ADULT DEVELOPMENT THEORY'S APPLICATION TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE REENTRY WOMEN

By
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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Although a dissertation may be produced in a two- to three-year period, the seeds for enacting its completion are planted much earlier in the writer's life. For sowing the seeds of discipline, goal setting, determination, persistence, I credit my parents, especially my mother, Harriet Murdock, whose lifelong challenge to me has been to excel. During the final year and a half of the dissertation process both she and my former husband Kenneth financially and morally supported me so that I could focus my full attention and energy toward completion of the task. Without their gifts, I would probably still be a "road warrior" (Dr. Paul George) teaching college English full time and commuting 180 miles as necessary to meet with professors and use the university library.

My professors have tended my garden and helped me grow. A few professors have been particularly influential in my development from graduate student to doctoral candidate to holder of Ph.D. Dr. Rodman Webb, of Educational Foundations, sustained me through difficult professional and personal times with his kind words, gentle manner, and understanding smile. It was also Dr. Webb who first labeled the reentry women's stages of transition and first observed that the reentry women I described were undergoing a "transformation of self."
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Special tribute must be paid to the subjects of the research, the reentry women themselves. This study is dedicated to the telling of their courageous story. Were it not for their willingness to reflect and self disclose, sometimes at the price of personal pain, their message of tenacious achievement could not
have been aired. So, to Scooter, Carrie, Jessica, Rose, Annette, Tigress, and Kathryn, I offer my deepest gratitude for their lending their “fragrance.” “To know a rose by its Latin name and yet to miss it fragrance is to miss much of the rose’s meaning “ (Eisner, 1981, p. 9).
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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ADULT DEVELOPMENT THEORY'S APPLICATION TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE REENTRY WOMEN

By

Valerie Murdock D'Ortona

December 1991

Chair: Dr. James L. Wattenbarger
Cochair: Dr. Sandra B. Damico
Major Department: Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry women's self-assessment processes, their struggle to balance their new student role along with the multiplicity of roles already performed, the experiences that triggered their reentry, and the transitional nature of their collegiate experience, through the application of adult development theory.

Twenty-nine community college reentry women who had been selected by purposive-based criteria participated in a screening interview and survey. From a data analysis of the survey, 7 key informants were identified from their discrepancy scores for further investigation in this study. These 7 community college reentry women ranging in age from 26 to 44 participated in a series of intensive in-depth, open-ended interviews, one of which used the projective-based technique of photo elicitation. Descriptive questions from a series of
interview schedules were asked. Data analysis was informed by Miles and Huberman's (1984) model of data reduction and display along with Spradley's (1979) task of domain analysis.

Data analysis suggested that the collegiate experiences of community college reentry women were consistent with selected propositions of adult development theory. The study showed that community college reentry women did experience: (a) on-going self-assessment, (b) reentry because of triggering events, (c) role conflict and role expectation dilemmas, and (d) numerous transitions that were often accompanied by anxieties. Having enrolled in college as freshmen who doubted their academic capabilities and felt they were not in control of their lives, the women emerged, by their own account, as individuals who believed themselves to be more assertive, self-confident, and empowered.

Three major conclusions emerged from this study. Adult development theory was (a) only partially applicable to community college reentry women; (b) inadequate to explain the betrayal felt by reentry women at society's conditioning them to devalue themselves and at some educators' reluctance to treat them with respect; and (c) inadequate to capture the contextual nature of the community college reentry women experience.

One implication of the findings is that institutions of higher learning should (a) target reentry women; (b) offer entry, exit, and on-going counseling oriented to reentry women's concerns; and (c) educate faculty to be sensitive to appropriate application of adult development theory to the problems and concerns of reentry women.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The age for the undergraduate student population of colleges and universities has traditionally been 18 to 22. In recent years, however, the pool of 18-to-22-year-old students has declined. Taking their place, “a virtual army of older students is moving into both undergraduate and graduate education” (Saslaw, 1981, p. 41). The percentage of total enrollment of colleges and universities of students 25 years of age and over has increased. In 1970, it was 28%; it is projected to be 49% in 1993 (“College,” 1985). Students 25 years of age and older are predicted to make up 60% of all college enrollments by the year 2000 (College Board, 1990). Most of these older students are women. The percent of women students was 41% of the total enrollment in 1970; 52% of the total enrollment by 1993 is projected to be women (“College,” 1985). The increase in women students represents nearly 80% of the growth of total enrollment in higher institutions from 1970 to 1985 (Chamberlain, 1988). Clearly, “reentry women are one of the fastest growing populations on today’s college campus” (Glass & Rose, 1987, p. 110).

Numerous explanations can be offered for why adult learners in general --and adult women in particular--have been returning to institutions of higher education. For one, given the rapid economic, technological, and societal changes that characterize the 20th century, many adults may need more
education and training to cope. Other factors include the rise in age at first marriage, rise in divorce rates, falling birth rates, and increased attention to women's rights (Chamberlain, 1988). In addition, the possibility of advancements for women in the work place due to economic and social changes gained momentum with the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Once the idea that women could combine education, careers, and parenting became more acceptable, colleges and universities began to play a part in preparing women for professional and occupational positions (Carnegie Council, 1980; Gilbert, Manning, & Ponder, 1980). Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) summarized the causes of the increase in numbers of adult learners as "changes in roles and increased opportunities for women, changing patterns of marital relationships, rapid growth in the number of two-career marriages and single parents, increased speed of obsolescence, and creation of new jobs" (p. 209).

With the traditional college-age population decreasing and the nontraditional college-age population increasing, it is imperative that administrations of colleges and universities recognize that their new pool of students from which to select will include large numbers of people--mainly women--over the age of 24. Clearly, adults represent the biggest growth market for colleges (College Board, 1990; El-Khwas, Carter, & Ottinger, 1988).

On the whole, the four-year institutions are still struggling to find a "suitable posture toward nontraditional students, and many are continuing to hold those students at arm's length either by excluding most of them or by shunting them into separate programs" (Bowen, 1980, p. 16). Although universities and four-year colleges will also be affected by the influx of older female students, community colleges are the logical providers of opportunities
for older people to pursue their formal learning. Community colleges in particular, in addition to their mission of introducing students to general learning, training for vocations and occupations, and affording a second chance to students who were unprepared for college after high school have recently been the "colleges that produce education on demand in response to the needs and wishes of the communities they serve" (Carnegie Council, 1980, p. 262).

The fact that community, technical, and junior colleges produce education on demand in response to their communities' needs has been evident from as early as the 1950s, when another significant change emerged in the composition of the higher education student population. This change resulted from the phenomenon of large numbers of adults enrolling as college students after World War II. Whereas prior to 1945, the traditional age college student was 18 to 21, during the 1945-46 academic year, over 26% of all undergraduates were veterans, men aided by the assistance of the G.I. Bill (Kasworm, 1980). This influx of adults--primarily male--gave impetus to the development of evening colleges and an expansion of public university systems and community colleges (Allen, 1979).

In 1946, there were 663 junior colleges; in 1988 there were approximately 1,200 institutions with "over 80% . . . publicly supported colleges serving local communities" (El-Khwas et al., 1988, p. xv). "After the wave of World War II vets, campuses returned to 'normal.' Students were kids just out of high school again. If an older person returned to college, he or she was looked upon with suspicion, an eccentric who had ignored the educational time clock" (McComas, 1990, p. 8). Additional changes in the composition of the student population took place in the 1970s: while their total college enrollments increased by 2.3 million, the student population of veterans decreased in size.
The average age of higher education students rose; about one-half of the enrollment were part-time students age 25 and older. This time, contrary to the trend in 1945 of the influx of veteran male students, the growth was due to the increase in the number of older female students (Glass & Rose, 1987; Hall, 1981; Hodgkinson, 1983; Tittle & Denker, 1977). Schlossberg et al. (1989) predicted that, by 1990, people 26 years of age and older would be seeking higher education in greater numbers than people 18 to 25 years of age.

In spite of recognition by institutions of higher learning that a rapid increase in the number of students 25 years of age and older may well fill the gap created by the decline in the number of students 18 to 22, “historically the mature college student, especially the older woman, has been considered unimportant” (Saslaw, 1981, p. 41). This view of female adult learners as relatively unimportant has resulted in their having only limited attention from researchers and college officials.

Changes must be made. Bronte (1987) paraphrased Dr. Harry Moody, Deputy Director of New York’s Hunter College Brookdale Center on Aging, as having warned that

The role of higher education in an aging society will almost certainly be somewhat different than it has been in our past. This will require change and adaptation. . . . What role can learning play in preparing individuals at every stage of life for a society where most people can expect to live to old age? (p. 12)

Community colleges must undergo a “transformation, which will be facilitated by their responsiveness to community needs and their flexibility. They must . . . provide additional access” for the older students (Watson, 1980, p. i). Adult learners are “not the same creatures as young adult undergraduates” (Kasworm, 1990, p. 366). They are “changing their way of
seeing themselves. They are altering their roles, routines, and relationships at home, in the community at large, and in the educational setting" (Schlossberg et al, 1989, p. 14). No longer can community colleges be organized exclusively for students 18 to 22 years of age.

To continue to do so places colleges at risk financially, but, more importantly, at risk of losing capable students who need to return to college, who are highly motivated to do so, and who perform at high levels of academic achievement. However, because adult students in demand of higher education have time commitments, family obligations and financial burdens that are more complex and more conflicting than those of the full-time, unattached, and financially dependent traditional-age student, they require new accommodations in how colleges serve them. (Office, 1990, p. 2)

In order for community colleges to change, adapt, and transform, educators who influence the administration of these institutions need to have a firm grasp of the phenomenon of the reentry woman. They must know the answers to such questions as: What is the profile of the typical reentry woman? What is her motivation for returning to institutions of higher learning? What special problems does she encounter or barriers does she face by virtue of her being older than traditionally aged college women? What adjustments must she make once enrolled, and what coping strategies does she employ? What are her perceptions of successes in her collegiate experience? What are her concerns in anticipating separation from the community college upon graduation?

In exploring these questions, an investigation that served as a pilot study was conducted. The research question of the pilot study (D'Ortona, 1990) was “What is it like to experience community college as a reentry woman, and what are the emerging patterns and theories that explain that experience?” An interview schedule was used that asked general questions including why the
informant decided to reenter, how she felt at the time, and what she liked about the faculty. An ethnographic analysis of the data identified five stages/phases through which reentry women appeared to pass on their journey through their collegiate experience: deciding, overcoming, adjusting, celebrating, and separating. An analysis of the data from the pilot study helped inform the content of the Reentry Woman Student Survey (see Chapter 3).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry women's self-assessment processes, their struggle to balance their new student role along with the duality of roles already performed, the experiences that triggered their reentry, and the transitional nature of their collegiate experience, through the application of adult development theory. The specific questions guiding this study were derived from the research on adult development.

