailed description of the confrontation.

> It was a really big scene with a lot of words exchanged. This was really kind of noncharacteristic. He had to realize, and I felt like I had to make my stand, that this is something I want to do. . . . Even though we were mad it was still where I could communicate with him and let him know my feelings. I told him, "you'll benefit in the long run; I'm not asking for thirty years of study, I'm asking for three years. I'm not asking for the rest of our marriage, the rest of our lives. I'm asking for breathing space for three years. You have to realize it will destroy me inside; you'll probably end up with a

> neurotic--the kind you don't like to hear sitting around yakking about everything." I explained to him that he needed time to be separate.

Beth reported that following that emotional scene things got "a little better," but her whole first quarter was tense. After that, she began to see some minor adjustments on the part of her husband. She admitted that she wanted and expected changes right away and that a friend had to point out that she couldn't expect overnight changes in something that took years to develop. Taking her friend's advice "to give him time" she reported that they are still working at it and that throughout her three quarters of attendance the situation at home has continued to improve. She feels that her husband now has a sense of how important it is to her. The sulking and silence have been replaced with encouraging comments such as "you can do it; don't worry about it."

The Underlying Issue

Beth's role transition has simultaneously influenced and been influenced by a change in her definition of the role of a wife and mother. Sh's always felt it was her responsibility to "be there, to take care of the family . . . your husband and children"; however, there is now an addendum: "to be a complete, whole person, a healthy person." Beth elaborated on her new perpsective:

> I still feel like being a wife and mother is the most important thing, but I also feel like my accomplishing something is important and I feel like in many ways my family has gained from it. . . . I think you should be available. But I think you should also make yourself

> so you're not so available that they can't act independently. . . . Give them what they need but still give yourself what you need. A healthy personality is being able to realize yourself, but also not neglect your family.

There is a striking similarity between Beth's commentary and the view expressed by Dale in Chapter V that a wife "should try to be independent, be her own person; have a separate life and a life together." Dale's emerging view, like that of Beth's, is incongruent with the strong unity which had long characterized her marital relationship. As Dale put it, before entering college she had always thought she and her husband . . . should be Siamese twins."

Reflected in the observations of both Beth and Dale is the paradoxical nature of the marital arrangement, the paradox seen in the struggle to be both "separate and connected" (LaRossa, 1977). The conflict is similarly described by Sprey (1979:141) as ". . . a perpetual confrontation between the quest for autonomy and jointness." In view of Dale's use of the term "independent," it is advisable to note, as does Sprey (1979:140), the distinction between "independence" and "autonomy." Whereas, for Sprey the former represents "virtual separateness," the latter, a "quest for selfhood," is a matter of degree.

Given the total context of Dale's interview there is little doubt that what she was attempting to communicate was a desire not for independence from her marriage, but for more autonomy in her marriage. In contrast, two interviewees quite candidly conveyed that education represented for them a way out of unstable and unhappy

marriages. Furthermore, there was strong indication from these particular subjects that a major source of that marital unhappiness was the opposition by their spouses to their desires for more autonomy. As suggested by these cases, conflicts over the issue of autonomy and the competition for privilege pose a threat to the stability of a relationship. These issues, classified by Sprey (1979) as "structural issues" and by Raush and others (1974) as "relationship conflicts," require a change in a family's negotiated order.

The challenge of finding and maintaining that delicate balance between "separateness" and "connectedness" is by no means unique to Beth and Dale as it is a theme which runs throughout most of the experiences of the women who reported a less than easy transition into the student role. Evidence of the issue was conspicuously absent from the interviews of the women who had received sustained support from their husbands.

On the other hand, the responses of most of the other subjects represented variations on the theme: "I want to be a person"; "I feel like I'm doing something for myself and don't look at myself as just an extension of him"; and, ". . . I still realized I was his wife, the kids' mother, but who else was I?" Of course, it is not this search for identity per se which is the issue, the source of conflict. As reflected in the above quotes, one's identity is in large part derived from the intimate context of the family, a context which therefore becomes a source of stability. But, as noted

by Askham (1976), the conditions necessary for that sense of stability run counter to the conditions necessary for establishing and maintaining autonomous identity. Some degree of privacy and autonomy is essential for the development and maintenance of identity. In reference to the marital relationship this means that, ideally, ". . . each partner shares responsibility for maintaining and enhancing unity, yet each is able to tolerate separation and independence of action" (Raush et al., 1974:138). It is that intolerance of a spouse's desire for autonomy or "separateness" which may lead one to interpret a pursuit of privacy as a sign of rejection and thus as a threat to the marital bond. Increasing the likelihood of such a perception are disparate definitions between spouses over how much separateness is acceptable.

What distinguishes the transition experiences of the subjects is the variation in their husbands' perceived understanding of and tolerance for their search for self-realization. Epitomizing that understanding and tolerance are the reported responses of the husbands of the women represented in the previous chapter by Abby. In contrast, Dale and Beth both saw their husbands as threatened by their interest in school and disgruntled by the interference of study time with "their" time. Yet, unlike Beth, Dale was ineffective in her efforts to alter her husband's perception.

For Beth and Dale and most of the subjects whose experiences they reflect, the issue and its effects were present from the beginning of the transition. In contrast, as illustrated by Carla,

it was not until after assuming the student role that the issue emerged for most of the women of the "positive-negative" category. It is not the emergence of the structural issues in and of themselves which contributes to a more difficult role transition, but instead it is the mode of response to those issues, or, as Sprey (1969) expresses it, how the conflict is managed. Carla's experience provides us with one technique of conflict management which is quite distinct from Beth's.

Carla: The Loss of Support

Carla's motivation for attending was somewhat similar to Beth's. Carla, thirty-six years old, is married to a machine shop foreman who has a high school education.* She and her husband of fourteen years have one child, a son who is twelve years old. She had been considering college for two years before taking the first step to gain admission. Having her family comfortably settled into their home of five years, she had a lot of free time leading her to feel she was no longer "productive." Noting that she came from a large family of eight children, she went on to specify the educational and occupational accomplishments of her siblings. In comparison, she felt inadequate: "I felt like I had done nothing with my life . . . my brain was deteriorating . . . and I couldn't stand it."

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*At thirty-six, Carla is older than the average age of thirty-two for the category she represents.

