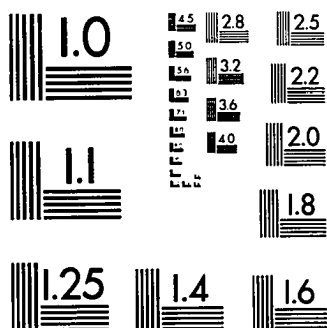
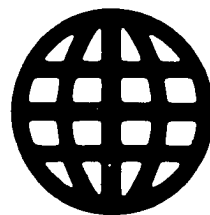


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**ANALYSES OF DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT SEEKING BETWEEN TWO
GROUPS OF WOMEN RETURNING TO COLLEGE**

The University of Oklahoma

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

ANALYSES OF DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT SEEKING
BETWEEN TWO GROUPS OF WOMEN
RETURNING TO COLLEGE

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
SUE ANN CORVIN
Norman, Oklahoma

1985

ANALYSES OF DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT SEEKING
BETWEEN TWO GROUPS OF WOMEN
RETURNING TO COLLEGE
A DISSERTATION
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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I dedicate this dissertation, with love, to my family. The love and emotional support of my husband helped provide me with the strength and determination I needed to get through. A special tribute to my son, Russell, is given in recognition for not only his support but his sacrifices made throughout this doctoral program.

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ANALYSES OF DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT SEEKING
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ABSTRACT

This research examined whether or not women returnees who were not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program had different concerns and family life circumstances than women who indicated interest in such services.

The Returning Women Questionnaire (RWQ), developed for the purpose of this study, was mailed to a random sample of 400 returning women through the Department of Continuing Education. A total of 139 subjects, at least 25 years of age, were included in the study resulting in 67 returnees who were not interested in the group and 72 returnees who were interested in group participation.

The variables of most concern, ranked in order of importance, for returning women in both groups included: a) financial matters, b) career choice/vocational future, c) coordinating family responsibilities with college schedule, and d) performance anxiety (i.e., tests, speeches).

Important differences between these two groups were identified through the use of chi-square and t -tests with a minimum .05 level of significance. Specifically, these differences suggest that women not interested in supportive group counseling are significantly less

concerned about school work/grades, coordinating child care, their relationships with spouse/boyfriend, remaining youthful and attractive, and depression. Additionally, the women not interested in the group were significantly better able to deal successfully with the returning experience and felt a greater degree of emotional support from others.

Demographically, women in the two groups differed significantly in regard to university classification. There were fewer numbers of women not interested in the group who were classified as Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors. However, the largest categories for women interested in the supportive counseling group were classified as Juniors and Seniors, respectively.

Results of the study were discussed in terms of their relationship to past research in this area, methodological limitations and recommendations for future research were made.

ANALYSES OF DIFFERENCES IN SUPPORT SEEKING
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past 10 years there has been much attention to the needs of women returning to college. Women who have experienced an extended interruption in their formal education have found that their decision to return to post secondary education has had a significant impact on their lives in regard to increased stress, family adjustments, and reassessing current values (Brandenburg, 1974). These changes not only alter their own values, perceptions, and self-images, but also give rise to stress and change in their subsequent relationships. A change resulting from the returning experience often proves to be disturbing, disrupting, disabling, or even disastrous (Roach, 1976). Clearly, there is a need to respond to such women's needs. A variety of interventions such as career courses, family counseling, and assistance through academic advisors have been used. A supportive group counseling model designed to support women's changing values and their roles in society is one approach to facilitate women's reentry into

higher education. However, what has yet to be tested is the difference between the concerns and life circumstances of women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program from those who are interested in participating.

As more women over 25 years of age enroll in colleges and universities across the country, it is important for educators, administrators, and support staff to consider the motivational factors and difficulties that these women face upon reentry to educational institutions. Such an awareness can lead to practices which facilitate women's educational experiences (Letchworth, 1970).

Women returnees encounter a diverse range of personal conflicts such as identity crises (Bradenberg, 1974; Letchworth, 1970), integrity crises (Letchworth, 1970), and mid-life transition (Muskat, 1978). They may be burdened with self-directed anger and hostility (Moreland, 1979), role conflict (Manis & Mochizuki, 1972), feelings of isolation (Scarato & Sigall, 1979), low self-confidence and self-esteem (Astin, 1976), or depression (Katz & Knapp, 1974). As reentry women pursue a postsecondary education, marital strife frequently ensues. Husbands may become threatened by the new woman with whom they live (Letchworth, 1970). Similarly friends and neighbors often disapprove of women's personal strivings (Scarato & Sigall, 1979).

In light of these concerns, continuing education programs were the first resources developed to facilitate the entry or reentry of women into higher education who were past the traditional college age of 18 (Astin, 1976). By 1963 there were about 20 programs, and by 1966 the Women's Bureau had identified about 100 programs (Astin, 1976). In

1971, Continuing Education Programs and Services for Women listed 376 institutions with special programs or services for adult women. In 1980, one out of every five adults was enrolled in some kind of post-secondary educational or training course, and women composed more than two-thirds of this adult student population (Fisher-Thompson, 1980).

Continuing education programs have expanded rapidly mostly due to increasing numbers of women seeking employment, declining birth rates, longer life spans, rising costs of living, and encouragement and support by the women's movement (Astin, 1976). Much has been written about women's difficulties in reentering higher education. However, past research in this area is deficient in descriptive studies that identify the primary concerns of women returnees who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program that is designed specifically for this population. Therefore, it is currently unknown if the concerns of women returnees who are not interested in utilizing such a program are similar or dissimilar from those women who are interested in utilizing this service.

Problem Statement

Do women returning to higher education who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program report different concerns and family-life circumstances than those women who express an interest in participating in such a program?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify if differences exist in the concerns and family life circumstances of women college students 25

years of age and over who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program from those women who are.

Hypotheses

- H1: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are on the following demographic variables: previous college attendance, number of years since previous enrollment, age, relationship status, university classification, employment status, and number of children living in the household.
- H2: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their types of expressed concerns.
- H3: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their feelings of dealing successfully with the returning experience.
- H4: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their feelings about their ability to make important decisions.
- H5: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their expectations for dealing positively with returning to school.
- H6: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in

regard to their degree of emotional support received from significant others.

Operational Definitions

Terms used in this study include:

- (1) reentry women, returnee, mature women, and non-traditional students are defined for the purpose of this study, as adult women students 25 years of age and older returning to higher education after a minimum of a two year time period since previous enrollment in an educational institution (Kasworm, 1980; Keehling, 1980; Mardoyan, Alleman, & Chochran, 1983; Smallwood, 1980).
- (2) supportive group counseling is defined as a group structured to share concerns, analyze role conflicts, minimize interpersonal stress, and attend to individual needs of women returning to school. The group has a leader and a predetermined population meeting for a time limited period (Jupiter, 1979).
- (3) concerns are defined, for the purpose of this study, as matters that are problematic, troublesome, or of distressing importance.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will provide an impetus for mental health professionals to assess concerns of women returnees more thoroughly. It is assumed that women who are not interested in participating in supportive group counseling for returning women have

different concerns and family-life circumstances than those returnees who are interested in such services. Therefore, the more comprehensive an understanding that university counseling centers have of returning women students, the better able they will be to provide appropriate programs/services.

The study will also provide a more comprehensive understanding of returning women and, therefore, has the potential to facilitate the reentry woman's educational experiences as she copes with additional stresses and altered relationships.

Limitations of the Study

This study intends to provide a broader understanding of the concerns and family-life circumstances of returning women students who do not express an interest in seeking supportive group counseling services in their adjustment to higher education.

The offering of a supportive counseling group was crucial to the study. However, the fact that the dates and times of group sessions were pre-set and the group did meet during that time period prohibited the opportunity to gather more subjects for inclusion in the study after the group had begun.