**Research Questions**

The following questions derived from a review of the literature tested a set of propositions distilled from the theories of adult development and drove the investigation that will be reported in the dissertation.

1. In what ways and around what issues did these community college reentry women engage in self-assessment?
2. Did experiences or life events have any influence over these community college reentry women's decision to continue pursuit of higher education?
3. In what ways did assuming the role of college student affect the social roles already performed by these community college reentry women, and what expectations did significant others have of their performance?
4. Did these community college reentry women undergo any transitions during their collegiate experience, and, if so, what were they?

The Literature Bases

The investigation of the community college female reentry student's perception of her collegiate experience was informed by two distinct bodies of literature. First, a review of the emergence of the reentry woman in higher education is presented, including definitions of "reentry woman," a brief historical overview of reentry women in education, and characteristics of reentry women. Second, the literature of adult development theory is presented; particular attention is paid to the adult development of women.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limiting Factors

The following limitations apply to the study.

1. Data were collected from one center of a three-campus community college; results may not be common to reentry women at the other two campuses or at other community colleges.

2. Data collection was limited to individuals willing to engage in and endure the emotional discomfort that facing oneself might elicit.

Delimitating Factors

The following delimitations apply to the investigation.

1. The study was confined to 7 informants and did not include perception from family, faculty, or administration.

2. Data gathering was confined to three primary sources: screening interviews, the Reentry Woman Student Survey, and in-depth interviews that included mini entry and exit interviews.
3. Data gathering was confined to informants who expressed substantial change and therefore may not be consistent with experiences common to all reentry women.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are essential to an understanding of this study:

- **Adaptation to transition** refers to a “process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 7).

- **Adult development** refers to a series of age-related sequential stages of maturity for people from age 15 to age 70.

- **Adult learner** refers to a student 25 years of age or older.

- **Adult learning** refers to the process of gaining knowledge or understanding of or skill in by study, instruction, or experience by people 25 years of age or older.

- **Andragogy** refers to “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1970, p. 38).

- **CLAST** is acronym for College-Level Academic Skills Test and was developed by the State of Florida to test college-level communication and computations skills. A satisfactory score must be earned for a student to matriculate into junior-level work.

- **Collegiate experience** refers to the time extending from the first moment the female student 25 years of age or older seriously considered returning to higher education at the community college through the time of her most recent community college course.

- **Contextual factors** refers to matters “constituted by what people are doing and where and when they are doing it” (Erickson & Shultz, 1981, p. 148).
Coping refers to the problem-solving behaviors exhibited by an individual when she is faced with demands that tax her adaptive resources. Coping is an emotional as well as cognitive process, may refer to positive as well as negative stress, and involves adaptive tasks "in which the outcome is uncertain and the limits of the individual's adaptive skills are approached" (Brammer & Abrego, 1981, p. 19).

Extreme case refers to those women who, in taking the Reentry Woman Student Survey, were identified as having experienced substantial change while pursuing their college education.

Intensive interview refers to a "guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis. . . . The intensive interview seeks to discover the informant's experience of a particular topic or situation" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 12).

Life events refer to those events that "create a demand for change in a person's life and that occur over a relatively finite period of time" (Chiriboga, 1982, p. 595).

Marginality refers to the way a person feels who is in a new and different role and knows little about the role beforehand (Schlossberg, 1984).

Mattering refers to "beliefs people have, whether right or wrong, that they matter to someone else, that they are the object of someone else's attention, and that others care about them and appreciate them" (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 21).

Photo-elicitation refers to the technical term for the method of using photographs to stimulate discussion in an interview.
Reentry women refers to "women over 25 who have interrupted their education for at least a few years and are now entering or reentering postsecondary institutions" (Hall & Gleaves, 1981, p. 1).

Stress refers to an event which taxes the adaptive resources of an individual (Brammer et al., 1981).

Transformation refers to something that occurs when people give up their illusion of safety to change their assumptions and creatively face their futures thus enabling them to change the transition they are experiencing into a positive new opportunity (Gould, 1981; Schlossberg, 1981b).

Transition refers to something that occurs "if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 5).

Significance of the Study

"Perhaps the most dramatic and far-reaching change in any subpopulation in our society can be found in the new role of women" (Deegan & Tillery, 1985, p. 152). The number of single female headed U. S. households between 1980 and 1990 increased by 35.6 % (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 11). Out of necessity to support themselves and their families, more women are entering the labor force (Touchton & Davis, 1991). Traditionally, women earn less than men; consequently, to earn adequate salaries, women need college education.

The proportion of all women entering the labor force--regardless of race or ethnicity--is increasing. Between 1960 and 1987, the percentage of women in the labor force who were married with children age 6-17 increased from 39% to 71%. During the same years, the percentage of women in the labor force married with children under age 6 increased from 19% to 57% (Touchton &
Davis, 1991). Chickering (1974) observed that "a surprising number of women have the sole responsibility for supporting one or more children and maintaining a household" (p. 14). The percentage of women in the labor force separated/divorced with children under age 6 increased from 54 to 65%, and the percentage of women in the labor force separated/divorced with children age 6 to 17 increased from 18 to 57% (Touchton & Davis, 1991).

In 1987, service occupations employed 60% of black women and 35% with less than 4 years of high school. For those women with a high school diploma or 1-3 years of college, the most likely occupation was in the technical/sales/administrative support area. Women in every racial and ethnic group earned lower median salaries than men. In 1984, "a woman could expect to earn less than one-half of what a man with comparable education could expect to earn" (Touchton & Davis, 1991, p. 36). As with men, the more education a woman has, the more likely she is to be employed. "In 1987, 54% of women with only a 4-year high school education were employed, whereas 62% of women with 1-3 years of college and 72% of women with 4 or more years of college were employed" (Touchton & Davis, 1991, p. 29).

Even if women decide to pursue college educations to increase their chances for financial security, they may have insufficient funds to finance their educations as well as pay for child care. "Three-quarters of all single-parent families are living below the income level at which the Department of Labor estimates day-to-day living expenses can be met" (Lewis, 1988, p. 9). This situation may be due to the reality that in divorce "women suffer loss of income, often loss of pension payment, and loss of remarriage possibilities" and thus "suffer financially" (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 152). Hodgkinson (1991) confirmed the reality of divorced women's diminished financial status when he
discussed its detrimental effect on children: "the 15 million children being raised by single mothers will have about one-third as much to spend on their needs as children being raised by two parents. (When both parents work, family income does not double; it triples)" (p. 11).

Although more women are in the labor force, women still suffer financially. "Females over 25 with children to support--not teenage males saving for a car--account for the largest proportion of . . . low-wage workers" (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 11). The prognostication for their financial futures is grim.

Whether married, separated, divorced, and with or without children, the harsh reality is that women traditionally earn less income than men. Female-headed families will probably experience little reduction in poverty from economic growth alone. An increase in the number of jobs in the economy will benefit these women little if they are unable to take jobs, or if the jobs available to them are confined to the secondary sector of the labor market. (Peterson, 1987, p. 336)

Women have little choice, therefore, but to better educate themselves in order to be able to command higher salaries. As explained by Mangano and Corrado (1979), community colleges are well suited to accommodate reentry women because of their open door policies, proximity, average age of student, and student-instructor ratio. The open door policy enables many who might otherwise be excluded to attempt college. The proximity to the reentry woman's home makes attendance more feasible given her numerous responsibilities other than her being a student. The reentry woman might not feel as alone in her collegiate pursuit at a community college because its average age of students--"over 27 years of age" (p. 15)--exceeds that at a university. Finally, small student-instructor ratios that typify community colleges would imply more
individualized attention than the reentry woman might be able to find at a university.

Over the past 20 years, numerous studies have been conducted on the emergence of reentry women in higher education. Subjects of these investigations have included demographic profiles of reentry women, their characteristics, their needs, and the potential barriers to their participation in higher education. Much research has been conducted in the area of adult development theory. More emphasis, however, must be placed on studying female adult development.

Regardless of the number of studies available about reentry women, adult development in general, and female adult development in particular, and regardless of whether the studies were conducted at universities or community colleges, research on the adult as a learner is in a "sad state" (Carbone, 1982, p. 64). There is a lack of data on the older returning woman student (Lewis, 1988; Sturges, Bombyk, & Chernesky, 1989). Although informative, this literature on adult learners may "have little relevance for aging women who are students" (Hooper & Traupmann, 1983, p. 234).

The present study benefits reentry women, faculty, and administration by extending our understanding of the impact of the collegiate experience for reentry women and the applicability of adult development theory to that experience. Valuable insights from the perception of those who have already experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon are shared. Current and future reentry women benefit from the assurance that others in their peer group share similar problems, anxieties, and triumphs.

Such a study provides valuable information for instructors of reentry women. Because of the integral part they play in the teaching-learning process,
faculty "must be better able to understand the reasons for the ever-increasing numbers of adult students in their classrooms and how best to teach them" (Carbone, 1982, p. 61). Classroom teachers often inadvertently play the role of counselor to older female students. A perceptive and caring classroom instructor "can intervene at times when the student may not, for a variety of reasons, seek counseling at the college center" (Higgins, 1985, p. 8). That intervention may make the difference in whether the reentry woman perceives that she matters to the college (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Furthermore, a better understanding of what causes adults to return to institutions of higher education would benefit not only the adult learners and the faculty, but all those individuals or groups concerned with adult learners, including counselors, administrators, boards of trustees, and graduate schools. To be able to plan appropriately and efficiently for the impact of adult population growth on building construction, hiring of faculty, and curriculum development, the administrators, counselors, and boards of trustees in "community colleges are obliged . . . to look at what precipitates an adult's return to formal education" (Carbone, 1982, p. 64).

Concurrent with the recent rise in higher education attendance by female reentry students new research emphasis has been "placed on adult development in the midlife years . . . . The areas of adult female development is in the initial stages of theory building, and . . . [researchers] are in the process of identifying those factors that may influence the adult development of females" (Kahnweiler & Johnson, 1980, p. 414). The importance of having a richer understanding of adult development of females in particular suggests that
"program goals and further research might better respond to the needs of returning students as more is known about midlife female development" (Kahnweiler & Johnson, 1980, p. 414).