In addition to offering intellectual stimulation, college was seen as a way of insuring her future. Realizing the inevitability of having to go to work if something happened to her husband, she was frightened by her lack of marketable skills. Her husband was not only receptive to the idea of her going to college, but also reassured her that if the expenses created a financial strain, he would do some cabinet work for extra income.

Three years later, at the time of the interview, Carla was one quarter away from graduating with an associate's degree in business administration. That two-year-degree required three years because Carla chose periodically to attend alternating quarters as a means of "keeping peace at home." The cooperative and supportive attitude her husband had displayed before the fact proved to be short lived.

Explaining the Decline of Support

Anticipatory socialization was demonstrated in Chapter V to exert both a direct and indirect influence on the role transition of these reentry women. Carla's case is one of those for whom its absence was of considerable consequence. Although, as previously noted, her siblings have achieved educationally, they did so after leaving home. Not knowing what being a college student would be like, Carla anticipated very little change in her life. She would attend classes, return home and have everything done by the time her son and husband returned home. Reality turned out to be far from what

she envisioned: "I suffered from shell-shock the first quarter." She believes her husband was equally unprepared:

> He thought I would go to school and when he got home from work, all my school would be over with, my studying would be done and the house would be cleaned and supper would be ready. And, that as far as my going to school, it wouldn't affect him at all. There would be no change in our life because I would take care of that while he was at work. . . . I think until I really got into it, neither of us realized what it was going to be. And he wasn't supportive once I got into school. He really didn't say that much at first. I still think he thought that it was a whim and I would go a quarter, maybe two, and that would be it.

Her husband's nonsupport was seen by Carla as originating from his lack of understanding of her desire to go to school. At least, she thinks he doesn't understand. By her own admission she really doesn't know ". . . if he doesn't understand, doesn't want to understand, or doesn't want to admit that he understands." Thus, as a result of limited self-disclosure, the real issue remains hidden precluding any confrontation which would allow constructive management of the conflict (Raush et al., 1974). The situation becomes much like a guessing game in which one must be receptive to subtle clues. Carla's husband provided those clues, sometimes in a less than subtle manner.

During the interview she shared an experience which revealed a source of his opposition to her college experience--his strong allegiance to the traditional role of the husband as provider and protector. Following an attempt by Carla to explain her insecurities about the future, he purchased additional insurance and "things of

that nature" and told her, "O'k., now I've taken care of you." Her elaboration on the issue reveals her interpretation:

> He couldn't understand why I wanted more . . . I think he saw it as a failure; that maybe he had failed me; that he hadn't lived up to what he thought he was supposed to do as a husband and that was why I needed something else.

Similar spouse responses reported by some of the other women suggest that their pursuit of education was seen by their husbands as symbolizing failure in the provider role. One woman, for example, said she has reason to believe that her husband tells his friends at work that he felt like "he should give her an education." Similarly, in one of the few studies which have included husbands of reentry women, Katz (1976:97) interprets the frequent use of the phrase, "I will let her," as a "symbolic expression of a threat to man's self-esteem."

The observation made by Homans (1961:287) that "the most important single factor in making a man a leader . . . is the ability to provide rare and valued rewards for his followers" is quite applicable to the husbands of these reentry women. Those men who feel they are no longer providing those valued rewards feel threatened and become, as Rueger (1973:76) suggests ". . . insecure and anxious because of the ominous specter of 'failure'." The insecurities become intensified if the husbands perceive the educational pursuit by their wives as a pursuit of resources necessary for virtual independence. Carla recalled remarks made by her husband such as, "Well, you want to go to work; I guess you'll leave me when you finish school."

She feels that he is particularly threatened by the prospect because so many of the men with whom he works are divorced and remarried. As she sees it, his insecurity is derived from his perception of lessening dependence on him. "I think he liked my dependence. I think that made him more secure with our marriage." Yet, she seemed not to know how to reassure him. "What do you do? Sign in blood, 'I'm not going to leave you when I finish school'?"

Other than the comments he made soon after she started college, the issue is never discussed. Among the few who reportedly articulated their fears to their wives was the husband of a thirty-seven-year-old nursing student. She indicated that her husband was quite candid in expressing his opposition to her student role: that she would "find 'some young stud'" and "would be smarter." It is this latter fear, the prospect of an "unconventional assymmetry" (Safilios-Rothschild and Djikers, 1978) based on a wife's educational superiority, which was perceived by many of the women interviewed as being at the core of their husbands' insecurities. By disclosing his fears, this particular husband granted his wife an opportunity to provide reassurances which she feels have not only satisfied him on this particular issue, but also enhanced their marital relationship generally.

Carla's husband also articulated concern over the prospect of her becoming more educated. She reported that he had commented several times, "I know you think you're smarter than I am." Responding, she said "No, I'm not. I think in some areas I am; I

think there are an awful lot of areas that you are much smarter than I am and you always will be." Reflecting on those episodes she concluded: "I think he would be perfectly satisfied with a wife who wasn't interested in the things that I'm interested in."

Her description of her husband's disinterest in her studies was quite similar to the comments by some of the other women whose husbands have no more than a high school education. There are never any questions asked about the classes they attend or comments about the papers they are assigned to write. In a few cases there is indication that the husbands with relatively less education are rather suspect of the content of the courses their wives take. According to one woman, her husband refers to them as "wacko courses" and another reported that her husband says, "you don't really believe that junk, do you?"

It is not just the fear of a wife becoming smarter, or more educated. As noted earlier, there is the fear that the wife will "find someone else," someone who, in comparison to the present husband, is more desirable as a spouse. While only a few have been confronted with the problem of their husband's suspicions and distrust, the issue of jealousy escalated to a critical level for two of the subjects, including the one who divorced her husband during her second quarter of college.* These two women were on occasion followed by

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*The other student reported success in convincing her husband that his suspicions were unfounded. She subsequently gained not only his emotional support but also behavioral support. She, therefore, is one of the subjects in the "negative-positive" category.

their husbands who suspected that "going to class" was being used as a cover for a clandestine affair. Both were frequently accused of dressing nicely just to "get the professor."

In reference to the theme of jealousy there is one deviant case which is worthy of note. One subject, a twenty-nine-year-old mother of two, revealed her wish that her husband would, as she put it, "let me be free to do what I want, If I wanted an affair, that he'd give the o'k." She referred to this as "the big problem" she's had in coming back to school--being around and attracted to other men after having been isolated so long. It is an issue which she says she and her husband have discussed to considerable lengths. The potential consequence of too much disclosure (Raush et al., 1974) is revealed in her observation that the issue causes him stress and that he is jealous. However, her empathic sensitivity is suggested by her comment, "He's being truthful; if he can't handle it, he shouldn't tell me to go ahead." Although there are obvious differences in their definitions of autonomy, the issue has been confronted and, according to her report, they are attempting to manage the conflict constructively.