Although the study provides information regarding women returnees, the scope of the generalization is limited to those women who will voluntarily respond to a paper and pencil questionnaire, which only indicates their perceptions at a moment in time. Additionally, responses are based on women's self-reports and their self-perceptions which does not assess how others perceive them in their coping with the returning experience.

This is exploratory research, and there is some caution to be used with the small return rate. As a consequence of the small sample size under exploration, the interpretations and conclusions drawn in this study have taken this variable under consideration and, therefore, need to be viewed with these limitations in mind. Thus, further research in this area is recommended.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

This review of the literature addresses (a) demographic and historical characteristics of women returning to higher education; (b) special concerns of women returnees; (c) familial and significant other perceptions and implications; and (d) strategies and special programs for women returnees.

Demographic and Historical Characteristics

Colleges and universities originally developed continuing education programs for women (CEW), in the early 1960s, to facilitate the entry or reentry of women past the traditional age of 18 into higher education (Astin, 1976). These programs were in demand because of the increasing numbers of women over 24 years of age who were entering college.

According to Reehling (1980), students 25 years of age and older represented 30% of all students attending colleges of which 999,000 were women in 1972; by 1977 the number of older students had increased to 40% of total college enrollments of which 2,064,000 were women. The U.S. Bureau of Census did not start tabulating national figures on college enrollments for students over 30 years of age until 1972

(Young, 1975). The increasing trend of female adult college students is a natural outgrowth of changing attitudes toward sex roles and the emerging social and economic realities of our time (Lenz & Shaevitz, 1977). Some of these realities include: increasing numbers of women seeking employment; reduced housework; declining birth rates; longer life spans; rising costs of living; and encouragement and support by the women's movement (Astin, 1976).

Historically, women primarily returned to higher education in the 60's and 70's for increased personal fulfillment (Brandenburg, 1974; Glozowski & Lanning, 1976; Hiltunen, 1965; Nichols, 1974; Shishkoff, 1972) and a hope for better career opportunities (Oliver, 1975; Tittle & Denker, 1977). The single most important reason reported for women returning to school in the 80's is due to economic factors (Weinstein, 1980). Most women return as a means to find careers and/or training to support themselves or their families. Women are seeking ways to gain and update marketable skills, opportunities for advancement, and to prepare for a midlife career change (Astin, 1976). Astin reported "job preparation was a much more important objective for single, separated, divorced, or widowed women than for married women" (1976, p. 57).

The re-entry woman is significantly different from the traditional 18 to 22 year old student because of such factors as age, maturity, background, experience, responsibilities, and objectives (Weinstein, 1980). Within the population of women returnees there is significant variance as well in terms of:

- (1) age: (Returnees range between the ages of 25 to 80+ with the majority between the ages of 28 and 50) (Weinstein, 1980). In

1976, one-third were under age 30, one in seven under 25, and one in seven were over 51 years of age (Astin, 1976).

- (2) marital status: (Returnees vary as to being single, married, divorced, or widowed, and possibly having infants, school-age children, grown children, or being childless) (Weinstein, 1980). In 1976, 17 percent had never married, 15 percent were separated or divorced, one-third were childless (Austin, 1976).
- (3) race or ethnicity: (Women returnees may vary considerably within a given institution) (Weinstein, 1980).
- (4) class: (Returnees may be working class, upwardly mobile, middle or upper class) (Weinstein, 1980).
- (5) education: (Some returnees may never have attended an institution of higher education; others will be finishing undergraduate degrees started previously; and others are beginning or completing graduate work) (Weinstein, 1980).
- (6) years of absence from college: (Returning women range from a minimum of five years to as many as thirty or thirty-five years) (Weinstein, 1980).
- (7) work experience: (some returnees have little or no work experience; others bring extensive volunteer service; still others return to school to advance their present career or to start new ones) (Weinstein, 1980).

Even though the backgrounds of returning women are diversified, significant trends have emerged regarding length of interim periods until reentry. Women in the 80's are returning sooner than women

returnees in the past decade (Mendelsohn, 1980). In 1965, the Center of Continuing Education of Women at the University of Michigan reported the average age of their reentry women students was 37.7 years. In 1971, the average age had dropped to 30.4 years. Additionally, more reentry students are heading their own households. Only sixteen percent of the Michigan students were unmarried in 1965. Whereas in 1976 unmarried reentry students increased to 52 percent. In the 1960's more women prolonged reentry until their children were in school. Presently an increasing number of students choose not to delay returning to higher education (Mendelsohn, 1980).

Previous research (Astin, 1976; Smallwood, 1980; Weinstein, 1980) indicates that the needs of returning women students are as diverse as the population of returning women themselves. The most significant needs of returning women seem to be positively correlated with age, marital status, children and childrens' ages. Thus their need for support services should be related to their particular situation.

Going to college is often a major disruption in the lives of older students (Mardoyan, Alleman, and Cochran, 1983). The time, attention, and financial resources once devoted to spouse, children, friends, community, and job are diverted to class attendance and study (Douvan, 1981). Unlike traditional students, older students often find themselves having to justify to family, friends, and employers a decision to return to school (Dewey, 1980; Krings, 1976).

Mardoyan et al. (1983) also concur with this perspective. They advocate adapting university counseling centers to meet the needs of the older (over 25) student body. These researchers point out

different developmental circumstances in their collegiate experience between traditional age and older students. For most traditional students, college is a normal progression and a continuation of familiar classroom-homework experiences. The older student however, may be changing career fields after years of employment, advancing within their chosen field, or the older student may be forced to make changes as a result of divorce or death of a spouse, unemployment, or a physical or emotional handicap (Blocher & Rapoza, 1981).

Consequently, as a result of these disruptions and multi-transitions, counseling centers are currently discovering the changing demographic profile of its student population and the need to respond accordingly.

Special Concerns of Women Returnees

A review of special concerns of women returnees are identified in the following studies that reflect their diversified age, marital status, presence or absence of children, and degree of interpersonal support with significant others.

Smallwood (1980) studied 392 community college women students over 25 years of age of diverse marital status. Data for this study were gathered by a questionnaire which consisted of seven multiple-choice questions that gathered demographic data and a list of twenty-one problems that a community college woman student might potentially face. One open-ended request to describe any other problems was also included. Participants were instructed to rate each of the problems on a Likert scale. Results indicated that the number one problem of adult women college students was coordinating child care and family

responsibilities with their college schedule. This was especially significant for women with very young children and for women carrying heavier credit-hour loads. Coordinating job schedules was the second greatest concern. Issues surrounding interpersonal relationships were important to adult women returnees, but were lower in priority than coordinating child care and jobs, succeeding academically, or choosing a career or job. Smallwood (1980) reports the most crucial interpersonal issue was general self-confidence as a woman student returning to college. Next in importance were relationships with their spouses and children. Relationships at school with other friends, or with their parents were ranked lowest in importance. Although these women were concerned about interpersonal relationship problems, other needs were perceived as more pressing. The need for financial aid was greatest for women in the lower income brackets and for separated and divorced women. "More than a third of the potential problems of adult women students were significantly related to the lower income brackets" (Smallwood, 1980 p. 72).

The divorced women in the study consistently reported the highest degree of concern for the largest number of problems, whereas the separated women reported the second highest degree of distress. The most crucial matter for consideration of divorced and separated women were relationships with their children, relationships with men, need for financial and legal aid, and wanting to be more assertive.

The students most recently enrolled in college were especially concerned about their ability to succeed and their self-confidence as women students returning to college. As these women accumulated more

credit hours they became more apprehensive about being treated seriously and equally by other students and wanting to pursue a career traditionally open to men.

Smallwood (1980) also found that the age of the women returnees was significantly related to certain problems. The younger returnees were more troubled with coordinating child care and relationships with their children. The older returnees (under 50) worried more about their ability to succeed in college and were often wanting to pursue a career traditionally open to men. Women older than 50 years of age felt significantly less distress for all the problems in this study.