**Design of the Study**

A qualitative methodology was used to collect biographical and experiential data from community college reentry women. Data gathering occurred in two parts: a preliminary study and this study. The preliminary study consisted of a screening interview and a survey. First, a purposive-based selection of community college reentry women participated in screening interviews designed to collect general information about the community college experience for reentry women. A data analysis of the screening interviews contributed to informing the content of the Reentry Woman Student Survey (RWSS). Second, the RWSS was mailed to those who participated in the screening interviews. From an analysis of the survey data, a subgroup of key respondents was identified from whom additional, more intensive, data were gathered in this study. These key respondents were those women who, from their survey responses, indicated substantial change as they moved through their collegiate experience. Further discussion of how these 7 key informants were identified along with their discrepancy scores has been included in Chapter 3.

This study consisted of a series of four interviews: orientation, long, projective technique-based, and exit. Each key respondent first participated in a brief orientation interview designed to establish rapport between the researcher and subject, explain the study, and secure written permission to audiotape the interviews. Following this orientation interview, subjects participated in an intensive semi-structured, open-ended interview constructed to probe more
specific information about their community college experience. Two weeks later, a projective technique formed the basis of an interview designed to stimulate discussion about the participants’ community college experience. Following this interview, each respondent participated in a final, brief exit interview engineered to answer questions about the study, thank the respondents for their participation, and establish closure. Data collected from these four interviews were analyzed and the results reported in Chapter 4 of the dissertation.

**Scope of the Study**

The screening interviews of the preliminary study were conducted during the 1989-90 academic year at a rural Southern community college in the United States. The RWSS and this study were conducted during the 1990-91 academic year. The RWSS was conducted by mail, and this study transpired at locations mutually convenient to key informants and researcher—in the homes of the informants, in a local restaurant, in the researcher's car in the parking lot of a grocery store, and in the researcher's motel room. The preliminary study's screening interview involved the participation of 29 community college reentry women, ranging in age from 25 to 57. The preliminary study's RWSS involved those same 29 reentry women. This study involved 7 of those 29 women ranging in age from 26 to 44.

Participants for the preliminary study were selected in a criterion-based, purposive manner from community college reentry women 25 years of age and over who had returned, after an interruption in their education, to pursue their education at the community college in question. Also considered in the selection of the sample was the ease of access to the informants by the researcher. At the time of the preliminary study, the researcher was an instructor in this academic institution. Because the researcher taught a daytime
schedule, only those female reentry students who attended at least some day
classes were included. As word of the study spread, some informants
requested to be interviewed. Others were suggested through networking.
Twenty-nine were available for the screening investigation.

Data from the RWSS and this study were informed by the results of the
preliminary study to provide a conceptual understanding of the community
college reentry woman and insight into her perception of her collegiate
experience. The criterion for participation in the RWSS was having been
already interviewed in the screening process of the same preliminary study.
Reporting of the study was based on using a combination of two of the three
flows (data reduction and data display) of Miles and Huberman’s (1984) model
of concurrent flows of activity (p. 24) and Spradley’s (1979) Developmental
Research Sequence Writing Tasks (D.R.S.), steps 1, 2, 4, and 6; those used
included: (1) locating an informant, (2) interviewing an informant, (4) asking
descriptive questions, and (6) making a domain analysis (pp. 224-226). A
computer software program, GOfer (1989), was used to facilitate the data
analysis process.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, this researcher was looking for
themes of behavior rather than searching for statistical laws of behavior (Smith,
1983). It is the “social-cultural patterns of experience, or relationships among
events are the matters of importance, not the quantification of human events”

The Conceptual Framework

The reason for examining the applicability of adult development theory to
community college reentry women was to determine whether they were in any
way unique in comparison to other students. In examining the community
college reentry women's perception of their collegiate experience it was important to know whether their perceptions resulted from the uniqueness of the population under study.

In terms of the major thrust of this study (an examination of the application of adult development theory on community college reentry women), the conceptual framework was derived from the writings of Erikson (1950), Havighurst (1952; 1953), Neugarten (1968), Sheehy (1976), Stevenson (1977), Levinson (1978), Scarf (1980), Schlossberg (1981a; 1981b; 1984; et al., 1989), and Gilligan (1982a; 1982b). Each of these theorists is a leader in the field of adult development and offers concepts related to aspects of adult development. A brief overview of these adult development concepts follows.

In his life cycle concept, Erikson (1950) described one of the tasks of adults as self-assessment. Sheehy (1976) observed that the passages adults go through are defined by changes that begin within, thus suggesting self-reflection. Soul searching must be done to set realistic goals accordingly to Stevenson (1977). Neugarten (1968) described middle age as a time of taking stock and introspection of the self.

The developmental tasks of adult years tend to be products of the evolution of social roles (Havighurst, 1952; 1953). There is an upsurge of identity issues during middlecence; women seek autonomy and an independent sense of self (Scarf, 1980). Women differ from men in the way in which they perform their roles. Women, for instance, are more affected by feelings of attachment and relationship (Gilligan, 1982a; 1982b). Life events and experiences may have more effect on a person's life than does chronological age (Neugarten, 1968).
When adults are confronting numerous role shifts, they are in a period of transition; relinquishing a role may cause anxiety (Levinson, 1978). Transitional passages are marked by predictable crises (Sheehy, 1976). Stages in adult life are uncomfortable when change is necessary; the ages between 39 and 42 are times of acute discomfort (Stevenson, 1977). Adults continuously experience transitions; adults when experiencing these changes require a new network of relationships and a new way of seeing themselves (Schlossberg, 1981a; 1981b; 1984; et al., 1989).

As indicated by the above brief summary of the theories, a diversity of explanations has been posited to explain the interrelated concepts of adult development. The existence of such diversity invites an eclectic approach to the conceptual framework for this study. In order to develop some consistent whole from the writings of the above-mentioned theoreticians, a series of propositions (see Chapter 2) that can be logically traced to one or more of the theoreticians was derived from the literature and used as a basis for providing a suitable analytical framework:

**Overview of Chapters 2 through 5**

In Chapter 2, the literature on reentry women is reviewed. The literature on reentry women serves as the framework against which the information collected on the population in this study is compared. The chapter also reviews the literature of adult development and concludes with a set of propositions distilled from the theories of adult development literature. These propositions serve as the theoretical framework against which the data collected on community college reentry women is analyzed. In Chapter 3 an exploration of the procedures and methods of analysis is given. In Chapter 4 an analysis of
the results of the collected data is presented. Findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations are offered in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter contains an examination of two areas of literature concerning reentry women. First, a review of the emergence of the reentry woman in higher education is presented, including definitions of "reentry woman," a brief historical overview of reentry women in education of reentry women, and characteristics of reentry women. Second, the literature of adult development theory is included; particular attention is paid to the adult development of women.

The Emergence of the Reentry Woman in Higher Education

The first area of literature to be examined is the emergence of the reentry woman in higher education. Included in this section is the definition of "reentry woman," a brief historical overview of reentry women in education, and characteristics of reentry women.

Definition of "Reentry Woman"

Reentry women are those women who return to postsecondary education after an interruption in their schooling (Fisher-Thompson, 1981a; Gilbert et al., 1980). The term "reentry" has been defined as "the process of returning to the educational system after a hiatus in formal study" (Mangano & Corrado, 1980, p. 3). Lewis (1988b) clarified that the reentry woman typically left school to "take a job or assume family responsibilities" (p. 5). The reentry woman is 25 or older (Mangano & Corrado, 1980). Other researchers restrict the minimum age to 28.
and the time of interruption to at least five years (Badenhoop & Johansen, 1980). Lewis (1988b) claimed "the majority [are] between 25 and 50" (p. 5). In some cases, "The term 're-entry student' is used even if the student has never been in college before but is re-entering the educational system at large" (Fisher-Thompson, 1981a, p. 1).

The term "nontraditional" is sometimes used to describe the reentry woman in contrast to the "traditional" age student of 18-22. "Nontraditional" can be confusing, however, and, therefore, will be avoided in this study because it can include "older students, part-time students, non-degree students, minority students, handicapped students, disadvantaged students and women students [in general]" (Dunkle, 1981, p. 1).

Displaced homemakers, while part of the population of adult female students entering higher education in increasing numbers, embody their own distinctive characteristics and problems which do not necessarily reflect the majority of female reentry students. Displaced homemakers are characterized as being

27 years of age or older, having been primarily homemakers, not being gainfully employed and having trouble securing employment, having lost the support of someone on whom they were dependent (whether through separation, divorce, or death), or not being able to secure public assistance as the parent of one or more children. (Swift, Colvin, & Mills, 1987, p. 343)

While displaced homemakers may, indeed, happen to have been included in the sample, their selection was not dependent on their status as displaced homemakers.

The History of Reentry Women in Education

An examination of adult learners in American higher education has been presented in the literature (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Astin, 1976a; Bowen,
An historical overview of reentry women in particular in higher education has been detailed (Chamberlain, 1988; Crimmins & Riddler, 1985; Osterkamp & Hullett, 1983; Thompson & Roberts, 1985; Tittle & Denker, 1977). The reentry woman’s return to college began gradually in the 1960s during the development of evening colleges and the expansion of public university systems and community colleges (Allen, 1979). Between 1972 and 1979, total college enrollments increased by 2.3 million; about half this group were part-time students age 25 and over. In large measure, this growth is due to the enrollment or re-enrollment of adult women (Hall, 1981). The increase in college enrollment by female reentry students is well documented (Glass & Rose, 1987; Hodgkinson, 1983; Tittle & Denker, 1977). The college population of women 35 or more years of age by the year 2000 is predicted to be almost 70% (Crimmins & Riddler, 1985).

Characteristics of Reentry Women

For the purposes of this study, reentry women were characterized in four ways. They were described according to demographic profile, reasons for pursuing higher education, obstacles to participation, and common personal characteristics.

The demographic profile

In the early 1970s, the adult learner was usually under 40 (Astin, 1976b; Mangano & Corrado, 1979; Tittle & Denker, 1977). Typically she was white, married with children, and was returning to school in preparation for employment (Astin, 1976b; Mangano & Corrado, 1979; Tittle & Denker, 1977). Astin (1976a) warned that “to view [reentry women] only as adult middle-class women whose family responsibilities have been reduced so they can return to education for personal development would be shortsighted and quite
erroneous" (p. 57). Many of the female reentry students in the 1970s were part-time students (Mangano & Corrado, 1979). By the late 1990s, the part-time student might be the norm in higher education ("Part-timers," 1986).