This particular case does point up once again the structural issues that emerge out of a disparity between spouses' definitions of how much separateness is desirable. The content of Carla's interview directly pointed to this particular issue as being at the heart of her husband's declining support. Carla revealed that until she started school, she and her husband were totally involved in each

other. Holding up two fingers tightly juxtaposed she said, "The two of us were like this; we did everything together. I had no life apart from him."

She described herself as having suffered from [self-diagnosed] agoraphobia, staying in the house, not going anywhere, not even to go shopping, alone. It was not until her sisters began to visit her and noted how dependent she had become did she realize the change that had occurred. Attending college has opened up a whole new social life for her. The friendships she has established at school have made a tremendous change in her life. But, there has not been that much change in her husband. She offered a summary assessment of the situation:

> I think he is very jealous of that part of my life also. I feel bad for him, but I'm not going back to that anymore. Before, if there was something he didn't approve of, I probably would have stopped. But, I will not stop school. I will not let that prevent me from going to school.

It is this comparison of how things are now to how they were in the past, before becoming a student, which greatly influenced the commitment of many of these women to the student role. Most of the women for whom the transition was complicated by their husband's opposition chose the transitional stress over the less than satisfactory pre-college family situation. These are the ones who could tolerate the present by focusing on the anticipated rewards of the future. The exception, of course, are the role retreaters who, as illustrated by Dale, found that the costs of the transition outweighed

the rewards. For all the retreaters, however, it was not the personal costs alone which were influential in the decision to withdraw from the student role; the perceived costs to other family members was of equal significance. Again, the implications of the more traditional attitude, "if my family does well, I do well" (Scanzoni, 1976), are apparent.

One of the retreaters, however, was seen as utilizing that philosophy as a socially approved excuse (Scott and Lyman, 1968) for withdrawing. Two messages were being communicated throughout her interview. On the one hand was the guilt derived from putting so many responsibilities off on her husband and sons. On the other hand, there was the disappointment and frustration she was experiencing as a result of her poor academic performance. Lacking the sense of achievement and enhanced self-confidence expressed by most of the other women studied, there were no rewards to help mitigate the strain (Sieber, 1974). Consequently, she chose to give up the student role; but because "the family would be better off in the long run."

Carla's decision not to attend every quarter represents an interesting compromise between the extremes of the traditional and modern philosophies. There were other ways of coping, however. Her husband's negative attitude concerning her student role was further manifested in his lack of behavioral support. According to her, he was actually doing less than he did before she started attending college. However, that was not a major source of concern

for her. Typical of the women she represents, she defines those household tasks as her responsibility. So much so that she said, in a manner suggesting that it was a striking revelation for herself, "I don't ever ask him. I don't ever ask him to do anything. Not that I'm afraid he'll refuse or whatever; I just don't ever ask him." The legitimacy of the existing structure had obviously never been questioned. However, she went on to note--and quite emphatically--that when she takes a job she will expect his participation. Again, she echoed the attitude expressed by many of the others in her category--"Things will be different when I begin the share the bread-winner role."

Unlike Abby and some of the others who have facilitated their transitions by mobilizing the behavioral support of their families, the current transition is not seen as providing a potential "bootcamp," an opportunity for anticipatory socialization, for when they do enter the labor force. Of course, it should be recalled that the subjects of the "positive-negative" category are relatively younger. Many of them have children under the age of seven who, therefore, may be considered a bit young for "bootcamp." One notable exception is a five year old who has learned to make his own peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

However, as illustrated by Carla, many of these women have modified their personal role definitions and have lowered their performance standards. Carla realized quite early in her transition that she would have to assess her priorities. Those priorities were

recited as if they were mandates etched in stone: supper would always be cooked--there would never be sandwiches; and her husband would always have clean, ironed clothes to wear to work. Carla's son is seldom called on for any assistance primarily because of allergies which preclude many of the household chores. Even if this were not the case, it is doubtful that she would expect too much of him as suggested by her comment, "I guess I have enough of the old traditional values in me that I don't want him to do too many of the 'female' things."

In contrast, Beth reported that behavioral changes in her husband and sons had followed in the wake of the attitudinal changes. Beth had previously assumed responsibility for all the household tasks. Now, there is a sharing of those responsibilities by all the family members. Her husband is helping with the dishes and even irons. The latter she clearly sees as the most remarkable of all the changes. Her husband reportedly has replaced her as the boys' "chauffeur" and stays behind the boys to see that they do their part. Her sons have taken over vacuuming, making their own beds and dusting.

When asked how she has been able to get them to share in these household responsibilities, she responded:

> I laid it on the line. I'm in school. They eat there, they live there, they dirty their clothes there and that mother wants something for herself. I just put it bluntly: "I want this for me. I give to you, I expect to get a little bit back."

The types of behavioral changes Beth described are consistent with those reported by the "negative-positive" category as a whole,

although all do not apply to both husbands and children. In one case there is an only child who is three years of age. The other case involves the woman who is concentrating on continuing to gain her husband's emotional support. She has, however, been successful in gaining the behavioral support of their four children.

Beth's individualistic approach to negotiating the changes is also symbolic of the strategies used by these other women. As noted by Scanzoni (1976), the woman who has a more modern orientation to her family roles is more likely to use such individualistic techniques to bring about desired changes in the family's routine or structural arrangement.

Role Orientation

Much of the diversity in the transition experiences of the women of this study can be attributed to the variation in their orientations to the roles of wife and mother. There are three facets of this phenomenon which are quite salient: variation among the women themselves (e.g., contrasting those who reveal modern orientations with those who continue to adhere to more traditional role prescriptions); variation in the degree of change (e.g., those who have always been guided by a modern orientation; those who were once traditional but who have fully embraced a new, modern orientation; and those who have been traditional but who are just beginning to adopt a more modern view); and, variation in the degree of congruence between spouses concerning the marital roles (ranging from considerable to minor congruence). Any one of these comparisons, if

expressed as a continuum, would coincide with the ease of transition continuum presented in Chapter IV.