Of women returnees, one group receiving a great deal of attention in the research is women in mid-life transition. Brandenburg (1974) described women reentering school in mid-life transition as ranging from 35 to 45 years of age who have several years of absence since previous school enrollment. This extended absence often increased women's anxiety over the returning experience and, therefore, the need for supportive services is augmented.

Muskat (1978) contends that the mid-life developmental period in the lives of women is gaining increasing attention in the counseling literature as a critical life stage. Brandenburg (1974) describes this developmental period as a time of renewed identity crises when women reappraise themselves and their goals and commitments. The transitional period may be laden with self-directed anger and hostility (Moreland, 1979), role conflict (Manis & Mochizuki, 1972), feelings of isolation (Scarato & Sigall, 1979), low self-confidence and self-esteem (Astin, 1976), or depression (Katz & Knapp, 1974).

Along with increased role flexibility, nontraditional careers and life-styles, many returning women experience obstacles to achievement which cause confusion and anxiety. Among these problems are an intense internal pressure to grow (Muskat, 1978), adjusting academic and household schedules and responsibilities (Letchworth, 1970), management of feelings of guilt (Astin, 1976; Letchworth, 1970; Weinstein, 1980), general lack of confidence with respect to skills and abilities (Astin, 1976; Muskat, 1978; Weinstein, 1980), and an unsupportive family or spouse (Letchworth, 1970; Weinstein, 1980). Letchworth (1970) also identifies shame as another factor that plays an important role among the anxieties and apprehensions of some women returning to college. Letchworth (1970) defines shame as a feeling of not being able to live up to one's own standards or aspirations and is primarily an identity concern. The feeling of shame is related to the woman's apprehension over her intellectual abilities. She is afraid that, in spite of the great energy she has expended in returning to college, she will not be able to succeed (Letchworth, 1970).

It is not surprising then, that the woman in midlife transition returning to school may experience many of these pressures and concerns with the addition of her new role as student.

In order to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of this population Kahnweiler and Johnson (1980) designed a study to gain a developmental perspective on the midlife returning woman student. The rationale for the study was to learn more about midlife women's development so that the needs of these returning students might be more efficiently met. Subjects in the study were forty women returnees between the ages of 30

and 50. An hour-and-a-half interview with each participant was conducted along with the administration of a developmental concerns questionnaire. The study indicated that some developmental concerns may occur in the lives of women returning to school at midlife. Those that occurred to a significant degree were introspective concerns, beliefs that centered around changes in the role as wife (e.g., remaining youthful and attractive). Returning to school had a particularly significant meaning for these returning women in midlife. They also reported that mentor experiences with a friend that offered emotional support was highly valued. A great emphasis was placed on the future and goal achievements by these midlife returnees. They were additionally concerned about how their aging might bar them from future career opportunities.

Kahnweiler and Johnson (1980) concluded that returning to school is part of an ongoing process of midlife development, and colleges and universities should be concerned with the timing of interventions with returning women students. They recommend a wide variety of counseling and supportive services to women according to their developmental stage as they return to school. Kasworm (1980) also concurs that as increasing numbers of older undergraduate students continue to enroll in higher education, specialized supportive services are needed to accommodate this population.

Hooper and Traupmann (1984) reported on their study of women over 50 who returned to higher education. Participants consisted of 53 women enrolled in a large university who responded to a questionnaire sent by mail. These subjects ranged in age from 51 to 63 with an average age

of 55.67 years. Thirty-three women were married, nine were divorced, two were separated, four were widowed, and five were single. Subjects were asked to describe their motives for returning to school: 73.6% of this sample indicated some career-related motivation with 11% of this percentage group working toward a Ph.D. to increase their possibilities of career advancement; 26.4% indicated that a desire for self-fulfillment was their main motivation for being in school.

Results of this study also indicated that several of the older women students once had traditional family roles when their children were younger. However, familial traditionalism didn't prevent them from pursuing an education at an untraditional age.

In addition to being motivated by career-related goals, other factors such as increased life expectancy, higher levels of education, and a rising retirement age may motivate more women to seek a college-level education in their older years (Hooper & Traupmann, 1984).

Familial and Significant Other Perceptions and Implications

The role of family members and significant others and their consequent support is evidenced by researchers to have a bearing on the returning woman's adjustment to higher education (Brandenburg, 1974; Hooper, 1979; Roach, 1976). These influences and their impact are explored in this next section.

Astin (1976) reported on a study sponsored by the National Coalition for Research on Women's Education and Development that was conducted to address the characteristics, needs, and interests of adult women returning to higher education. A total of 649 women in

continuing education for women programs, 153 spouses, and 88 children ranging from 9 to 31 years of age (73% were under 18) gave their responses in a mail survey to the returning experience.

One-fourth of the women in this study had been away from school for at least 11 years. Their experience not only was a new experience for themselves but it also affected the whole family.

In this study a majority of the husbands reported positive feelings about their wives' activities. Their perceptions included a happier more actualized wife who would benefit the entire family intellectually and financially.

However, some spouses reported that the marriage suffered and that there were more tensions in the family as a result of the wife's return to school. Specifically, 27% of the spouses reported less time together, 10% expressed strain on the marriage, and 3% said their wives were more restless as a result of the returning experience.

As part of this research fifty girls and thirty-eight boys were interviewed. Astin (1976) reported that children's views differed as to why their mother was going to college from the views of fathers. "Only 29% mentioned personal growth, while 58% believed their mother went to college to prepare for or to get a better job" (Astin, 1976 p. 59). When Astin discussed these differences in perceptions, some women mentioned that it was easier to give practical reasons that implied that the total family would benefit from her returning to school rather than to say she returned to fulfill personal goals. Astin's perception of this reasoning was that it typifies women's sex-role socialization process of reinforcing the nurturing role. Only 6% to 9% of the

children reported any disapproval of their mother currently going to school and/or working outside the home in the future.

An interesting component of this study was that children 16 years or older were asked what they would have done differently if they were in their mother's place. Sixty-one percent said they would have gone to school earlier, had fewer children or spaced them differently, asked their husbands to share more household responsibilities or/and married later or not at all. Astin points out that "all of these responses reflect the known barriers to a woman's educational and occupational development: marriage and children" (1976, p. 59).

Astin (1976) hypothesizes that if the children had been asked the same question about their fathers that marriage and children would not have been regarded as barriers to his development or self-actualization. She predicts the children's responses would have probably mentioned aspects of his educational preparation or work and career activities. This reflects stereotyped values regarding sex roles which impact women's returning experience by having them assess past and current sex role attitudes toward women.

It was also reported that the women returnees themselves who enter continuing education with a strong career orientation differ from other participants in that they express less traditional views about the role of women, are more supportive of the women's movement, and have more self-confidence. Even though these women are more likely to have children and husbands that are generally supportive of their educational activities, they are more inclined to be dissatisfied at home.

Astin declares that while "the women's movement has given women the freedom to be, continuing education has provided the support and training that adult women need to develop their talents and to acquire skills that enable them to enter or reenter the labor market" (Astin, 1976, p. 59).

Astin (1976) advocates the existence of women's continuing education programs as a vehicle for facilitating support from other women in analogous situations with similar concerns.

Ballmer and Cozby (1975) found congruent findings as Astin (1976) in regard to family support of returning women. Specifically, both husbands and wives reported positive attitudes toward the returning experience.

Additionally, Parelman (1974) identified some of the conditions that are likely to encourage this supportive familial condition:

- (1) Families tend to be more supportive if the marriage is already in some ways nontraditional in role assignments (e.g., housework, outside employment).
- (2) The more the husband supports his wife's decision to return to school, the more likely he is to substantially share in household tasks.
- (3) Mothers who explore roles outside of the homemaking role for the first time will express more guilt feelings and be more accommodating to family needs and demand (e.g., housework) than the previously employed mother.