The demographic profile of the “typical” female reentry student has changed over the past 20 years. Holliday (1985) reported the female reentry student is no longer just the middle-class, middle-income, middle-aged woman with time on her hands for enrichment courses. Re-entry women are represented more and more by minority, lower-income women who are single parents and heads of households and single women interested in career advancement. (p. 62)

A more current profile of reentry women suggests these women are in their early 30s, married with at least one child. Family incomes range from $15,500 to $39,900. Half are, themselves, employed in professional or technical jobs. Swift et al. (1987) goes on to suggest that college enrollment by reentry women may not be limited to seeking career advancement but may include other personal reasons. The spouses of reentry women are often well educated (O’Connell, 1977) and employed. Encouragement by family and friends and availability of financial resources predicate enrollment, it is divided between full- and part-time class attendance (Swift et al., 1987).

Returning women may be working class, economically deprived, upwardly mobile, or upper class. Some may have been absent from an educational setting for more than thirty-five years, while others simply left briefly to assume family responsibilities or pursue employment. Within reentry populations, there are many diverse and special-needs groups, including minorities, older women, displaced homemakers, disabled women, single parents, rural, and low-income women. (Lewis, 1988a, p. 6)

Clearly, reentry women are a heterogeneous group. Generalizations about reentry women should be taken with “caution because they do not take
into account the diversity of the re-entry woman population or recognize the subgroups that exist due to individual statuses, life cycle stages, and personal characteristics" (Holliday, 1985, p. 62).

Adult learners have their individual and unique stories, “yet underlying universal principles tie all individual adult learners together” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 34). This researcher’s intention in this investigation of community college reentry women is to use the stories of a few adult learners to reflect those of the many adult learners in higher education.

**Reasons for reentry**

Adults who return to college “tend to be in transition and experiencing crises in their lives (e.g. divorce, unemployment, geographic relocation)” (Nordstrom, 1989, p. 72). Reentry women return to higher education for a variety of reasons:

--Economic necessity, either adding to the financial base of her family or gaining financial independence
--Preparation for a career or occupation
--Need for intellectual fulfillment, satisfaction, and realization of her potential
--More time to devote to her own interests because less time is needed for childcare
--Preparation for a career change
--Enhancement of skills and abilities to increase job options
--Divorce or death of a spouse
--Increased appetite for education
--Enrollment in an advanced degree program
--Desire for increased status as a college graduate. (Holliday, 1985, pp. 62-63)

Eight factors which motivated the students’ enrollment in institutions of higher education include: self improvement, self-actualization, vocational, role, family, social, humanitarian, and knowledge (Clayton & Smith, 1987). More recently, reported Schlossberg et al. (1989), reasons given for reentry are “becoming
better educated and informed, achieving personal satisfaction, and helping to solve personal and community problems” (p. 175).

Obstacles to participation

Obstacles that may interfere with the reentry woman’s schooling have been classified as institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers (Tittle & Denker, 1980). Some researchers have added “societal” to the list of barriers (Cross, 1974; Glass & Rose, 1987). Barriers have also been divided into personal and institutional categories (Mohsenin, 1980). Instead of using the term “barriers,” Claus (1986) identified eight key categories of factors which influence students’ attempts to manage the learning process: economic issues, home and family issues, transportation issues, unique personal issues, goal and commitment issues, academic adjustment issues, classroom issues, and institutional issues. The “realness” of barriers may be questionable. In her research Cross (cited in Carbone, 1982) wondered whether some rationalization might have taken place by the adults she questioned. Regardless, obstacles have been reported by reentry women and, therefore, need to be addressed. For the purpose of this study, the obstacles will be classified as institutional issues, academic issues, and home and family issues.

Institutional issues. Research (Mohsenin, 1980; Swift et al., 1987; Tittle & Denker, 1980) showed that numerous institutional issues can frustrate the participation in higher education by the reentry woman. Among these issues may be included sex and age quotas, admissions procedures, lack of specific orientation programs for older students, stringent curriculum planning and course scheduling, financial aid, lack of support services such as childcare and career and personal counseling, and faculty and staff attitudes. Kapeller (1990) found in his study of perception of adult learners’ needs that “the greatest
discrepancy resulted when comparing the student need responses with faculty/staff perceptions" (p. 3132A). Colleges should "rethink their philosophies and foci of student services to meet the divergent needs that adult students have" (Nordstrom, 1989, p. 72).

A more serious institutional issue is the "discrimination against part-time re-entry women. Institutions still prefer full-time students" (Holliday, 1985, p. 65). Bowen (1980) asserted that "It has been common practice in the past to assign less qualified faculty members to evening and other extension classes than to the regular programs," evening and extension classes being more typically attended by part-time students; "this discrimination . . . should be eliminated" (p. 19). Most financial aid is unavailable to part-time students, and information concerning financial aid is not always readily accessible to part-time students. Course scheduling and cycling of classes often do not attempt to accommodate the time frame of the part-time student. Part-time older students expressed a greater need for longer class periods which meet evenings and weekends (Mangano & Corrado, 1979). Another barrier may be admissions regulations which evaluate outdated transcripts in the transferring of credits earned years earlier and require letters of recommendation from women who have been out of school for several years.

According to Peelo (1990), "women, while having established a claim to undertake degree-level work, still remain marginal" (p. 3379A) to institutions of higher education. Marginality, another more subtle, perhaps, institutional barrier that underlies institutional policy, may be diffused through "mattering," a belief people have that others like and appreciate them. Such "mattering" keeps students engaged in learning and can be manifested in such procedures as faculty calling students by name, credit being given for life experiences, and
advisers' office hours being held at times convenient to adult learners. The concept of showing adults that they matter supports Astin's (cited in Schlossberg et al., 1989) theory of student involvement. She posited that student involvement is a composite of physical and psychological energy devoted to the academic experience. Faculty, administration, and student services personnel should "re-evaluate how they relate" to adult learners (Nordstrom, 1989, p. 72). Community college leaders should select female staff carefully because they will be "regarded as representative of [the leaders'] attitudes toward women" (Dziech, 1983, p. 74).

Women returning to institutions of higher learning later in life "may do so in the absence of support or in the face of outright antagonism from . . . even their instructors" (Datan & Hughes, 1985, p. 175). According to Nidiffer (1985), "administrators' attitudes may justifiably be considered a barrier to older adults' participation in education" (p. 3516A). "There are those leaders in higher education who would argue that adults had their chance to gain an undergraduate education in earlier years. Undergraduate education should first serve the young, the mentally agile, and the future creators of new scholarship" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 366).

Academic issues. Academic issues stifle the participation of reentry women in higher education. Some of the major academic issues that may adversely affect reentry women's participation include low self-confidence, inadequate academic skills, and mathematics anxiety.

Reentry women are often characterized by poor self concept and subsequent anxiety about collegiate expectations. They may lack confidence in their own basic skills and abilities (Nordstrom, 1989). According to Rollins College president, Dr. Rita Bornstein, herself a former reentry woman, "one of
the hard things about returning as a student is to get over the fear that they don't belong in school, that they won't do well, that they can't compete" (Hunter, 1990, p. 51). A typical reaction of a new reentry woman might be similar to the following student's response "I sat in the back of the classroom and didn't open my mouth for the entire first semester" (Prahl, 1981, p. 7). One of the "biggest fears of adults returning to a school environment is the subject of 'testing'" (Diaz-Lefebvre, 1989, p. 10). Reentry women may feel uncomfortable and incompetent around younger students (Mangano & Corrado, 1979). Reentry women may not "realize they have something to say and the ability to say it clearly" (Prahl, 1981, p. 5). They may overlook the mature perspectives they themselves can bring to bear on issues" (Prahl, 1981, p. 7). Perhaps unfamiliar with appropriate classroom procedure or simply unsure of themselves, some reentry women may "talk too much,' ask the same question repeatedly, or inappropriately challenge a younger instructor" (Prahl, 1981, p. 7).

In addition to lacking self-confidence, reentry women may be characterized by inadequate academic skills. Reentry women may feel they need to brush up on skills and techniques such as time management; note-taking; typing; test taking; language lab, computer lab, and library use; researching; and paper writing (Creamer & Akins, 1981; Mohsenin, 1980; Prahl, 1981). They may need help with how to study, improve reading ability, brush up in math and science, communicate and give presentations in class, and/or and juggle schedules (Grood, 1986; Prahl, 1981; Mangano & Corrado, 1979). One reentry woman was reported as having said, "I returned to college with a minus and a plus--rusty skills and a desire to succeed" (Prahl, 1981, p. 2). Although not all reentry women need basic skills help, "for those who do . . .
opportunity to refresh and rebuild old skills and to develop new ones may make
the difference between failure and success” (Tobias, 1980, p. 2).

A third academic issue that may impede reentry women's participation in
higher education is their fear of mathematics. Mathematics anxiety may be
particularly acute for reentry women (Astin, 1976b; Kostka & Wilson, 1986;
Prahl, 1981; Tobias, 1980). They may find that even beginning mathematics
courses expect a level of knowledge beyond their present capacity, even if they
have taken mathematics courses in their past. They need a refresher course
"that will sharpen their skills and permit entry into the regular program" (Prahl,
1981, p. 5). Reentry women exhibited higher levels of math anxiety than did the
women of traditional college age (Kostka & Wilson, 1986). For adult learners,
mathematics is "frequently the barrier that keeps adults from pursuing desired
careers" (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 128). Women who seek treatment for this
anxiety are likely, then, to improve their math skills as well. It becomes
increasingly important to provide programs that meet the academic deficiencies
of reentry women (Kostka & Wilson, 1986). "Mathematics avoidance" women
should be taught beginning level math by a competent math teacher but along
side a professional counselor trained in diminishing the anxiety levels of the
students (Tobias, 1980).

**Home and family issues.** A third major obstacle to participation in higher
education by reentry women is that of home and family issues. Reentry women
often have feelings of guilt because they may be neglecting their husbands,
children, or both (Mohsenin, 1980). The observations of adult development
theorist Gilligan (1982b) would seem to support this view. She found that
women place significant value on attachments, intimacy, and relationships and
that women are never disconnected from the importance of others.
Blue-collar worker husbands may see the institution of higher learning as "stealing" their wives, that "the decision to return to school may reflect a need for something beyond the home or indeed . . . a plan to achieve greater independence" (Datan & Hughes, 1985, p. 182). This stereotype is vividly illustrated in the contemporary movie Educating Rita in which an angry husband destroys his wife's college textbooks. "Better-educated husbands held more positive attitudes toward their wives' enrollment" in college than do lesser-educated husbands, but "their enthusiasm did not translate into higher levels of instrumental support" (Suitor, 1988, p. 492).