All of these women have endorsed--at least to some degree--a more modern outlook concerning women's roles. The fact that they were in the population of reentry women and qualified as participants for this study by having children still living at home is evidence of that. The cases presented in this chapter suggest that a more modern orientation and self-identity which is consistent with that orientation increases the chances of an easier transition into the student role. Having resolved that new identity the reentry woman is better prepared to respond constructively to the conflicts of interests which emerge within her family and to have gained the self-confidence necessary for effective management of those conflicts. She therefore has a better chance for being simultaneously sensitive to her family's interests and her own personal interests. In contrast, the woman who is just beginning to accept a more modern definition of her familial roles while her husband remains more traditional in his outlook is not only more likely to face conflicts of interests, but also less likely to be able to cope effectively with those conflicts. Vestiges of the traditional orientation make her more inclined to continue to subordinate her desires to those of her family.

These differences have been mirrored by the experiences of Beth and Carla. Also apparent is the observation made by Sprey (1975:73) that "existing role arrangements affect the problem-solving

behavior of spouses." If, however, it is the existing arrangement which is the source of the conflicting interests, then the problem is further complicated, particularly if the conflict is over a structural issue as demonstrated by the women who are highlighted in this chapter, those who occupy the intermediate transition positions.

Responding to the Issues

Structural issues, those involving conflicts over privilege and autonomy, can, according to Sprey (1979), be managed by two "potentially constructive strategies," avoidance and compromise, both of which are illustrated by Carla's experiences. The avoidance pattern chosen by her husband was taken to such an extreme that after the first year it was as if her student role had been totally blotted from his mind, as if it simply did not exist. Of course, that strategy might have been facilitated by Carla's compromises which serve to minimize the visibility of the effects of her new role. Most of her studying was done after eleven o'clock at night. During the quarter she was not attending classes she would have determined what instructors and assignments she would have for the upcoming quarter and would spend time preparing in advance for those courses.

Compromise was the most typical response of the women whose husbands failed to follow through with a supportive attitude. Although many of these husbands had at least some college experience, there were opposing views over how much study was really necessary and/or the importance of maintaining a high academic average. While the primary overt conflict was in reference to the time devoted to

studying, these women strongly suggest that the underlying issue was the conflict over "separateness."

The compromises described by the subjects essentially represented bargains that were made to prevent any further opposition from their husbands and as such they represent a form of avoiding an engagement of the real issue. In a few cases the bargaining was carried out quite explicitly. For example, one subject recalled the time when her husband was disturbed that she could not go with him to a church ball game because she needed to study for a test she was to take the next day. She reported "working out a deal" by which she would go to the game if he wouldn't get mad if she studied that night after returning from the game.

In other cases the bargaining or compromise was seen as more explicit. For one women, compromise meant lowering her standards concerning her academic performance and deciding that marital harmony was more important than making all "A's." That marital harmony was also improved when she changed her study location: "I used to go to the bedroom every night to study. Third quarter it wasn't quite so hard and I started doing my studying in the living room with him when he was watching TV. Being in the same room, he felt better about that." Another interviewee who reported studying while her husband watches television made the observation: "Even if they don't need you, they just want you to be there with them."

As suggested by these comments even the spatial distance between spouses was an issue. However, it is symbolic of the real

issue, that of autonomy. If one is physically close there is an assurance of a psychosocial closeness as well. Fundamentally, the meta-message being conveyed is "its fine and good for you to be pursuing your own individual interest as long as I am right there with you." While this was satisfactory to most of these compromisers, a few suggested that they still felt confined by so much "connectedness." As one of the temporary retreaters expressed it: ". . . he wants us to be in the same room together. I enjoy being with him but I also like doing things by myself." She felt that her husband, who holds a graduate degree, was perfectly satisfied as long as he could be involved with her studying, but when there was a subject which was out of his domain he reportedly seemed to feel "left out."

The major contrast between the subjects represented by Beth and those by Carla is in the manner by which they have responded to the structural issues emerging from the transition into the student role. Beth's direct engagement of the issue led to constructive management of the conflict. The open communication which she and her husband have been able to develop has been beneficial for the continued growth and development of the whole family. Discussing the issue allowed them to recognize how their relationship was being affected by what Watzlawick (1967) describes as "punctuational disjunctiveness" in communication. For example, in one episode described by Beth, she said to her husband, "You are threatened," to which he reportedly replied, "Yes, because you are unhappy."

Of course, from Beth's perspective, she was unhappy because of her husband's lack of appreciation for her own interests. As each was seeing a different cause and effect sequence their responses to one another were counter productive until they could reach agreement on that sequence.

Beth's friend, who advised her to "give it time," can be seen to have played a critical role in Beth's eventual confrontation of the issue. Askham (1976) notes the importance of someone in addition to the primary significant other for developing a clear understanding of one's identity. Carla did not have the benefit of someone with whom she felt comfortable in discussing the frustration she was feeling. As a matter of fact, at the close of the interview she noted that she had not discussed the problem with anyone. Furthermore, she indicated that she was "embarrassed" because she thought all the other mrried women who were attending college had supportive husbands.

For Carla, therefore, relative deprivation was manifested in two ways. These other women, her reference group, were perceived to be better off than she was because they all had supportive spouses. Furthermore, she felt deprived of the support she had anticipated from her husband. Yet, in spite of this sense of injustice, her strong traditionalism operated against a confrontation of the issue. Projecting into the future, she seemed confident that the situation at home would return to an even keel. However, she went on to note: "I will never forget the fact that he . . . did not support me.

I can live with it; I won't ever forget it." Thus, for Carla, avoidance has perhaps not only precluded the intrinsic growth and development of her marital relationship (Raush et al., 1974), but it may well represent an outcome which, as suggested by Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980), offers significant implications for future issues which may emerge.

In this respect we see an interesting contrast between Beth and Carla. Beth's emerging views on her roles as wife and mother have influenced significant changes for her family. And as those changes occurred, her more modern orientation has been further enhanced. In contrast, Carla's traditionalism influenced a strong inclination to maintain harmony at home, but in the process her "silent suffering" may serve as a prelude to a dissatisfaction with the effects of that traditionalism.

For these reentry women, therefore, the experience of the transition into the student role may be symbolic of a more encompassing transition involving an assessment not only of self-identity but also of their marital and family arrangements. The next chapter will continue to focus on such implications as we summarize and analyze the diverse experiences of all of these reentry women.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the transition experiences of reentry women who have chosen to add the role of college student to their existing roles of wife and mother. Four case studies were presented to reflect the diversity in the transition experiences of the twenty-six women interviewed. The case analyses provided a means of describing, in the words of the subjects themselves, the adjustments that are associated with this type of role accumulation. The specific focus of the research was on identification of factors which served either to facilitate or to hinder the transition into the role of college student.