Brandenburg (1974) emphasized that out of the large number of women she counsels, many face resistance to their return to school from

husbands, families, and friends. She reported that as the woman's involvement in school progresses, aspects of the woman's life changes. The most common change in the participants of her study (N=200) was a sacrifice of housekeeping responsibilities and decreased time for family and friends. The reaction patterns of these significant others ranged from continuous open hostility to continuous support. The latter response was comparatively rare among these women; most of them experienced some degree of resistance as a result of their return to school. These findings are contrary to Astin's (1976) study.

Differences from the Astin (1976) study also appeared in regard to the effect on children. Some mothers experienced improved relationships while others felt increasing competition, especially with older children, and increasing resentment and regressive behavior.

In this study, several women reported being challenged by friends who were not returning to school. Such questions as "Why are you neglecting your husband and family?" "What are you getting out of it?" were asked. Brandenburg (1974) noted that friend's negative reaction to the returning woman's experience may be viewed as threatening and some may feel fearful that the change will alter the friendship.

Hooper (1979) surveyed twenty-four returning women students and their families. Measures of personality traits were reported on adults in the study using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (S-E). These adult personality scores varied with academic rank (graduate/undergraduate) and length of time in school as wives. Family coping style was also related to the wife's performance in the student role as measured by a Family Supportiveness-Role Taking Instrument that was developed for the

study. Hooper (1979) noted the following major findings:

- (1) Husbands of graduate women had significantly lower self-esteem than their wives.
- (2) The longer a woman had been a successful student, the higher her self-esteem.
- (3) The more anxious husbands are about their wives returning to school, the less support husbands express.

Additionally, Hooper (1979) reported the following differences in familial coping styles as indicated by role taking and decision making which impact family functioning and the woman's student role:

- (1) The women viewed their new student roles as having a negative impact on their families and attempted to perform all previous family functions as a result of feeling guilty.
- (2) The woman's student role was accommodated by the rest of the family by sharing household work and expressing positive attitudes toward her new role.
- (3) The women used their student role as a lever to force change in family role taking and decision making. This resulted in the woman experiencing considerable guilt feelings and precipitated a crisis situation in the family as members tried to elicit her former traditional family role.

Therefore, the woman returnee may bring into the new student role the above familial coping styles with which mental health professionals working with this population should be aware. Thus, counseling returning women students and their families early in the student's academic careers could facilitate the families understanding

of the demands of the student role, probable impact on the family, and coping strategies while supporting the returnee (Hooper, 1979). Other researchers also support this view (Daily, Cartledge, & Kearney, 1981; Roach, 1976).

Single returning women students encounter numerous concerns as a result of the continuing education process when the responsibilities of children are involved.

Hooper and March (1980) explored the problems faced by female single parents returning to school. Their conclusions are based on clinical experiences with this population in a university counseling center. They found that major problems identified by single women are:

- (1) having sole responsibility for their children
- (2) psychological and physical isolation in a society geared toward families with both parents
- (3) financial problems and difficulty in acquiring loans
- (4) difficulty in scheduling jobs with class hours

Hooper and March (1980) contend that many colleges and universities are still designed to serve the younger population of 18 to 22 year olds who have no nonacademic responsibilities, thus institutional barriers exist for the female single parent returnee.

Single women parents have gone to various extremes in order to survive the returning experience. Hooper and March (1980) identified the following ways some women survive:

- (1) entering a joint household living arrangement with others in similar situations; sharing

expenses, household and childcare duties while both attend classes

- (2) choosing minimum-cost dwellings
- (3) a "last resort" solution used by a few women is temporarily giving up custody of the children.

Hooper and March (1980) made the following suggestions for institutional support for the single female parent returnee:

- (1) special counseling by persons trained to be sensitive to the unique needs of returning women and to be informed on the availability of accommodating resources and supportive services in the university and community; Other researchers have supported the idea of special counseling for these nontraditional students (Geisler, 1973; Hooper & Rice, 1978) and the specific training needed by counselors of these students (Royce, 1973).
- (2) day care for children of university students
- (3) a more flexible approach to employment of student hourly workers by the university.

Intervention Strategies and Special Programs for Returning Women Students

Numerous programs have been developed to meet the needs of women returnees since the first Continuing Education Program for Women was established at the University of Minnesota in 1960 (Cless, 1976).

A current review of intervention strategies utilized in

university settings are examined in the following studies.

Roach (1976) approached the reentry woman as a member of a family system. She developed a model to teach couples how to understand the inevitable tensions in their interpersonal relationships as a result of the woman's new student role.

Berman, Gelso, Greenfeig, and Hirsch (1977) performed two experiments to determine if a change in women's life style could occur by providing a supportive learning environment for women returnees rather than through individual or group counseling.

The subjects in the first study were 46 women entering the University of Maryland. The women ranged in age from 20 to 60 years, with an average age of 36. Most of the women were married and had two school-aged children. They had worked for an average of 4 years and had been away from school for 2 to 30 years.

One experimental group (N=18) met 3 hours a week for 5 weeks, while another experimental group (N=18) and the control group (N=10) met 2 hours weekly for 15 weeks in the fall semester. The supportive learning environment was a course designed to allow for sharing personal and emotional concerns, improving interpersonal relationships, disseminating academic and vocational information, and setting goals. The results, based on the Vocational Decision-Making Checklist, the Self-Concept as Learner Scale, and the Dogmatism Scale (Form E), indicated that the course had positive effects on vocational decision making.

The second experiment was designed to test the effectiveness of a supportive learning program for adult women exploring new vocational

and psychological goals. This program differed from the first study in that it was conducted in a family-oriented community agency. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to determine if the treatment provided would influence vocational decision making, attitudes toward women, and self-acceptance.

Sixty-six women ranging in age from 23 to 55, with an average age of 37, participated in this experiment. Most women were married or had been previously married and almost all had children. Group members had been away from school from 3 to 32 years. The reason most frequently given for enrollment was the need to set vocational goals.

The program consisted of providing information on vocational planning, employment trends, educational opportunities, decision making, assertiveness training, and personal awareness training.

Weekly sessions were organized into large didactic class activities and three small discussion groups of between 7 and 11 participants each.

As in the first study, the Vocational Decision-Making Checklist, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, and the Dogmatism Scale (Form E) were the assessment instruments used. The Index of Adjustment and Values was used to measure self-acceptance.

The analyses suggest that both programs had desirable effects on participant's self concept both after treatment and upon follow-up one month later.

Berman et al., (1977) concluded that supportive educational programs are useful mechanisms for women who are thinking of making changes in their life style.

One program which has gained wide recognition in the research literature is a student group called Women Involved in New Goals (WING), which started at Queens College of the City University of New York. This program continues to develop activities, practices, and programs for meeting the needs of reentry women (Brandenburg, 1974).

WING was designed to offer regular matriculated returning women students an opportunity to develop friendships with peers, discuss problems, gain support, and obtain information specific to their needs. It is run by a committee of four students under the coordination of Judith Brandenburg who is a member of the faculty and the counseling staff at Queens College.

Prime issues such as personal concerns about guilt and dependency, sex discrimination, and career development are addressed through two-hour weekly meetings and workshops, speakers, and special programs.

Brandenburg (1974) stresses the importance of counselors helping women come to terms with such difficulties as feelings of dependency, self-defeating behavior, and coping with the resistance of significant others.

The WING program has been evaluated by Brandenburg (1974) as a successful approach, however, she neglected to mention how program efficacy was assessed.

Jacobs, Unger, Striegel-Moore, and Kimbrell (1983) did an empirical study providing a support group program for returning women students (25 years and older). They suggest that school adjustment is related to the stressfulness of students' life experiences, available

social support, and personal skills. Thus, a support group program was chosen as a means of helping mature students cope with their school demands.

Results of the study indicated that social support helped mature students (54%) cope with stressful life events and enhanced school adjustment.