The extent of the guilt felt may depend on the reentry woman's socioeconomic group. Fewer women from lower socioeconomic groups are likely to participate in higher education than men from these groups (Tittle & Denker, 1980). Typically, working class families do not value the concept of women continuing their education. With such a high value placed on work in this nation, the woman who chooses attending school over going to work may be viewed as an unproductive contributor to society. Consequently "women whose networks are composed primarily of individuals who are less educated may find the return to school particularly difficult" (Suitor, 1988, p. 492).

Another adjustment facing reentry women is the juggling they must perform to balance the role of student against roles of homemaker, breadwinner, spouse, single parent, and/or daughter, among others. While reentry women may be motivated by career objectives and personal challenge, "they also place importance on their spouses, parents, children, lovers, and friends" (Carbone, 1988). Aslanian and Brickell (1980) reported that family transitions are the primary trigger for women returning to school. Reentry women often have "feelings of low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, uncertainty of goals, and
feelings of guilt because they may be neglecting their wife or mother roles” (Mohsenin, 1980, p. 194). Many returning women experience problems with their families because of their spending less time--and, perhaps, feeling guilty about it--with children, husband, and friends, along with neglecting housework. Reentry women in their twenties and early thirties who are more likely to have young children may suffer the most in their role-balancing act (Holliday, 1985).

Relinquishing a role, such as full-time housewife, may cause anxiety over separating from a familiar piece of self structure. “After all, it is through our roles that we find meaning in life. . . . not . . . the roles themselves but . . . it is the way that we personally live out our roles that we find meaning” (Gerstein & Papen-Daniel, 1981, p. 21). With the acquisition of new roles, “we must try it on for size, master the skills necessary to the role, invest the role with our own unique personal style” (Gerstein & Papen-Daniel, 1981, p. 21). Role expectations (Berkove, 1979; Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986; Roehl & Okun, 1985) and role conflict (Beutell & O'Hare, 1987; Gilbert et al., 1980; Hooper, 1979) remain major issues facing reentry women.

Common personal traits

Even though reentry women are a divergent group, they exhibit some common personal traits. Included among those personal characteristics descriptive of reentry women in general are independence, academic achievement, persistence, restored self-confidence, fine-tuned coping strategies, and transitional experiences.

Typically, the reentry woman is an independent student (Cross, 1971; Knowles, 1970). “Whether self-imposed or otherwise, the older student feels she must handle the situation herself” (Badenhoop & Johansen, 1980, p. 595). Reentry women may be hesitant to seek help from a professor or younger
classmates "because they feel that, as mature students, their skills are expected to be more highly developed" (Prahl, 1981, p. 5).

The reentry woman whether part or full time "is a member of a large identifiable group of intellectually able students" (Bueche, 1986, p. 15). She is highly motivated and conscientious (Nordstrom, 1989; Wheeler, 1990). "The part-time re-entry woman is as serious academically as her younger full-time classmates despite differences in course load and limited time on campus and she often makes many sacrifices to return to school, and, once on campus, may outperform traditional students." (Hall, 1981, pp. 1-2). The reentry woman's academic success may be due in part to her penchant for critical reflection. Brookfield (cited in Schlossberg et al., 1989) suggested that the reentry woman has the ability to "identify [her] underlying assumptions and consider alternative ways of behaving and living" (p. 7). Older learners emphasize concreteness and reflection over abstraction and experimentation (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Another factor contributing to the reentry woman's academic success is her persistence in pursuing her academic goals. At a four-year college "the reentry women in the sample persisted in college at a phenomenally high rate compared to their younger colleagues" (Pirnot, 1987, p. 23). Perhaps one explanation of the persistence of reentry women is their lack of fear of success. A comparison between women aged 18 to 23 with those over 30 confirmed the hypothesis that the adult students would exhibit less fear of success. Adult women appear to be more "secure in their achievement efforts; they are more likely to have obtained their 'feminine credentials' and hence do not experience a conflict between what can seem, to the college-age women, to be mutually exclusive goals of achievement and femininity" (Freilino & Hummel, 1985, p. 8). Baruch showed that achievement motivation in a group of Radcliffe graduates
was lower in the group 10 years out of college than in those women who were either younger or older. She hypothesized that women's achievement motivation began to rise after 35 when major family responsibilities were lessening (Giele, 1978). A comparison of university reentry women to full-time housewives reveals college women to be "more dominant, ambitious, self-confident, achievement oriented, and self-actualizing than housewives" (O'Connell, 1977, p. 52).

Restored self-confidence of reentry women is important to their collegiate success. The difficulties of going to college, many of which have been already described, are "outweighed by increased self-confidence and the opportunity to meet new friends" (Swift et al., 1987, p. 344). Overcoming "difficult obstacles to attend college, often deferring school for financial reasons or obligations to family . . . embarrassment, fright, awkwardness, and ambivalence . . . resulted in an increase in self-esteem for the returning student" (Carbone, 1988, p. 89). The key to shoring up reentry women's self-concept may be the development of a working system of peer support (Haywoode, 1983).

Reentry women who are successful in college have learned to cope with low self concept, concerns about their mental capacity, feelings of anxiety, and juggling of responsibilities. Pearlin (cited in Schlossberg et al., 1989) suggested strategies that the "creative coper" uses. She might change a situation, such as asking family for help with housework; she might change the meaning of a situation such as finding humor in embarrassing moments; she might manage the stress by taking up an active exercise program. Deep breathing exercises and listening to "specially selected baroque music [may] help relieve stress" (Diaz-Lefebvre, 1989).
One way of coping is to form support groups. Reentry women expressed a great need for encouragement and reassurance (Mangano & Corrado, 1979). Support groups or formal organizations of networking are reported to help fulfill this need. Self-help groups “usually offer not only emotional and social supports, but also specific information and suggestions for dealing with the particular shared problem” (Waters & Goodman, 1981, p. 363).

Reentry women “acknowledge they are in transition” (Saltonstall, 1990, p. 1902A). Acknowledged improvement in important relationships since returning to school is one type of transition reported by reentry women (Saltonstall, 1990). Transition and change for reentry women often involve experiencing crises (Nordstrom, 1989) and high stress (Diaz-Lefebvre, 1989; Wheeler, 1989).

**Adult Development Theory**

Historically, much of what is known about adult development has been gleaned by studies on children and animals. Research by Freud, Jung, Piaget, and others indicated that, in general, children pass through an orderly succession of stages that correspond with specific ages. Recent studies, have “challenged some of the apparent orderliness of child development” (Rosenfeld & Stark, 1987, p. 64). The pattern of adult development, they observe, “seems to be even less clear-cut” (p. 64).

**Early adult development theory**

Unlike child development research, however, adult development research is a fairly recent phenomenon. “The delineation of stages or sequential patterns of adulthood is certainly not a new phenomenon, nor is it peculiar to Western societies,” reported Merriam (1984). In the seventh century B.C., the Greek poet Solon wrote about ten seven-year stages of life. Confucius...
wrote of different concerns for each ten-year period from age 30 to 70. No real attention, however, was given to the study of adulthood until the middle of the 20th century (Naylor, 1985). Prior to the mid-20th century, researchers thought that "nothing of significance happened to a person from the time of entry into young adulthood until the dying process set in" (Merriam, 1984, p. 3).

People are now beginning to view the notion of maturity (formerly thought to be almost synonymous with adulthood) in a context rather than as a content. That is, growth and development are seen as continuing characteristics of life, and maturity as the individual's successful negotiation of whatever tasks are presented to him/her at each stage of growth. (Baile, 1978, p. 3)

**Recent adult development research**

In the early 1930s, researchers began to study human development in a systematic manner. Models of its various stages from infancy through old age were formulated. These models are known as age-related sequential models since they view adult development as a series of age-related stages. The term "life stages" is explained as "periods of life which are defined by major life events, such as the birth of a first child and the entrance of the last child into a full day of school" (Krogh, 1985, p. 75). Stages overlap and interpenetrate, and a person's tasks of one period are never completely dealt with and cast aside when the period ends.

A second major type of life course theory "focuses on timing of events and is much less likely to observe or document clearly demarcated developmental steps" (Giele, 1982, p. 4). The differentiation between stage and nonstage theorists is made by noting that "most stage theorists are trained in psychology or psychoanalysis and that most nonstage theorists are trained in sociology and other social sciences" (Giele, 1982, p. 8). The former look for "change triggered primarily by the internal timetable of individual learning and
growth," whereas nonstage theorists "take note of the often random and arbitrary timing of events" (Giele, 1982, p. 8).

In summary, new research emphasis is being placed on adult development in the midlife years whereas earlier ideas about adult development were gleaned primarily from studies on children and animals. In the 1930s, researchers began to study human development in a systematic manner. One notion suggests that humans develop through age-related stages, stages which overlap and intertwine. Another notion focuses on timing of events; adults are more affected by their own experiences or life events and the timing of those events than they are by chronological age. From this view, untimely events upset the sequence and rhythm of the expected life cycle.

Much of the scholarly research and theory done on young and middle adulthood has been "conducted within the last 25 years, with most major studies being published within the last decade" (Merriam, 1984, p. 3). Developmental factors that affect women over 25 years of age and may be relevant to their reentering college and the impact of their collegiate experience are suggested by adult development theorists Erikson (1950), Havighurst (1952; 1953), Neugarten (1968), Levinson (1978), Sheehy (1976; 1981), Stevenson (1977), Scarf (1980), Schlossberg (1981a; 1981b; 1984; et al., 1989), and Gilligan (1982a; 1982b). Those aspects of their theories on adult development which directly relate to women 25 years of age and older will be briefly highlighted. Although most of these theorists do not mention reentry women specifically, their theories about adult development may certainly have direct application to this population.
Early major figures in adult development theory

Four major figures in the early investigation of adult development to be discussed in chronological order include Erikson (1950), Havighurst (1952; 1953), Neugarten (1968), and Levinson (1978).

Erik Erikson. The first psychologist to view the life cycle by stages was Else Frenkel-Brunswik. Frenkel-Brunswik’s identification of five phases every person passes through foreshadowed the “Eight Stages of Man” in the life cycle later outlined by Erikson of Harvard University. The concept of the life cycle became clear and popular through his publication of Childhod and Society (1950). Erikson’s Eight Stages model influenced the work of Levinson among others.