The most cricial determinant of a facilitated transition was the wife's perception of her husband's response to her student role. The reports given by the women revealed four distinct response patterns which were based on the husband's initial response and his subsequent or follow-through response. Two of those patterns were characterized by consistency--one positive or supportive and the other negative or nonsupportive. The other two patterns involved inconsistency or a shift in response either from negative or positive or from positive to negative.

Examination of these four categories has provided the means for describing and explaining the difference between an "easy" transition and a "difficult" transition. The explanatory process

requires clarifying the meaning of "ease of role transition" by focusing on those factors associated with "freedom from difficulty" and "readily available resources" (Burr et al., 1979). The features identified with each of the four transition types are presented.

Summary of Transition Experiences

The greatest transition ease was suggested by the accounts of the eight women who, as revealed through Abby, reported consistently positive responses by their husbands to their pursuits of a college education. The emotional and behavioral support provided by these men has greatly facilitated the transition of their wives into the student role. Socioeconomically, the families presented are predominantly middle class, with six of the husbands holding professional-managerial positions. Five of these men have themselves earned college degrees.

For seven of these women education is valued either as an end in itself by providing personal enrichment or as preparation for entering the work world to enhance their families' economic standing. The former motivation is associated with pursuit of a bachelor's degree and the latter with a two-year degree in a career program.

A somewhat more difficult transition was experienced by the four women who have gained the support of their husbands in spite of their initial opposition. These four women were represented in Chapter VI by Beth. The reasons these subjects had for attending college were diverse, but the bases of their spouses' opposition

were quite similar. Although three of these husbands are in managerial type positions, none holds a college degree and two of them did not complete high school. These women perceived their husbands as "threatened" by their interest in college. They felt that their husbands feared being educationally surpassed, no longer being needed by the spouse, and/or being rejected. The beginning phase of the transition by these women was, therefore, complicated by their husbands' lack of understanding, fears and jealousy. Basic to all of these reasons was the incongruent perceptions of the spouses concerning the marital roles. Each one of these subjects reported significant changes in her definition of the woman's role; changes that were not similarly experienced by her husband. Their experiences reveal the implications of a strongly modernistic role orientation emerging out of a traditional marital relationship.

Also undergoing change in their marital role orientations are many of the nine women whose assumption of the student role was only initially endorsed by their husbands. As seen through Carla's experience, these men did not remain consistent in their acceptance of their wives' new role. Of the four transition categories this one is the most heterogeneous. Six of the husbands hold blue-collar jobs; three have no more than a high school education and two have earned college degrees. The motivations of their wives for attending college are similarly diverse, a diversity which is reflected in the relatively equal distribution of the subjects' educational goals between associate's and bachelor's degrees. The declining spouse

support reported by these women is attributed to the same fears underlying the initial opposition by the husbands of the previously-discussed category.

A notable characteristic of these women is their response to "structural" or relationship issues, in which they faced incongruent views concerning the acceptable degree of "separateness." These subjects were more inclined either to avoid those issues or to compromise with their husbands--or themselves--rather than confront their spouses and attempt to negotiate a change. That this category represents an increasing degree of role transition difficulty is reflected by the fact that three of the "role retreaters" (dropouts) were seen in this transition continuum position.

The most difficult role transitions were reported by five women whose husbands were initially negative in their responses and remained consistently nonsupportive. The effects of that opposition were demonstrated through the experiences of Dale, who ultimately withdrew from the student role. Three of these husbands are in working-class positions and only one of the five has had any college experience. Three of these subjects are attending in response to their families' financial needs; thus, education for them is a preparation for the transition into the role of co-provider. These women suggest that the opposition presented by their husbands is derived from a sense of having failed in the provider role. In contrast, the two subjects who are attending for reasons other than financial need are confronted by their husbands' failure to

understand why a college education is so important to their wives.

Sources of the Variation in Ease of Transition

Role accumulation in and of itself does not produce role strain. The assumption of an additional role represents an increase in prescribed activities but there are two means by which the burdensome effects of role accumulation may be avoided or counteracted. First, a multiplicity of roles may yield a number of potentially positive outcomes which may serve to compensate for the increased demands and responsibilities of the increased number of roles (Sieber, 1974). The data revealed that such rewards were differentially experienced by the reentry women studied. Invariably, the women with facilitated transitions were characterized by emphases on the positive outcomes of having assumed the student role. Positive effects also were cited by the subjects reporting more difficult transitions; however, references to the negative effects or "costs" of the transition were more frequently heard. Thus, for these latter subjects, the rewards of role accumulation were relatively lacking.

Similarly, for those experiencing the more difficult transitions, there was less evidence of the second means by which role strain is reduced, the use of "role bargains" (Goode, 1960). A number of such strain-reduction or strain-avoidance mechanisms were reported by the respondents. Those used most frequently were classified as both structural and personal role definitions (Hall, 1972). The subjects reported varying degrees of success in their use of these coping techniques and some, it should be recalled, made

no such efforts. The subjects reporting less transitional ease were less likely to delegate responsibilities generally but particularly less likely to seek behavioral assistance from their husbands. While there was evidence of a lowering of performance standards, that potential strain-reducing technique, when not fully negotiated, was often counter-productive because of the feelings of guilt which resulted.

Some of the women were more inclined than others to negotiate a restructuring of domestic tasks. In large part, the varying degrees of success in those attempts was a consequence of differences in the women's orientations to their familial roles. Most of the women who reported an easier transition revealed endorsement of and adherence to greater modernity in the roles of wife and mother. Most salient, however, were their perceptions of their husbands' agreement on those role prescriptions. As a result of that consensus, the adjustments in family routine and reallocation of domestic tasks were more easily carried out. The educational pursuits of these women were less likely to be viewed as a threat to the interests of other family members or to the family as a whole.

Furthermore, as suggested by the profile of this category, "resources" for facilitating the transition were relatively more available. The women whose husbands had attended college had the benefit of anticipatory socialization whereby they were better prepared for the adjustments that were required of their families. The educational achievements of these men also contributed to their understanding of the demands their wives faced as college students.

Women who experienced an easy transition tended to view both husbands and children as resources for emotional and behavioral support.