The researchers concluded that support groups can promote awareness that others share the same struggles, provide an opportunity for ongoing support and the learning of new skills (Jacobs et al., 1983). Others (Bauman, 1983; Jupiter, 1979;) also support this view.

In summary, this review of the literature has (a) given an historical perspective of women returning to higher education who have been willing to participate in supportive services; (b) described the diversity of this population in regard to age, marital status and familial context; (c) discussed how this population differs from the traditional 18 to 22 year old student; (d) identified their common concerns as well as special problems characteristic of specific age spans and diverse marital status; and, (e) described special programs for women returnees designed to meet their identified needs.

What is missing in the literature are the concerns and family-life circumstances of women returnees who choose not to participate in supportive group counseling services compared to those women who choose to participate. Do we as researchers assume that all women returnees share the same problems and difficulties as those women who do seek assistance? Perhaps those women who have not sought supportive counseling programs have different concerns or family-life

circumstances and, therefore, do not need the same services as other returning women. Not only are the types of concerns unknown as a function of age, relationship status, and university classification, but, also, the degree of positive expectation regarding the woman's returning experience may be different for women who don't seek assistance from those who do. It is important to know how that information might alter our present description of reentry women and their needs.

It is evident that "our understanding of the reentry woman is at an embryonic stage of development" (Mc Graw, 1982, p. 471). Therefore, future researchers must consider the limited scope of past studies given those descriptions are based primarily on women who have sought assistance. Undeniably, as more women returning students increase in numbers, counselors will need a more accurate understanding of this population to more adequately respond to their needs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

A random sample of 400 returning women were mailed a questionnaire through the Department of Continuing Education. Participants in the study were 139 women, at least 25 years of age, enrolled in a large midwestern university. There were 67 returnees who were not interested in participating in the supportive group counseling program and 72 returnees who were interested in participating. The average number of years since previous enrollment, based on the mean, was 12 years for women indicating no interest in participating in the group. This analysis compared to a mean of 10 years for women interested in the service. More women were in the 30 to 39 year age group (46.9 percent) than any other category for both groups. Typically, women in both groups were employed (62.1 percent), with the mean number of hours per week of 28. The women in each group were also similar in that each had an average of 1.3 children living in the household. All subjects were voluntary participants and were ensured of confidentiality of the data.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were gathered by the Returning Women Questionnaire (RWQ) (Appendix B). The RWQ was developed through incorporating ideas and recommendations from previous research (Brandenburg, 1974; Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Hooper, 1980; Kasworm, 1980; Roach, 1976; Smallwood, 1980; Weinstein, 1980). This instrument was validated consentaneously by a panel of five senior staff psychologists at the student counseling center.

The questionnaire consisted of:

1. Seven questions that gather the following demographic data:
 - (a) previous college enrollment; (b) age range; (c) relationship status; (d) number of dependent children; (e) university classification; (f) number of hours employed per week; (f) present state of health.
2. Twenty problems that a mature university woman might encounter plus one request to describe the nature of her main concern(s). Participants were instructed to check once those problems which were currently troubling them; and, to check twice those problems which were of most concern to them.
3. One question that assesses the degree to which women feel they can now deal successfully with their returning experience. Participants were asked to rate the item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "not at all" to 7 "completely".
4. One question that assesses the degree to which women felt their ability to make important decisions was satisfactory. Participants were instructed to rate their response on a

- 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "completely unsatisfactory" to 7 "completely satisfactory".
5. One question that assesses the degree of positive expectations for learning to deal positively with the returning experience. Participants were asked to rate the item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "very low" to 7 "very high".
 6. One question that assesses the degree of emotional support women were currently receiving from significant others. Participants were instructed to rate their response on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "very low" to 7 "very high".
 7. Two questions that gather information in regard to interest and willingness to participate in a returning women's support group.

Procedure

A letter describing the RWQ and the supportive counseling group (Appendix A) was mailed randomly to 400 returning women students at a large midwestern university through the Department of Continuing Education. Participation was voluntary, and subjects were ensured of confidentiality of the data. The participants were instructed to complete the RWQ and return it by mail to the university student counseling center. Given that the purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the different concerns and family-life circumstances of women who would choose not to be interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program from those who would, an advertisement for such a group was incorporated into the questionnaire

in order to provide a real opportunity for participation. Participants had to make a decision as to their willingness to participate or not. This was the method used to separate the women into the two groups (not interested and interested in participating in the supportive group counseling program). Therefore, the likelihood for a more accurate response was increased. Those subjects who were willing to participate in the supportive counseling group were contacted by phone and a screening time was arranged at the student counseling center. At the time of the screening a consent form (Appendix C) was completed. All participation was voluntary and subjects were ensured of confidentiality of the data.

Statistical Analysis

A series chi-square and t -tests, with a minimum .05 level of significance, was used in the statistical analysis to determine item differences on the RWQ between returning women who were not interested in participating in a supportive counseling group program from those who were interested in participating. A count was performed to obtain frequencies and percentages for the values regarding demographic variables (i.e., number of years since previous enrollment, age, and employment status).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Of the 145 women who responded to the RWQ, six did not indicate if they were interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program or not and were, therefore, excluded in the analysis of the data. A total of 139 cases were included in the study resulting in 67 returnees who were not interested in participating in the group and 72 returnees who were. To test for differences between the two groups, the hypotheses were analyzed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those who are on the following demographic variables: previous college attendance, number of years since previous enrollment, age, relationship status, university classification, employment status, and number of children living in the household.

A chi-square was conducted to examine differences between women who were not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program from those women who were interested based on the following demographic variables: previous college attendance, age, relationship status, university classification, and employment status (see Table 1). T-tests were used to examine differences in scores regarding the number of children living in the household for the two

groups (see Table 2). Results indicated that there were no significant differences in previous college attendance (chi-square =0.0), age (chi-square =0.897), relationship status (chi-square =2.713), employment status (chi-square =1.742), number of years since previous enrollment ($t = -1.49$), and number of children in the household ($t = 0.00$). There was a significant difference at the .05 level regarding university classification (chi-square =16.863).

Table 1

Analysis of Chi-Square Scores of Demographic Variables (N=139)

Source	chi-square	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Previous College Attendance	0.0	1	1.000
Age	0.897	2	0.639
Relationship Status	2.713	4	0.607
Employment Status	1.742	2	0.418
University Classification	16.863	7	0.018*

* $p < .05$.

Table 2

Analysis of Group 1 (Yes/Interested) and Group 2 (No/Not Interested)
t-Test Scores based on Number of Years Since Previous Enrollment
(NYSPE) and Number of Children In Household (NCIH) (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	2-Tail
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>			
NYSPE	10.136	8.432	12.617	10.283	-1.49	124	0.140
NCIH	1.368	1.132	1.367	1.288	0.00	126	0.996

p >.05.

Hypothesis 2: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those who are in regard to their types of expressed concerns.

A series of t -tests were used to analyze differences between means for the two groups as a result of subjects responses on the RWQ. Results of the procedure indicated a significant difference at the .01 level in regard to concern about school work and/or grades between the two groups (t =2.60, $p=0.010$). Women who were not interested in participating in the group were significantly less concerned about their schoolwork and/or grades than women interested. The sources of variation between group's scores on the RWQ by this item are presented in Table 3.

Results of the t -test also indicated that women not interested

in participating were significantly (at the .05 level) less concerned about coordinating child care than those women interested ($t = 2.47$, $p = 0.015$). Group means and standard deviations of group's scores on the RWQ by this item are presented in Table 3.

Group means differed significantly, at the .01 level, regarding women's relationship with their spouse/boyfriend ($t = 3.04$, $p = .003$). The mean for women who were not interested in participating in the program was substantially lower than the mean for those women interested in participation (see Table 3 for sources of variation of group's scores on the RWQ for relationship with spouse/boyfriend).