The life cycle model was originally prepared in 1950 by Erikson and his wife for a White House conference on childhood and youth. In it, each stage of life is associated with a specific psychological struggle which, if it saw successful resolution of task, enabled the individual to become more vital in a new way. If the stage’s task was not successfully resolved, the person would have difficulty accomplishing tasks in subsequent stages.

Looking briefly at Erikson’s stages which relate specifically to adults, Erikson’s sixth stage, Intimacy vs. Isolation, spans the years from 18 to 28. A person is not capable of fully intimate relationships until the identity crisis of stage five is resolved. Stage seven, Generativity vs. Stagnation spans the ages 24 to 45. The task is to produce something or someone that outlines the self. Stage eight is Ego Integrity vs. Despair and spans the ages 40 to old age. Its task is to assess one’s life. According to Erikson (1950), each stage unfolds in sequence, each stage is triggered by a turning point of increased personal
vulnerability and potentiality, and each stage confronts the individual with central issues demanding resolution.

In their 80s, Erikson and his wife have expanded the psychological model of the life cycle,

breaking new ground . . . spell[ing] out the way the lessons of each major stage of life can ripen into wisdom in old age. They depict an old age in which one has enough conviction in one's own completeness to ward off the despair that gradual physical disintegration can too easily bring. (Coleman, 1988, p. E-3)

According to this new addition to the life cycle stages, "the struggle is between a sense of one's own integrity and a feeling of defeat or despair about one's life in the phase of normal physical disintegration. The fruit of that struggle is wisdom" (Coleman, 1988, p. E-3).

Robert Havighurst. Another major adult development theorist, Havighurst, divides the adult years into three phases: Early Adulthood (18 to 30), Middle Age (30 to 55), and Later Maturity (55 and over). Adulthood has various social roles. "Social role" as a term which refers to "situations in which a specific pattern of behavior is expected of an individual" (Gerstein & Papen-Daniel, 1981, p. 20). The requirements for performing each of these social roles change as the adult moves through the three phases, thereby setting up changing developmental tasks and, therefore, changing readiness to learn. Havighurst (1953) defines a developmental task as

a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks. (p. 6)

The developmental tasks of the adult years tend to be the products of the evolution of social roles rather than the products of physiological and mental
maturation of youth. He identifies ten social roles of adulthood: worker, mate, parent, homemaker, son or daughter of aging parents, citizen, friend, organization member, religious affiliate, and user of leisure time.

**Bernice Neugarten.** Neugarten (1968) and her associates at the University of Chicago, like Erikson, organized life cycles around the role of age and timing. Neugarten (1968) defined adulthood as being composed of young adulthood, maturity, middle age, and old age, each period having specific characteristics. From interviewing 100 men and women, Neugarten (1968) described middle age as a time of taking stock and introspection of the self within a complex social environment. For women, a major theme in middle life is increased freedom, a time when unused talents and abilities can be developed and used in new directions. She posited that adults are more affected by their own experiences—or, life events—and the timing of those experiences than they are by chronological age. “Life events” as “those events that create a demand for change in a person’s life and that occur over a relatively finite period of time” (Chiriboga, 1982, p. 595). Neugarten “criticized the common practice in developmental research of focusing on the simple passage of time rather than events that transpired during that time” (Chiriboga, 1982, p. 595). Untimely events upset the sequence and rhythm of the expected life cycle. To Neugarten (cited in Schlossberg et al., 1989), “lack of predictability . . . surprises or unexpected things that can happen at any age to anyone” (p. 3) shape adult developments.

**Daniel Levinson.** Levinson began his study in 1969 when Levinson was 49 years old; as he admitted in *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* (1978), he chose to study men because he wanted to understand his own development better. Levinson (1978), organizing life cycles around developmental ages, asserted
that adults, as do children and adolescents, develop by periods, each period engaging them in specific tasks. Levinson and associates at Yale studied 40 men between the ages of 35 and 45.

Levinson's outline of development indicated that in those stages of the life span that appear relatively stable, there are few, if any, role shifts. When people are confronting many role shifts, they are in a period of transition.

These transitional periods that began with anticipation and end with our settling into a new life structure are composed of a new alignment of roles. They are frequently periods of time in which we experience separation anxiety, depression, and fear of failure. (Gerstein & Papendaniel, 1981, p. 21)

Levinson's study found that at each major stage of adulthood, men pass through predictably unstable transitional periods. Reported in Levinson's study--which was "unusual because of the use of in-depth biographical interview" (Roberts & Newton, 1987, p. 154)--is the particularly turbulent time men experience at around 40. Although Levinson et al. focus on the lives of men, their work "provides a structure that may eventually help to explain the adult development of women" (Roberts & Newton, 1987, p. 154). The return to school by female reentry students

implies that the changes and questioning that occur are more likely to emerge during the transition (i.e., midlife transition) rather than during a stable period (i.e., middle adulthood). The major tasks of this transition are (a) reappraising the past, (b) modifying the life structure, and (c) continuing the individuation process. (Kahnweiler & Johnson, 1980, p. 414)

Levinson expanded Erikson's concept of adult development. Levinson determined that a person's adult development characterizations were shaped by not just psycho-social timetables, but also by "biological, psycho-dynamic,
cultural, social-structural and other timetables which operate in a system of partial synchronization" (Gerstein & Papen-Daniel, 1981, p. 25).

Levinson's "presumably universal timetable . . . was very rigid, allowing no more than four years' leeway for each transition" (Rosenfeld & Stark, 1987, p. 66). Levinson "stated baldly that in a specified variance each stage begins and ends at modal ages" (Roberts & Newton, 1987, p. 154).

**Recent major figures in adult development theory**

Increasingly critiques of male-biased research have been reported (Clabaugh, 1986; Gilligan, 1982b; Horner, 1972; Miller, 1986).

Mere intellectual thoroughness demands that attention be given to the distinct adult dilemmas and issues experienced by women. Until this is done, one cannot be sure that the categories of analysis and theories of development are not somehow flawed by attention to only half the human race. (Giele, 1982, p.2)

In recent years several women researchers have contributed significantly to the body of adult development literature that may be of special value to this study on community college reentry women. Included among the women adult development theorists to be discussed in chronological order are Sheehy (1976; 1981), Stevenson (1977), Scarf (1980), Schlosssberg (1981a, 1981b; 1984; et al., 1989), and Gilligan (1982a, 1982b).

**Gail Sheehy.** Sheehy's (1976) model, described in *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life*, is of particular interest to this study of community college female reentry students because "perhaps Sheehy's most noteworthy contribution is her attention to adult female development as well as male development" (Merriam, 1984, p. 12). Sheehy studied the lives of 115 people of middle-class backgrounds. From her research, she conceptualized adult development as occurring in six distinct stages, each marked by a crisis

"Of special interest in Sheehy's thinking is her identification of patterns by which people make their passages" (Baile, 1978, p. 9). Sheehy (1976) described these patterns by reporting "on where various choices had led in the past" (p. 295). Introducing these patterns in a "chronological way, beginning with the most traditional and ending with the more experimental," Sheehy (1976) listed Caregiver, Either-Or, Integrators, Never-Married Women, and Transients (pp. 295-296).

The caregiving pattern is the traditional female pattern of cherishing, succoring, listening to, and believing in other people. Personal ambitions are worked out through others, most often the husband. Generally, women in this pattern are dependent on their attachments' continuing need for them. (Baile, 1978, p. 10)

The either-ors either are nurturers who defer achievement or achievers who defer nurturing. "Both patterns are reflections of women's feelings that they must chose either marriage or career, but not both, at least not simultaneously" (Baile, 1978, p. 10).

Integrators attempted in their twenties to have marriage, family and career simultaneously. Never-marrieds included "paranurturers and office wives" (p. 296). Transients "chose impermanence in their twenties and wander sexually, occupationally, geographically" (Sheehy, 1976, p. 296).

Sheehy shared with Erikson and Levinson the belief that people move through a series of life stages development that are marked by predictable
crises. Marker events such as marriage, childbirth, or divorce do not define developmental stages. Instead, a developmental stage is “defined by changes that begin within” (Sheehy, 1976, p. 29). Sheehy (1976) replaced the term “crisis” with a “less loaded word for the critical transitions between stages, and called them passages” (p. 23).

A major contribution of Sheehy’s (1976) adult development theory was her concept of four areas of perception which are changed during each of the predictable passages. During each one of these predictable passages, areas of perception are changed. First, Sheehy (1976) explained, people see themselves in relationship to others in a new way. Second, they feel that there is far more danger than safety during a passage. Third, when at a developmental plateau, people feel as if they have plenty of time, but during a passage, they tend to feel as though time were running out. Fourth, people experience a shift in their sense of aliveness or stagnation.

The central issues and tasks of one period are never completely resolved, according to Sheehy (1976), even though she believed that the sequence of stages is invariant. Sheehy found it important for adults to understand better adult development so that when adults do not “‘fit in,’ we [will not be] likely to think of our behavior as evidence of our inadequacies, rather than as a valid stage unfolding in a sequence of growth, something we all accept when applied to childhood” (p. 15). People need to know that “a sense of stagnation, disequilibrium, and depression is predictable as we enter the passage to midlife” (Sheehy, 1976, p. 16).

Sheehy, also like Erikson and Levinson, believed that change is not only desirable but is necessary in order for people to change and restructure their lives so they may grow successfully into adults that find fulfillment and
satisfaction. Sheehy (1976) observed that “times of crisis, of disruption or constructive change, are not only predictable but desirable. They mean growth” (p. 31).

Joanne Sabol Stevenson. About the same time Sheehy’s Passages (1976) was published, Stevenson (1977) was finishing her book called Issues and Crises during Middlescence which, unlike the adult development theorists previously mentioned, offered concentrated attention to the “heretofore undifferentiated middle years of the life cycle. . . . the stages of adult development between high school graduation and late life” (p. vii). Stevenson coined the term “middlescence” from a facetious comment about the age group in the middle between adolescence and senescence. Stevenson identified four stages of adulthood: Youth or Young Adulthood (18 to 30); Middlescence I or the Core of the Middle Years (30 to 50); Middlescence II or the New Middle Years (50 to 70 or 75; and the Late Adult Years (70 + to death). She named the stages in this manner because she believed--as did Neugarten--that specific chronologic age ranges are often misleading; for example, one person who may be only 20 may be already working on the tasks of middlescence. Her shifting of the age range between 50 and 70 years to what she calls the New Middle Years

serves to formalize the actual shift in prolongation of the mental and physical attributes of middle age within the elongated life-span. It is an error to visualize the additional years of life as tacked onto the end. Rather, we should think of them as slipped into the middle. (Stevenson, 1977, p. 14)

Building on the work of Maslow and Erikson, Stevenson (1977) posited developmental tasks that “reflect a positive growth and development throughout
life, from conception to death” (p. 14). Growth and development are “more significant happenings during life than atrophy and loss or decay” (p. 23).