The major sources of the more difficult transitions reported by eighteen of the subjects were the lack of congruent orientations between spouses and the husband's lower level of education. Most of these women reported changes in their own views concerning their family roles, but also indicated that they saw their husbands remaining faithful to a more traditional role orientation.

Within the context of "mixed" or incongruent role orientations Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) see the greatest prospect of serious conflicts of interests between spouses, conflicts which are more difficult to manage satisfactorily. While the reported experiences of these particular women are consistent with that observation, there is need for further elaboration of the point. Management of the conflict was influenced by the degree to which the reentry woman had endorsed a more modern role ideology. Some women suggested marginality in their views and, as a result, are still reluctant to be assertive or even communicative about their personal views or interests. They continue outwardly to grant legitimacy to the structural arrangements characteristic of their families. Most characteristic of this pattern was the expressed view that although they do not presently expect behavioral support from their husbands, when they go to work they will expect some changes.

In contrast, management of the emerging or potential conflicts was seen to be quite different for those women who expressed a

stronger commitment to their new orientations. These are the subjects who have shifted further away from their acceptance of the traditional homemaker role. The effects of that stronger commitment are seen in the four women who gained their husbands' support after initial opposition. These women all reported increasing acceptance of the more modern views.

Relevance for Theory Development

This study is predicated on the supposition that the role transition of the reentry woman offers an opportunity for gaining insight into the changing definition of the woman's place in society. For the married woman with children, being a student is a form of role accumulation, which may entail role strain. Such strain may precipitate family powering or negotiating and, in turn, the re-definition of family roles. The cases presented in the previous chapters revealed varying degrees of success among these reentry women in achieving a restructured family order. On the one hand, the types of facilitated transitions depicted by Abby and Beth were characterized by significant changes in their families' routines. Those changes served to enhance the rewarding aspects of their multiple roles. On the other hand, more difficult types of transitions were illustrated by Carla's reluctance to negotiate changes and by Dale's frustrating and unsuccessful attempts in that direction. For them, and the women they represent, the addition of the student role, although in some respects rewarding, was relatively more costly.

A closer examination of the conditions under which the student role is rewarding or costly reveals the mutual interplay between social interaction and the broader society. As Stryker (1980:73) has observed: "The concepts 'role conflict' and 'role strain' . . . nicely illustrate the interactionist principle that person and society are two sides of the same coin." The interplay between the individual and society is apparent in the theories of role strain offered by Merton (1957), Goode (1960), Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977). Merton focuses on the social mechanisms which serve to "articulate" the potentially contradictory expectations within a role-set. Thus, the social structure functions to minimize role conflict which might otherwise affect the individual. In contrast, Goode delineates ways in which the individual may choose to avoid or reduce the strain associated with role overload. Presenting these as a matter of "ego's choice," Goode goes on to discuss certain structural constraints which may limit those choices and affect the nature of role bargaining. Because of a hierarchy of social evaluations, the effectiveness of role bargains may be limited by the greater power or prestige of one's role partner and by the influence of "third parties."

It is the hierarchy of evaluations and its resulting "socio-cultural arrangements" which, according to Marks (1977), produce a scarcity of time thereby contributing to role strain. Through these arrangements, or culturally defined commitment systems, certain activities come to be viewed as more highly valued than others.

As a greater investment of time and energy in the "more important" activities infringes on involvement in "less important" activities, role strain results (Marks, 1977).

Finally, the interplay between the individual and society is noted in Sieber's (1974) discussion of role accumulation. Societal evaluations and social constraints provide the backdrop to Sieber's interpretation of the desire by women for ". . . a wider role repertoire to increase their resources, privileges and sense of personal worth" as reflecting "the emergence of egalitarian protest movements" (1974:577).

The varied theoretical assumptions of role strain theorists have led LaRossa (1981:6) to assert that "any theory of role strain which claims to be comprehensive must take into account both structural and situational factors." Incorporation of both factors extends the theoretical relevance of "role strain" to include symbolic interactionism, choice and exchange theory, systems theory, conflict theory, and phenomenological theory (LaRossa, 1981). Focusing on the woman whose role transitions were complicated by role strain clarifies the significance of LaRossa's assertions.

For some of these women, assumption of the student role placed them within the context of norms and values which contradicted or conflicted with those of their family contexts. As a result, the various conflict issues delineated by Deutsch (1973) emerged: control over resources, preferences, values, beliefs, and the nature of relationships between individuals. The issues revolving around

educational costs, time devoted to studying and the "separateness-connectedness" of the marital partners illustrate the relevance of the conflict framework, but also the symbolic interactionist and choice/exchange perspectives.

The issues which emerged as a part of the transition into the student role provided the catalyst for exchange to become conflict. Sieber (1974) notes that the desire by women for multiple roles is a desire for rewards in addition to those derived from their family relationships. Similarly, Scanzoni (1972) observes the pattern in modern society of women seeking greater rewards not only in the family context but also beyond that context. In reference to the latter, the reward-seeking is "for themselves as individual persons" (Scanzoni, 1972:34). The effort by women to gain more rights and privileges may precipitate a modification in the ordinary exchange in the marital relationship. Whether or not such a "conversion" occurs is dependent on the perceived fairness of the exchange. If either spouse feels he or she is being exploited by unfair demands, opposition or conflict occurs. Carla is illustrative of the many reentry women who commented on the unfairness of their husbands' nonsupportive response to their new role. Typically, transitions were difficult when hindered by a stifling of open conflict and exchange. Although Carla felt her husband had failed to reciprocate the support she had always given him, her traditional orientation to her role as wife precluded any manifestation of conflict with her husband.

It was not only interpersonal conflicts which were associated with a difficult role transition; also significant were the internal conflicts some of these women faced. As suggested by Carla and Dale, the more traditional orientations by these subjects to their family responsibilities influenced them to view the student role as a contradiction of their definitions of what is appropriate for them as wives and mothers.

For many of these women, being a college student was reflective of a desire to be a "person" and not just a wife and mother. However, as illustrated by Dale's case, adjusting to the student role was complicated by the belief that the pursuit of personal fulfillment was inconsistent not only with her husband's expectations but also with what she believed was expected of her by society. The continued adherence to the belief in the supremacy of the familial roles represents what Marks (1977) describes as an "overcommitment." Thus, the difficulty of the role transition was exacerbated by the guilt and anxiety stemming from a sense of neglected duties.