Additionally, results of the t -test indicated a significant difference at the .01 level between group means in regard to women's concern over remaining youthful and attractive ($t = 2.71$, $p = 0.008$). Women not interested in participating in the group were not as concerned about remaining youthful and attractive as those women who were interested in the service (see Table 3 for sources of variation of group's scores on the RWQ for this item).

A result of the t -test also indicated that women not interested in participating in the group were significantly (at the .05 level) not as concerned about anxiety or nervousness compared to women who were interested in participating in the group ($t = 2.55$, $p = 0.012$). Sources of variation of group's scores on the RWQ regarding anxiety and nervousness are presented in Table 3.

Important differences between group means also resulted at the .01 level regarding women's concern about depression ($t = 2.76$, $p = 0.007$). This indicated that women not interested in participating in the group

were significantly less concerned about depression than women interested in the group. Sources of variation of group's scores on the RWQ regarding depression are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Analysis of Group 1 and Group 2 t-Test Scores on Variables of Concern That Differed Significantly (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	2-Tail
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>			
SWG	1.014	0.831	0.657	0.789	2.60	136.94	0.010**
CCC	0.472	0.712	0.209	0.538	2.47	131.57	0.015*
RS/B	0.444	0.690	0.149	0.435	3.04	120.95	0.003**
RYA	0.292	0.458	0.105	0.354	2.71	132.65	0.008**
AN	0.514	0.692	0.254	0.503	2.55	129.57	0.012*
D	0.319	0.577	0.105	0.308	2.76	110.06	0.007**

Note : The variables analyzed are School Work and/or Grades (SWG), Coordinating Child Care (CCC), Relationship with Spouse/Boyfriend (RS/B), Remaining Youthful and Attractive (RYA), Anxiety or Nervousness (AN), and Depression (D).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The following concerns were also analyzed using a t-test to detect differences in the two groups:

- a) career choices/vocational future
- b) coordinating family responsibilities with college schedule

- c) coordinating job schedule with college schedule
- d) relationship with parents/family of origin
- e) relationship with friends
- f) relationship with children
- g) relationship with teachers
- h) financial matters
- i) legal aid
- j) physical health
- k) social activities/involvement
- l) assertion
- m) guilt
- n) performance anxiety (i.e., tests, speeches)

The results obtained indicated no difference between the means of women not interested in participating and women interested in participating in the group. The difference between group means approached significance ($p=0.054$) only in regard to feelings of guilt. Women not interested in participating were not as concerned about guilt feelings as women interested in participating. Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and t -values regarding these concerns.

Table 4

Analysis of Group 1 and Group 2 t-Test Scores on Variables of Concern
That Did Not Differ Significantly (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	2-Tail
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>			

a	0.833	0.856	0.582	0.801	1.78	137	0.077
b	0.833	0.822	0.731	0.790	0.74	137	0.458
c	0.417	0.666	0.403	0.653	0.12	137	0.903
d	0.056	0.285	0.134	0.423	-1.30	137	0.197
e	0.153	0.362	0.089	0.288	1.13	137	0.259
f	0.444	0.710	0.269	0.592	1.58	137	0.117
g	0.153	0.433	0.075	0.265	1.27	137	0.206
h	0.833	0.805	0.761	0.818	0.52	137	0.601
i	0.083	0.366	0.015	0.122	1.46	137	0.147
j	0.167	0.444	0.119	0.370	0.68	137	0.498
k	0.222	0.481	0.239	0.553	-0.19	137	0.850
l	0.306	0.573	0.224	0.487	0.90	137	0.368
m	0.181	0.422	0.059	0.295	1.94	137	0.054
n	0.778	0.755	0.731	0.730	0.37	137	0.713

p > .05.

Hypothesis 3: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their feelings of dealing successfully with the returning experience.

Women rated their feelings on a scale of 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("completely") on the RWQ. A t -test was used to analyze differences between means of the two groups. Results of the procedure indicated a significant difference at the .05 level ($t = -2.49$, $p = 0.014$). Women who were not interested in participating felt better able to deal successfully with the returning experience than women interested in participating in the group. Sources of variation between group scores on the RWQ by this item are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Analysis of Group 1 and Group 2 t -Test Scores on Feelings of Dealing Successfully with the Returning Experience (FDSRE) (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		t	df	2-Tail
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>			
FDSRE	5.444	1.266	5.954	1.124	-2.49	134.97	0.014*

* $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 4: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their feelings about their ability to make important

decisions.

The degree to which women felt their ability to make important decisions was satisfactory was expressed by subject's ratings of (1 equal to "completely unsatisfactory" to 7 equal to "completely satisfactory") on the RWQ. This hypothesis was tested by a t -test and resulted in an analysis consistent with the null hypothesis (no difference between women who are not interested in participating and those women who are in regard to their feelings about their ability to make important decisions). The t -test yielded the following: $t = -1.11$. Sources of variation between group's scores on the RWQ by this item are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Analysis of Group 1 and Group 2 t-Test Scores on Feelings About Ability to Make Important Decisions (FAAMID) (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		t	df	2-Tail
	$\bar{M}$	SD	$\bar{M}$	SD			
FAAMID	5.583	1.097	5.791	1.108	-1.11	137	0.269

$p > .05$.

Hypothesis 5: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their expectations for learning to deal positively with returning to school.

The degree to which women expected to learn to deal positively with returning to school was based on self-ratings ranging from 1 (equal to "very low") to 7 (equal to "very high") on the RWQ. A t -test was used to analyze differences between means of the two groups. The results yielded a t -score of -0.50, which is non-significant, and suggests no difference in women who are not interested in participating compared to those who are in regard to their expectations for learning to deal positively with returning to school. Sources of variation between groups are presented in Table 7 for this item.

Table 7

Analysis of Group 1 and Group 2 t-Test Scores on Expectations for Learning to Deal Positively with Returning to School (ELDPRS) (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		t	df	2-Tail
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>			
ELDPRS	5.986	0.978	6.076	1.114	-0.50	135	0.616

$p > .05$.

Hypothesis 6: Women who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program differ from those women who are in regard to their degree of emotional support received from significant others.

The degree of emotional support women felt they received from

significant others was based on self-ratings of feelings on a scale of 1 (equal to "very low") to 7 (equal to "very high") on the RWQ. A t -test was used to detect differences between means of the two groups. Results of the procedure indicated a significant difference at the .05 level ($t = -2.24$). This score suggests that women who are not interested in participating in the supportive group counseling program felt a significantly greater degree of emotional support from others compared to women who were interested in participating in the group. Sources of variation between groups scores are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Analysis of Group 1 and Group 2 t-Test Scores on Degree of Emotional Support Received From Significant Others (DESRFSO) (N=139)

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		t	df	2-Tail
	$\bar{M}$	SD	$\bar{M}$	SD			
DESRFSO	5.278	1.762	5.894	1.469	-2.24	134.82	0.027*

* $p < .05$.

Some of the reasons why women were not interested in participating in the group, as indicated by those who responded to the item on the RWQ, were evaluated. The most frequently indicated reason was a) no need, as expressed by 29.7% of the women. The second most frequent response was b) no time, as indicated by 16.6%. Next, in order of frequency were c) problems with family responsibilities, as expressed

by 5.5%; d) negative family reactions about spending more time away from home, identified by 4.8%; and e) commuting distance, indicated by 1.4%.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess whether or not women who were not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program had different concerns and family life circumstances than women who were interested in participating. The analyses of the data revealed that these two groups of women were not significantly different in their previous college attendance, age, relationship status, employment status, number of years since previous enrollment, and the number of children in the household. However, women who were not interested in participating did differ significantly in regard to their university classification. A greater number of women classified as Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors were more interested in participating in the group than those who were not. Thus, one explanation might be that women not interested in the group could possibly have had more experience in being in higher education and, consequently, felt better able to deal with returning to school. Assuming this is accurate for these women, this could also explain why they were significantly less concerned about their schoolwork and/or grades than the other women interested in the group. However, this interpretation warrants further investigation given that the largest categories for women interested in the supportive counseling group were

classified as Juniors and Seniors, respectively.