Stevenson (1977) described transition years as stages in adult life that are “an uncomfortable time when change is necessary and imminent” (p. 154). The time between the ages of 29 and 32 is called the “Catch 30” transition and finds people questioning what they are doing and why they are or are not doing certain things; serious soul searching of priorities takes place. Stevenson concurred with Sheehy that during this period, a person must find realistic goals. The next transition period for adults is the time between 32 and 39 years of age. Stevenson (1977) described this as a period in which adults define their commitments and stabilize their life-style. This is a time of high career ascendancy with many people experiencing a time squeeze. The “Catch 40” transition—the ages between 39 and 42—is a time for acute discomfort, “a time when the gap between youthful fantasies and the raw realities of actual fulfillment must be faced” (p. 156). This is the “paradox of simultaneously entering the period of greatest fulfillment and being stunned by the unavoidable reality of impending nonexistence” (Stevenson, 1977, p. 156). On a more positive note, Stevenson wrote that for people who successfully transcend the “Catch 40” transition period, life on the other side will be brighter with a new sense of stability and commitment. People in this age group know how to “use their time, how to delegate authority, how to make decisions, how to make policy, and how to administer systems” (p. 158).

Stevenson (1977) stressed that growth and development are significant happenings during life. She described adults in their mid-forties, an age group to which many reentry women belong. The “Mid-40s Inferno” is a paradoxical time. While the 45-year-old is self-assured, competent, and respected with
settled family, work and social life, he or she must also deal with out-of-control adolescents, ill and aging parents, and his or her own imbalance of hormones.

For people who successfully transcend the "Catch 40" transition period, life on the other side will be brighter with a new sense of stability and commitment. People in this age group know how to "use their time, how to delegate authority, how to make decisions, how to make policy, and how to administer systems" (Stevenson, 1977, p. 158). In order to cope with all the necessary adjustments to reentry life, reentry women certainly must demonstrate efficient use of time, delegation of authority concerning household and childcare chores, and decision making.

Sheehy and Stevenson, along with Levinson, described and labeled periods in adult life cycles that are defined by unique characteristics within specific age ranges. All suggested the stages must be encountered sequentially, but, none believes that there is any particular magic for any particular year. In other words, Sheehy's "Catch-30" transition might appear at 25 as well as 35. It's what people face and not how or when they face it that presents itself as the common denominator. (Baile, 1978, p. 7)

Maggie Scarf. Primarily a journalist and a scientific writer, Scarf's (1980) Unfinished Business: Pressure Points in the Lives of Women also described middlescence when she wrote that the word middlescence seems to . . . capture quite well the whole sense of a second upsurge of identity issues--of a second period of existence during which a person feels pushed, by a combination of inner and outer pressures toward the re-creating of the self, and toward becoming someone tantalizingly and frighteningly new. (p. 453)

Scarf (1980) in what Giele (1982) described as "a stage schema for women" (p. 5) examined psychological tasks a woman encounters during her life from her
teens to her sixties. As Thomas Detre wrote in the Foreword to *Unfinished Business* (1980), many women

are ill prepared to cope with changes in their own lives and with their changing roles in society. Being a woman becomes, then, more a matter of increasing complications rather than widening opportunities: challenges that can never be met and successfully mastered. (p. xvi)

In her study, Scarf (1980) discerned two recurring, what she called, interrelated leitmotifs or life themes:

the woman’s struggle to liberate her self (or certain aspects of her self) from its thralldom to magical figures from the past--to liberate the adult person from the shackles of her childhood. The other . . . involved the demanding and sometimes daunting effort to develop an independent and autonomous sense of self . . . that inner confidence that one will be able to survive on one’s own emotional resources, should it become necessary to do so. (pp. 1-2)

The chapters in Scarf’s book are divided into groups of ages: In the Teens, In the Twenties, In the Thirties, In the Forties, In the Fifties, and In the Sixties. Although she did not specific stages of development that women pass through, she did identify phases of passages in each chapter that describe experiences at stressful junctures of loss, disruption of emotional bonds, and depression. Scarf (1980) reported that depression is two to six times more common in women than in men.

Depressions of the various decades do reflect underlying issues and concerns of that decade of life; what a depression is about has everything to do with an individual’s place in her own existence, where she is, in terms of life stage. (p. 8)

In the section In the Forties, for instance, she discusses Feeling Uprooted, An Emptying Family Nest, and The Trauma That is Loneliness, among other topics.

Scarf (1980) describes the typical life passages for women as she explains the evolution of her investigation:
It was in the course of this search for “themes” that I noticed something absolutely striking: the replies I was getting varied— in relatively systematic ways—with the various stages of the life cycle. That is, although there were certain overarching depressive themes and issues... which could crop up at any point in a woman’s life—the issues and difficulties of the different life decades tended to fall into distinct psychological baskets. Women in the same phase of life were, by and large, depressed about similar sorts of things... .

Issues of the thirties were, frequently, the mistakes that had already been made and the payment that had been exacted: an “I’ve been cheated” sense that the fantasies and dreams of girlhood had not been and might never be satisfied.

At mid-life, major preoccupations were with the loss of certain identity-conferring roles or ways of being—roles which, in many an instance, had been perceived as a person’s sole source of interpersonal power or meaning. . . . (pp. 7-8)

Carol Gilligan. Gilligan (1982b), in *In a Different Voice*, shared the sentiment of Giele (1982) and the observation of Sheehy’s (1976) that “most of the research was being done by men who were studying other men” (p. 21), and thus is critical of the “repeated exclusion of women from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research” (Gilligan, 1982b, p. 1). Gilligan (1982b) believed that “the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition, an omission of certain truths about life” (p. 2).

Gilligan addressed the issue of sex difference in development. According to Giele (1982), Gilligan subjects stage and sequence notions to critical scrutiny... . Although Gilligan does not yet propose a grand theoretical formulations for women that is comparable with Erikson’s eight stages of man, she has accomplished the theoretical groundwork by posing the central development issues for women in an entirely fresh and promising way. She suggests that women’s concern for others—their sensitivity to caring and not hurting—should not be considered a simple failure of ego.
development but a different pattern to be understood and valued in its own right. (p. 19)

Gilligan (1982b) asserted that women across their life cycle place importance on attachments, intimacy, and relationships, while male theorists studying primarily male subjects placed greater emphasis on separation, individuation, and autonomy. Women are never disconnected from the importance of others, from an ethic in which caring for others is just as valid a viewpoint for decision making as a detached idealistic stance.

In concluding her book In a Different Voice, Gilligan (1982b) offered a summary that is also applicable to this current study of community college reentry women:

A recognition of the differences in women's experience and understanding expands our vision of maturity and points to the contextual nature of developmental truths. Through this expansion in perspective, we can begin to envision how a marriage between adult development as it is currently portrayed and women's development as it begins to be seen could lead to a changed understanding of human development and a more generative view of human life. (p. 174)

Nancy K. Schlossberg. Schlossberg (1981a), full-time professor at the University of Maryland's College of Education, Department of Counseling and Personnel Services since 1974, has posited that adults continuously experience transitions, although these transitions do not occur in any sequential order, nor does everyone experience the various transitions in like manner. All we know for certain is that all adults experience change and that often these changes require a new network of relationships and a new way of seeing oneself. (p. 3)

To Schlossberg (1981a), the important issue was how adults can best be understood and helped as they face the inevitable but unpredictable transitions of life. In Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with
Schlossberg (1984) identified three categories of variables that influence the transition process for adult students: personal and demographic characteristics that include socioeconomic status, sex, age, stage of life, and health; psychological resources such as ego development, personality, outlook, commitment, and values; and coping responses such as seeking information, direct action (exercising self-discipline and self-reliance), and inhibition of action (passive forbearance and denial).

Schlossberg (1981a) defined the word transition broadly to include subtle as well as obvious life changes. For example, the nonoccurrence of an anticipated job promotion qualifies as a transition as much as would the birth of the first child. A transition may have a high probability of occurring, such as marrying, or be improbably, such as winning the lottery. Often the outcome of a transition has “both positive and negative aspects for the same individual” (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 6).

Schlossberg (1981a) cautioned that “a transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s perception of change. A transition is a transition if it is so defined by the person experiencing it” (p. 7). For example, for the woman who does not perceive having a hysterectomy as the termination of her femininity, that event would not qualify as a transition to her.

Schlossberg et al. (1989) suggested that adults, traditionally thought of as in charge of their own and others’ lives, are assumed to be trying to maintain control over their lives, to preserve their independence. Thus, when we put the terms adult and student together, we sense a paradox—and educational institutions tend to neglect adult and emphasize student. (p. 7)

The sense of losing control and independence might be influenced by adults’ perception of mattering. “Mattering refers to beliefs people have, whether right
or wrong, that they matter to someone else, that they are the object of someone else's attention, and that others care about them and appreciate them” (p. 21). Through institutional mattering, the adult learner will be more likely to feel psychologically involved and, therefore, committed to the learning process (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p 29).

Adult learners also often “fear that as they age their learning capacity will diminish” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 6). Not only age but roles influence adult learners. “For adult learners, role involvements influence decisions to pursue education, to what degree, and in what manner” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 51).

Reentry women cope with college problems such as questioning their mental capacity and role juggling in a variety of ways. One of the most important and effective ways is by making friends with other reentry women, “friends who share their interests and the learning journey” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 106).

Schlossberg et al. (1989) referred to separating as “moving on,” one's “ending one series of transitions and beginning to ask what comes next” (p. 16). They suggest that “grieving can be used as a model to explain this phase in the structured learning process” (p. 16). They reported that “special culminating services are particularly important for adult learners” (p. 168) and claim that “more emphasis needs to be placed on culminating education” (p. 188).