The role strain reported by many of the women resulted, therefore, from conflicts not only with their husbands but also with themselves. That role strain, the felt difficulty in meeting role obligations, is illustrative of what Stokes and Hewitt (1976) refer to as a "problematic" situation. Like role strain, what is "problematic" is a subjective evaluation. It is, according to Stokes and Hewitt (1976:842) any situation in which: "Interaction is disrupted, identities are threatened, meanings are unclear, situations seem

disorderly, people have intentions that run counter to others' wishes . . ." The case analyses revealed the extent to which the role transition was problematic for most of these reentry women. Carla, Dale and, initially, Beth all reported experiences illustrative of the confusion and instability that arose in their families as a result of the decision to attend college. Furthermore, the interviews reflect numerous attempts by these women to reconcile the student role with their family roles. Such efforts are referred to by Stokes and Hewitt (1976:838) as "aligning actions" which are verbal techniques "to restore or assure meaningful interaction in the face of problematic situations. . . ."

There are numerous ways in which individuals align interpersonal conflicts and/or individual conduct with cultural expectations. Manifested throughout the interviews was one particular type, the "account" which Scott and Lyman (1968) define as a statement ". . . to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior. . . ." Such behavior is explained through the use of excuses and justifications.

As aligning actions, accounts function in two ways, both of which were manifested throughout the interviews. First, were the various reported attempts by these women to align their student role with their family roles and relationships. Beth's description of the emotional encounter with her husband detailing the reasons--justifications--she had for wanting to go to school and soliciting the support of the family illustrates such an attempt to restore stability to the family situation. Second, were those accounts by

many of the women representing an alignment of the student role with ". . . what is thought to be typical, normatively expected, probable, desirable or, in other respects, more in accord with what is culturally normal" (Stokes and Hewitt, 1976:843). The multiple and, in some cases, elaborate responses to the question, "What led to your decision to become a student?" may be seen as attempts to justify the culturally unjustified choice by a wife and mother to attend college. The frequency with which economic reasons were given suggests an attempt to convey a continued allegiance to their primary responsibility, the family.

These subjects were relatively more traditional in their orientations to their family roles and although they chose to pursue a college education, they are careful to prevent the student role from disrupting the harmony and stability of their family lives. The manner in which they attempt to maintain the desirable balance between costs and rewards is interpretable in the terms of the choice and exchange perspective. The "lack of time" for more involvement in the student role would be seen by Marks as an account necessitated by the over-commitment to the family roles. It is a choice which is made but one which is strongly embedded in the family context. The influence of the continued acceptance of the "patriarchal ideology," by which there is more attention to their family duties than to their rights, should be of interest to conflict theorists and phenomenologists. The endorsement of such an ideology has significant implications for the maintenance of the existing family

power structure and thus for the "construction of reality" by these women.

Scanzoni (1972:34) sees modern society as providing ". . . the kinds of conditions under which women are able to challenge (conflict with) male privileges." The strongly emerging ideologies of equalitarianism and individualism provide alternative opportunities for women to enhance their bargaining positions in relation to their husbands. Although the societal conditions to which Scanzoni refers may be necessary to challenge existing inequalities, they alone are not sufficient. Some of these reentry women apparently had the resources for challenging their husbands but failed to do so. As noted by McDonald (1980) the existing power structure may preclude conflict. At best, conflict is, in Deutsch's term (1973) "latent." Legitimacy of power arrangements is not questioned, consequently ". . . the lower the perceived (subjective) conflict of interests" (Duke, 1976: 272).

The influence of the social class subculture is apparent among the women who continued to acquiesce to their husbands' wishes. There is strong evidence that endorsement of the ideology of equalitarianism has been confined primarily to the middle class and is only currently beginning to filter through to the working class (cf. Komarovsky, 1962; Young and Willmott, 1973; Scanzoni, 1975). Most of the women whose transitions were more problematic were married to men with relatively limited education and who were in blue-collar positions. The ideology of equalitarianism remains somewhat foreign

to them. As a result, we see the traditional woman, described by Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980:114), who is "unwilling (or unable) to make an issue explicit, less likely to disturb certain silent arrangements . . ." and who "knows the limits--the boundaries--of what is permissible to discuss and what is not."

Those arrangements represent definitions of what is appropriate and desirable and provide the backdrop against which individual conduct is evaluated. When conduct is inconsistent with those arrangements, aligning actions are utilized to restore stability. However, as noted by Stokes and Hewitt (1976:848): "aligning actions provide a social lubricant that simultaneously permits social change and yet allows conduct to be linked to recognized cultural boundaries." The potential for change offered by aligning actions was exemplified by Beth and the other subjects who were successful in negotiating a new family order out of the confusion created by the student role. Beth's own rules changed, precipitating a change in those of her husband and of the family as a whole. In this regard, role strain and the concomitant alignment of conduct are consistent with systems theory and its focus on change (Broderick and Smith, 1979).

"Aligning actions," therefore, are seen as central to an integration of various theoretical frameworks. For the reentry woman the major factor underlying the significance of aligning actions is the degree of congruence between spouses concerning the family roles. These larger role orientations may be used to specify the arguments of Sieber (1974) and Marks (1977) concerning role accumulation.

For many respondents, the positive effects of the student role counteracted some of the negative effects of the multiple roles (Sieber, 1974). For these women, unlike the subjects whose transitions were less plagued by role strain, expansion of time and energy (Marks, 1977) was not among the positive effects. According to Thoits, the rewards of role accumulation suggested by Sieber (1974) are discernible to the degree the multiple roles are segregated. In contrast, roles which are nonsegregated or overlapping are more conducive to the expansion of time and energy described by Marks (1977). Thoits' thesis is applicable to these reentry women, although "segregated" and "nonsegregated" roles are interpreted somewhat differently. Conventionally, nonsegregated roles are those for which role partners overlap, illustrated by such phenomena as marital and parental roles, or friendships which are shared by both spouses. The significance of the concept for the reentry women is related to the response of her husband to her student role and recognition of her student identity. Where the husband was negative about his wife's new role there was no interest in her activities and typically enactment of the student role was segregated or "isolated" from observation. In contrast, those subjects whose husbands were supportive reported involvement by their husbands in their studies. Time devoted to the student role, therefore, overlapped with time devoted to the nonsegregated marital role.

This study has stressed the centrality of role orientations for understanding the role transition problems of married female

reentry students. The study points to the relevance of the concept for various theoretical perspectives which focus on role vs. strain.