Further, the results of this investigation imply that women not interested in the supportive group were significantly less troubled about coordinating child care than the other women. Other studies have indicated that coordinating child care with the college schedule is of major concern for women returnees interested in supportive services (Smallwood, 1980). This finding was consistent with the results of this study for women interested in this type of service. Smallwood (1980) also found this to be especially true for women with very young children and for women carrying heavier credit-hour loads.

Analyses of the data in this study revealed that there was a significant difference interpersonally in the degree of concern regarding relationships with spouse/boyfriend. These relationships were significantly less troublesome for women who were not interested in participating in the group. Therefore, it is possible that these relationships are more positive/supportive than those for women interested in supportive services. The emphases on interpersonal relationships with spouse/boyfriend as being of important concern for some returning women has been previously studied by Brandenburg (1974). She found that within the large number of women she counsels, many husbands were resistant/hostile to their wives returning to school.

Results of this research also indicated that women not interested in participating in the group were significantly less concerned about remaining youthful and attractive than those women interested in participating. These findings are again consistent with past analyses for women who seek supportive counseling services. Both Kahnweiler and

Johnson (1980) have concluded that among the significant developmental concerns that may occur for women returnees between the ages of 30 and 50 are the introspective concerns of remaining youthful and attractive.

Additional significance was obtained in the results of this study in that women not interested in participating in the group were not as distressed about anxiety or nervousness compared to the other women in the study. Brandenburg (1974) acknowledged increased anxiety levels for women returnees ranging in age from 35 to 45 who have several years of absence since previous school enrollment. One possible interpretation of these results is that women interested in seeking supportive counseling services are more in need because of their anxiety or nervousness due to a) a long period since previous enrollment and/or b) possibly few years of academic experience.

This research again provided significant results suggesting that women who were not interested in participating in the counseling group were distinctively less concerned about depression than women interested in the group. This finding is consistent historically for returning women seeking supportive counseling services for problems with depression (Katz & Knapp, 1974).

Results of this investigation did not provide support for the remaining variables in hypothesis 2. It is concluded that women not interested in participating in the group did not differ from women who were in regard to concerns about the following: a) career choices/vocational future; b) coordinating family responsibilities with college schedule; c) coordinating job schedule with college schedule; d) relationships with parents/family of origin, friends, children, and

teachers; e) financial matters; f) legal aid; g) physical health; h) social activities/involvement; i) assertion; j) guilt; and k) performance anxiety (i.e., tests, speeches). These findings are consistent with the diverse nature of concerns among women returnees reported in other studies. Weinstein (1980) likewise indicated financial issues as the single most important reason for women returning to school in the 80's. Financial matters were identified as the variable most frequently given as being of most concern in this study. Additionally, Astin (1976) identified making career choices as a major matter of consideration for returning women. The findings in this study concur with Astin (1976) in that career choice/vocational future was the second most frequent variable of major concern. Smallwood (1980) reported coordinating family responsibilities with the college schedule as a serious problem as well as coordinating job schedules. This study also identified coordinating family responsibilities with college schedule as the third variable of most concern followed by performance anxiety (i.e., tests, speeches). Given these findings, university counseling centers might more effectively assist returning women by a) providing information about financial assistance, b) offer career decision-making groups (i.e., Discover for Adult Learners), c) offer groups at varying times of the day or evening and, d) offer structured groups for performance anxiety (i.e., test anxiety groups).

Lower in priority were problems around interpersonal relationships (i.e., friends and parents). Among other concerns compatible with this study's findings are relationships with children, legal aid, concern

about being more assertive (Smallwood, 1980); guilt (Astin, 1976; Letchworth, 1970; Weinstein, 1980); physical health (Blocher & Rapoza, 1981); and performance anxiety (Astin, 1976; Letchworth, 1970; Muskat, 1978; Weinstein, 1980).

Analyses of the results of this study did provide support for hypothesis 3 regarding women's feelings of dealing successfully with the returning experience. Results of a t - test indicated a significant difference in the means between the two groups ($t = -2.49$, $p = 0.014$). This is interpreted as meaning that women who were not interested in participating in the support group felt significantly better able to deal successfully with the returning experience than women who were interested in participating. Given these results, it seems consistent with past studies that the less able a woman feels she can deal with returning to school the more likely she is to seek out supportive counseling services (Brandenburg, 1974; Smallwood, 1980).

Hypothesis 4 addressing women's feelings about their ability to make important decisions was not supported by the results of this study in that statistical significance was not achieved. Women who were not interested in participating in the group scored a mean of 5.95 on a scale of 1 equal to "completely unsatisfactory" and 7 equal to "completely satisfactory" on the RWQ. Women interested in the group averaged 5.44. Although the mean of those women not interested was greater than the other group's, it was not large enough to be significant. Previous research by Berman, Gelso, Greenfeig, and Hirsh (1977) incorporated learning decision-making skills as an important variable in their study for returning women. Their research supported

programs for women thinking of making important changes in their life style. Hooper (1979) also included assessment of decision-making in her study of returning women. These studies have recognized decision-making as an important variable to be assessed and was, therefore, included in this study.

A test of hypothesis 5, which addressed women's expectations for learning to deal positively with returning to school, resulted in no significant difference between women who were not interested in the group and women who were interested in participating. Assessing women's expectations was included in the study because previous psychological research (Goldstein & Shipman, 1961) has indicated that people who have had medium expectations for change make the most significant gains. Therefore, the results of this study can be interpreted to mean that women who are not interested in participating in the group have neither significantly higher or lower expectations for learning to deal positively with returning to school than women who are interested.

Analysis of the results of this study did provide support for hypothesis 6 regarding the degree of emotional support received from significant others for those women not interested in participating in the group from those who were. Results of a t -test performed on group means did indicate a significant difference between the two groups ($t = -2.24$, $p = 0.027$). The interpretation of this score suggests that women who are not interested in participating in the group felt a significantly greater degree of emotional support from others compared to the other women. Given that numerous past researchers (Bauman,

1983; Brandenburg, 1974; Jacobs, Unger, Striegel-Moore, & Kimbrell, 1983; Jupiter, 1979; Weinstein, 1980) have emphasized the importance of emotional support for women returnees, it is not surprising that women who seek supportive counseling services experience a lesser degree of emotional support than other women who are not interested.

Conclusions

The results of this study have indicated several significant differences between women returning to higher education who are not interested in participating in a supportive group counseling program and women returnees who are interested in such services. Specifically, these differences suggest that women not interested in the group are significantly less concerned about school work/grades, coordinating child care, their relationships with spouse/boyfriend, remaining youthful and attractive, anxiety or nervousness, and depression.

Additionally, women not interested in participating in the group were significantly different from those women who were in that women not interested felt better able to deal successfully with the returning experience and felt a significantly greater degree of emotional support from others.

Demographically, the two groups of women differed significantly in regard to university classification. There were fewer numbers of women not interested in participating in the group who were classified as Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors. However, the women were similar in regard to previous college attendance, age, relationship status, and employment status. Likewise, this was also true in their degree of concern for the following: a) career choices/vocational future, b)

coordinating family responsibilities with college schedule, c) coordinating job schedule, d) relationships with parents/family of origin, friends, children, and teachers, e) financial matters, f) legal aid, g) physical health, h) social activities/involvement, i) assertion, j) guilt, and k) performance anxiety (i.e., tests, speeches). These findings have implications for university counseling centers providing information about financial aid sources, offering such services as career choice groups or computerized guidance systems (i.e., Discover for Adult Learners), providing structured test anxiety groups, and offering groups at varied times of the day or evening.

The two groups also did not differ significantly in their feelings about their ability to make important decisions and in regard to their expectations for learning to deal positively with returning to school.