Suggestions for Future Research

Earlier discussion has noted the recognition of the desired direction for future research. A longitudinal design offers the best approach for noting the effects of the role transition on the reentry woman and her family. Following these women through the stages of their transition would facilitate sorting out the effects of age, life cycle stage, changing role orientations, and negotiation effectiveness in response to emerging conflicts. A longitudinal design offers an advantage over retrospective accounts, the significance of which may be influenced and contaminated by the passage of time.

Also worthy of consideration is the prospect of conjoint interviewing to avoid the potential hazards of the "wives-only" approach. As noted in Chapter II, the limitation of this study to the students was seen as appropriate for the initial stage of the research. Further research, however, could benefit from involvement of both spouses by providing a check on the congruence of perceptions. For example, does the husband of a reentry woman perceive the same degree of consensus on role prescriptions as she does? Furthermore, the husband's responses concerning his feelings about her educational pursuit would be of considerable value in understanding the implications of the changing status of women in our society. Although the conjoint interview offers many advantages, it is also plagued by

certain hazards which certainly should not be ignored (cf. LaRossa, Bennett and Gelles, 1981).

In view of the expressed concern for the implications of the reentry phenomenon for changing role orientations, it would be desirable for future studies to identify, if possible, those homemakers who have considered a delayed education, but who have not yet begun that pursuit. This may allow identification of a conflict of interests which is regulated by the husband and thus precludes her follow through on satisfying her personal interests.

The number of reentry women in our colleges and universities continues to increase, thereby suggesting a need to continue to assess both the causes and effects of their presence. The implications of this trend are not limited to the educational institutions nor to the families of these women, but extend to society in general. Many of these women are attending college in preparation for employment and their transition into the student role, as suggested by some of the women of this study, may very well represent for their families an adjustment period in anticipation of their wives and mothers becoming co-providers. The adjustments made during this preliminary stage may be quite consequential for the later adjustments associated with dual-earner and dual-career families.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

The research which I am currently conducting is part of the requirements for the Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I have chosen to study married women who are attending college and am interested in what the return to college means for them and their families--the experiences they've had and the adjustments they've had to make in taking on this new role.

Because of the length of the interview and the importance of what you have to say, I will be recording the interview unless you object to my doing so.

The interview is anonymous. You will not be identified as an individual no one could trace what you've said back to you. You should not feel compelled to answer every question and you have the right to end the interview at any time that you desire to do so.

Your signature below indicates that the above information concerning the nature of the study has been explained to you by me.

> "I give my consent to Faye Barr to use the information given in this interview for her dissertation and any subsequent papers with the understanding that my identity will not be revealed."

_____ _____

Signature Date

FACESHEET

1. Respondent's age Husband's age

2. Education of husband

3. Education of respondent's parents: Father
   Mother

4. Husband's occupation:

5. Husband's work schedule:

6. Family income:

Below $10,000	30,000 - 35,000
10,000 - 15,000	35,000 - 40,000
15,000 - 20,000	40,000 - 45,000
20,000 - 25,000	45,000 - 50,000
25,000 - 30,000	50,000 +

   If respondent worked in past, how much did you contribute to annual family income?

7. Length of present residence?

   Where did you grow up?

8. Are there any questions you think I should be asking?

9. Are there any comments you would like to make?

10. Would you agree to be interviewed further at some later time?

11. Do you think your husband would agree to be interviewed?

12. Race/Ethnicity

13. Religion: Affiliation Active

If you think of anything else you would like to say, please feel free to call me.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How long have you been married? Is this your first marriage?

2. How many children do you have? Age(s)?

3. When did you first enroll in college? Have you been attending regularly? How many courses do you usually take per quarter?

4. Did you have any previous college experience? When? How much?

5. Did you have problems adapting to the student role? What problems?

6. When did you first consider coming to school?
   Probe: What would you say led to the decision to come to college? What are your goals? Degree? Major?

7. Did you and your husband discuss the prospect of your coming to school before the decision was made? What changes or problems did you anticipate?

8. What were your husband's feelings about the decision?
   How do you feel about his response?
   Probe: If husband opposed or reluctant - What arguments do you give him to gain his support?

9. Marriages often involve conflicting ideas and viewpoints. Sometimes, because of this, we find ourselves bargaining to get what we want. Would you say you did any "bargaining" in order to become a college student? Would you describe this for me?

10. There is a lot of talk about the changing roles of women in marriage and the family. Would you describe your view of the woman's role as wife? As mother? How do you think your views compare to other women? To your husband's views?

11. Would you say your life, and your family's has changed as a result of your student role? How much? In what ways?
What was your marriage like before you became a student? Now?
How do you feel about the changes?

12. What specific changes in your family's regular routine have occurred? I'm going to name some typical activities and tasks that families have to deal with. Please tell me who did these things before you came to school and who does them now.
Probe: If woman still doing, probe concerning time devoted to activity. Where husband and/or children have assumed responsibility--How did you get him/them to do it? Did you have to bargain any? What seems to work best? What doesn't seem to work?

13. How do you feel about the way family tasks are currently divided?
Probe: Would you like to see some (more) changes? What? How are you attempting to achieve this?

How does your family respond? How do you feel about their response? Do you tell them how you feel?

14. How would you describe your husband's reponse since your return?
(If supportive) Probe: In what ways?
What would you want him to do or be like? Do you tell him this?
How does he respond? Are you able to get him to change? How?

15. How do your children feel about their mother being a college student?

16. How have relatives reacted? Friends?
Probe: Specific problems? Your response?
What have you done to deal with this?

17. Overall, what would you say is the biggest or major problem that you faced? How have you dealt with this?

18. How do you see your life right now? Is it worth it?
How do you see things in the future when you complete your education?

19. How would you feel if you were unable to achieve your education goals?

20. Do you think this college could do something to make the transition easier for women like you? What things would help?

VITA

Faye Tanner Barr was born in Milledgeville, Georgia on June 24, 1941. She graduated from the public schools of Milledgeville and obtained the B.A. degree from Georgia College at Milledgeville in 1962. After teaching in the public schools of Albany, Georgia for seven years, she began the M.A. degree program in the Department of Sociology at The University of Tennessee in 1969. This degree was awarded in August 1972.

In September 1972, Ms. Barr was employed by Clayton Junior College in Morrow, Georgia. She reentered the Graduate School of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1978. Ms. Barr received the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Sociology in December 1984.