Although significant differences between these two groups of women returnees have been identified in this study, some caution should be used in their interpretation due to the small sample size investigated. Other limitations of this research study included the following: a) possible error due to potential differences among women who didn't respond to the RWQ from those who responded, b) the probability that some of the significant findings at the .05 level could have been spurious because of the large number of comparisons made, and c) the need for more work done on the reliability of the RWQ.

Recommendations for future studies include further investigation of women's school work/grades, coordinating child care responsibilities, relationships with spouse/boyfriend, feelings about remaining youthful and attractive, anxiety or nervousness, and

depression who do not seek supportive counseling services. It is also suggested that more extensive research be done regarding these women's feelings of being better able to deal successfully with the returning experience, and their emotional support systems.

Given that returning women are a diverse population, there is a necessity to provide diverse services to accommodate differentiation of needs. Some women are in need of emotional support/supportive group counseling while others are not. It is recommended that structured groups focusing on specific concerns (i.e., test anxiety groups or other performance anxiety groups, and career choice/vocational decision-making groups) also be offered. It is advised that both counseling/structured groups and university courses be offered at variable times in order to more effectively adapt to the non-traditional student.

This study did address some of the reasons why women were not interested in participating, but resulted in only a minimal number of responses indicating such reasons as no need, no time for the group, problems with family responsibilities, negative family reactions about spending more time away from home, and commuting distance as a factor. It should be noted that 58% of the women not interested in participating in the group did not identify any reason why they weren't interested. Consequently, more knowledge of the reasons why women are not interested in supportive counseling services is needed.

Recommendations for future studies include a) comparing the needs of traditional Freshman students with the needs of returning women and b) investigating different issues for women returnees based on ages of

dependent children. Methodologically, it is suggested that follow-up measures (i.e., letters, phone calls) be used to increase the response rate to questionnaires with returning women. Finally, a more thorough understanding of the concerns of this diverse population is needed to effectively develop and implement appropriate services.

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APPENDIX A
COVER LETTER

STUDENT COUNSELING CENTER**56 DeGarmo Hall****Illinois State University****TO ALL WOMEN RETURNING TO HIGHER EDUCATION:**

The Student Counseling Center at Illinois State University is interested in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of women returning to the University. We also wish to facilitate women's returning experience by providing services to help women achieve their personal educational/career goals.

RETURNING WOMEN QUESTIONNAIRE

The attached Returning Women Questionnaire is designed to gather information specifically regarding the concerns of women returning to higher education and the degree of emotional support they receive from others as a result of their returning experience.

All information is strictly confidential. Please complete this questionnaire. Your help in gathering this data will be very much appreciated. Responses to the questionnaire will be used to plan additional services for returning women.

RETURNING WOMEN'S GROUP

The Student Counseling Center at ISU is currently offering a four session group for women 25 years of age and older. The group is designed to provide returning women with support/understanding and an

opportunity to explore and identify immediate needs related to the returning experience. Group sessions provide social contact with other women returnees outside of the classroom and are geared to enhance motivation. Additionally, women will learn to identify supports in their environment as well as how to deal with restraints/barriers.

The Returning Women's Group will be lead by female senior staff at the Student Counseling Center, 56 DeGarmo Hall, on Thursdays 2:00 to 4:30, Feb. 14, 21, 28 with a March 21 follow up session.

An individual screening time will be necessary prior to enrollment in the group.

If you would be interested in knowing more about the Returning Women's Group, complete number 15 on the questionnaire and return it by February 12, to Sue Ann Corvin, Student Counseling Center, 56 DeGarmo Hall, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61761 (309) 438-3655. No envelope is necessary to return the forms. Just refold the forms so that the Student Counseling Center address is on the front, then staple, stamp, and mail. Thanks for your cooperation.

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU WISH TO JOIN THE RETURNING WOMEN'S GROUP, PLEASE COMPLETE THE ATTACHED QUESTIONNAIRE AND RETURN TO THE STUDENT COUNSELING CENTER.

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

Sue Ann Corvin
Student Counseling Center
56 DeGarmo Hall
Illinois State University
Normal, IL 61761

Fold Here

Fold Here

APPENDIX B
RETURNING WOMEN QUESTIONNAIRE

RETURNING WOMEN QUESTIONNAIRE

developed by

Sue Ann Corvin

Student Counseling Center

Illinois State University

CONFIDENTIAL

1. Have you ever attended college before? Yes ☐ No ☐If yes, how many years has it been since previous enrollment?

2. Age range:

3. Relationship Status:

☐ 25 to 29☐ 30 to 39☐ 40 to 49☐ 50 to 59☐ 60 to 69☐ 70 to 79☐ Single☐ Married☐ 80 to 89☐ 90+☐ Divorced☐ Widowed☐ Separated☐ Cohabitant☐ Remarried4. Number of children living in your household:

5. University Classification:

☐ Fr.☐ Grad.☐ Soph.☐ Faculty☐ Jr.☐ Civil Service☐ Sr.☐ Other (specify) Major: GPA (approximate) 6. Are you currently employed? Yes ☐ No ☐Hours per week:

CONFIDENTIAL

7. Present state of health: _____

List chronic health problems: _____

8. Please read this checklist and check ONCE those items which are currently troubling you. Check TWICE those items which are of most concern to you.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ 1. Career choices/vocational future | ☐ 11. Financial matters |
| ☐ 2. School work and/or grades | ☐ 12. Legal aid |
| ☐ 3. Coordinating child care | ☐ 13. Physical health |
| ☐ 4. Coordinating family responsibilities
with college schedule | ☐ 14. Social activities
involvement |
| ☐ 5. Coordinating job schedule with
college schedule | ☐ 15. Remaining youthful
and attractive |
| ☐ 6. Relationship with parents/
family of origin | ☐ 16. Assertion |
| ☐ 7. Relationship with friend(s) | ☐ 17. Anxiety or nervousness |
| ☐ 8. Relationship with spouse/boyfriend | ☐ 18. Depression |
| ☐ 9. Relationship with children | ☐ 19. Guilt |
| ☐ 10. Relationship with teachers | ☐ 20. Performance anxiety
(ie; tests, speeches) |
| | ☐ 21. Lack of confidence |

9. Briefly state the nature of your main concern(s):

10. The degree to which I feel I can now deal successfully with my returning experience is:

not at all

completely

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

CONFIDENTIAL

11. I feel that my ability to make important decisions is:

completely unsatisfactory

completely satisfactory

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. My expectations for learning to deal positively with returning to school are:

very low

very high

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. The degree of emotional support I am currently receiving from significant others in my life is:

very low

very high

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. If there were no time/scheduling conflicts, I would be interested in participating in a returning women's support group that meets for 4 sessions:

Yes ____ No ____

If you're not interested in participating in this type of group, please check those items that apply to you:

____ 1. no need

____ 2. embarrassed

____ 3. problems with family responsibilities

____ 4. negative family reactions about spending more time away from home

____ 5. Other reasons: _____

15. If you would like more information about the Returning Women's Group please provide the following information.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Have you attended college before? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, when: _____

CONFIDENTIAL

If you wish to enroll in the Returning Women's Group please call
the Student Counseling Center, 438-3655 or 438-7218 to schedule an
individual screening time.

APPENDIX C
AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

University of Oklahoma
AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Title of Project: Supportive Group Counseling for Women
Returning To Higher Education

Investigator: Sue Ann Corvin, Doctoral Candidate,
Counseling Psychology, 438-3655

I, _____, hereby agree to participate as a
volunteer in the above named research project, which has been fully
explained to me.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate in any procedure
or to refuse to answer any question at any time without prejudice to
me. I further understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and to
withdraw from the research project at any time without prejudice to me.

I understand that by agreeing to participate in this research and
signing this form, I do not waive any of my legal rights.

Date

Participant Signature