Chapter Summary

“Research on undergraduate higher education has been predominantly based in historical perspectives and beliefs of a traditional student profile—that of a person who was 17-22 years old—and of a traditional undergraduate higher education as defined by an institutional culture and curriculum focused on the
17-22-year-old undergraduate student" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 345). Over the past 20 years, the demographics of the undergraduate student population have changed dramatically; consequently, much recent research has focused on a new undergraduate population--the adult learner. Adult learners exhibit significant differences in their academic and life involvements from the traditional age undergraduates (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The majority of adult undergraduates participate in the traditional undergraduate environment of higher education. Subsequently, researchers of recent studies have focused on three primary concerns: "How does one define the adult learner within the context of the undergraduate student role? What is the relationship of the adult learner to the traditional undergraduate student environment? What should be the relationship between the adult student and the undergraduate higher educational environment?" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 346).

In Kasworm's (1990) review of "over 345 articles, papers, books, and research reports on adult undergraduate learners in higher education from 1940-1986," 32 titles in her bibliography referred to female adult learners. Only one title (Mezirow, 1978) referred to community college reentry women. Examples of studies on reentry women mentioned in Kasworm (1990) included: examination of the influence of psychological constructs (mental health factors or role strain) for predictors of satisfaction (Kirk & Dorfman, 1983; Sands & Richardson, 1984); reentry women's penchant for mathematics anxiety and possible effective intervention by the institution (Kostka & Wilson, 1986); family support (Berkove, 1979; Hildreth, Dilworth-Anderson & Rabe, 1983; Hooper, 1979); psychosocial characteristics between women students and their peer group homemakers or young adult women students (Erdwins, Tyer, & Mellinger, 1980); differences in role conflict between professional and nonprofessional
women groupings (Beutell & O'Hare, 1987); a lack of significant impact upon assertiveness skill development of women reentry students (Hetherington & Hudson, 1981); horizons in education and employment (Hutchinson, 1974); and motivations to reentry (Clayton & Smith, 1987; Lenick, 1986). Investigations involving reentry students at community colleges specifically included managing the process (Claus, 1986); reentry needs (Mangano & Corrado, 1979); perceptions of social environment of classroom (Beer, 1988); and interactions, feelings, and attitudes (Hottenstein, 1986).

In summary, researchers have substantially documented the recent history, characteristic profile, participant obstacles of adult learners and of female reentry students in particular in universities, four year colleges, and community colleges. Additional qualitative exploration of adult development of women should be undertaken. According to Gilligan (1982a) "the study of women must begin with a descriptive or ethnographic approach in order to admit new constructs to the understanding of what constitutes maturity" (p. 89).

Therefore, in an effort to accomplish the scholarly purpose of a theoretician (Levi-Strauss as cited in Kasworm, 1990) which is "to introduce some order into a field where knowledge is very chaotic" (p. 346), this descriptive study of community college reentry women will contribute new knowledge to the data base of information on the adult development of reentry women. Based on propositions distilled from theories of adult development, this investigation will cast a "broad 'net' to develop 'baseline' descriptors" and will focus on the "identification of definitive characteristics of adult undergraduate" reentry women and on their "definition of their needs or desires for programs and services" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 355).
Propositions

Adult development is a complex phenomenon. As evidenced by the volume of the preceding review, the topic of adult development in general has been of considerable research interest. In regard to the adult development of community college reentry women in particular, however, research is sparse. A set of propositions that distill the theories of adult development discussed in Chapter 2 is presented in the following summary:

Proposition 1: Adults regularly assess their lives questioning themselves and their values.

Proposition 2: Adults are more affected by their own experiences or life events and the timing of those events than by chronological age.

Proposition 3: Adults perform a multiplicity of social roles such as mate, parent, employee, and homemaker, and struggle to maintain a workable balance among them.

Proposition 4: Adults experience numerous patterns of transitions, most of which are marked by anxieties.

In the following, each proposition in the set is briefly summarized in terms of the theories and theorists that have been examined in Chapter 2:

Proposition 1: Adults regularly assess their lives questioning themselves and their values.

Adults take a hard look at themselves and begin to ask questions of self-assessment. As they face the reality of their own mortality, they wonder whether they have left a legacy (Erikson, 1950). Adults become introspective. For women in particular, middle age is a time to redirect unused talents and abilities (Neugarten, 1968). Between the ages of 29 and 32, adults begin to question what they are doing and why. They undergo serious soul searching to reset
priorities. Between 32 and 39, adults experience a time squeeze (Stevenson, 1977). According to the research, in their self-assessment reentry women quickly discern and strongly object to behavior that is sexist, ageist, and/or racist (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Adult learners may fear that their mental capacity has waned too low for them to be able to accomplish college-level work (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

**Proposition 2:** Adults are more affected by their own experiences or life events and the timing of those events than by chronological age.

Neugarten (1968) posited that adults are less affected in their development by chronological age than they are by their own life events. She noted the influence of surprises, lack of predictability, and unexpected things on people's lives. People's own personal experiences have the most effect on their development (Schlossberg, 1984).

**Proposition 3:** Adults perform a multiplicity of social roles such as mate, parent, employee, and homemaker, and struggle to maintain a workable balance among them.

During adulthood, social roles or specific patterns of behavior are expected of individuals (Havighurst, 1953). Social role performance requirements change. Developmental tasks of adult years tend to be the products of the evolution of social roles rather than the product of physiological and mental maturation. Among Havighurst's ten adulthood social roles are worker, mate, parent, and homemaker.

Sheehy (1976) discussed the patterns of characteristic behaviors associated with societal roles such as caregiving and nurturing. Subsequent emotions of despair and depression are often associated with shifts in societal roles (Scarf, 1980).
According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), for the adult learner, role involvements are decisive the feasibility of the pursuit of education. One way reentry women cope with their college problems, including role juggling, is by making friends with other reentry women (Schlossberg et al., 1989), thus supporting Gilligan's (1982b) theories on the significance women place on attachments.

Proposition 4: Adults experience numerous patterns of transitions, most of which are marked by anxieties.

Levinson (1978) reported that adults are in a period of transition when they are experiencing numerous role shifts. These transitional periods are frequently marked by anxiety, depression, and fear of failure (Scarf, 1980) and uncomfortable (Stevenson, 1977). The transitions or changes occur in phases and are important to understanding adult development (Scarf, 1980; Schlossberg, 1987; Sheehy, 1976; Stevenson, 1977). One of the transitions adult learners experience is a loss of control and independence. Traditionally in charge of themselves and others, they come to a school environment and surrender that right (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Contributing to the anxiety of transition are the barriers (institutional, academic, and home and family) that adult learners often find interfere with their pursuit of education (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Adults may be sensitive to “mattering” (Schlossberg et al., 1989) where their college education is concerned. Women may feel marginal; their commitment to the learning institution might increase if they perceived themselves as mattering. Another aspect of anxiety with transition is the feelings experienced upon separation from the college upon graduation. They may go through a mourning process
and feel fear and confusion about what the next step should be for them (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Chapter 2 has presented an examination of two areas of literature concerning reentry women. First, a review of the emergence of the reentry woman in higher education is presented, including definitions of "reentry woman," a brief historical overview of reentry women in education of reentry women, and characteristics of reentry women. Second, the literature of adult development theory is included; particular attention is paid to the adult development of women. Chapter 3 is an exploration of the procedures and methods of analysis.
CHAPTER 3
PROCEDURES AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The following chapter is comprised of four sections. First, a discussion of the qualitative perspective is presented. Second, the design of this study is explained. Third, the specific procedures that guided the coding and analysis of this study are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the credibility of the research methods and intensive, in-depth interview study design that were used in this study.

The Research Perspective

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry women's self-assessment processes, their struggle to balance their new student role along with the duality of roles already performed, the experiences that triggered their reentry, and the transitional nature of their collegiate experience, through the application of adult development theory. The specific questions guiding this study were derived from the research on adult development.

The following questions derived from a review of the literature tested a set of propositions distilled from the theories of adult development and drove the investigation that will be reported in the dissertation.

1. What factor did self-assessment play in these community college reentry women's decision to continue pursuit of higher education?
2. How has assuming the role of college student affected the social roles already performed by these community college reentry women?
3. What factors triggered these community college reentry women's continued pursuit of higher education?
4. What transitions did these community college reentry women experience in their continued pursuit of higher education?

The Qualitative Perspective

Jacob (1988) identified several themes associated with qualitative research; included among these themes are understanding participants' perspectives and employing interviews.

Theoretical perspective

Jacob (1988) observed that a central theme common to qualitative researchers holds two tenets: realizing the importance of the participant’s perspective and knowing what that perspective is. To those ends, Jacob (1988) explained the importance of studying “the subjective aspects of human life as a moving process in which participants are defining and interpreting each others’s acts” (p. 19). To truly document the experiences of the participants, the researcher must have the “ability to place oneself in the position of the individual” (Blumer, 1969, p. 51). Human behavior is best observed in a “holistic cultural context” (Shimahara, 1984, p. 63). This concept is made clearer with the realization that quite the opposite is true of non-qualitative research: “Context stripping is a key feature of our standard methods of experimental design, measurement, and statistical analysis” (Shimahara, 1984, p. 2).

The need for studying a phenomenon in context is appropriate particularly to women. Peck (1986) advocated research on women that used
methodologies "sensitive to the interaction of the person with environment and which allow for the possibility that a person constructs her own reality and responds to her own interpretation of external events (rather than to that of the investigator)" (p. 274).

The investigator must "view human conduct from the point of view of those he is studying" (Denzin, 1970, p. 8). "Taking the role of the acting other permits the [investigator] to escape the fallacy of objectivism; that is, the substitution of his own perspective for that of those he is studying" (Denzin, 1970, p. 8). Qualitative researchers "want those who are studied to speak for themselves" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 5). Qualitative research "has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 7). "Naturalistic inquiry attempts to present 'slice-of-life' episodes, documented through natural language and representing as closely as possible how people feel, what they know, how they know it, and what their concerns, beliefs, perceptions and understanding are" (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 7). Termed "sympathetic introspection" by Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds (1975, p. 51), this concept of seeking the perspective of the participant is supported by three of the leading researchers on female adult development. Gilligan (1982b) in her In a Different Voice, suggested "that the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act" (p. 2). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) in Women's Ways of Knowing describe the "ways of knowing that women have cultivated and learned to value, ways we have come to believe are powerful but have been neglected and denigrated by the dominant intellectual ethos of our time" (x). Miller (1986) in her book Toward a New Psychology of Women applauded what
she perceived as a theme in the large body of new literature on the psychology of women which is:

to describe women's lives and women's development in the terms in which it is lived rather than to force it into the categories which we have inherited, categories that originated in the attempt by men to describe all of life. In the largest sense, all of our prior thinking emerged from men's institutions and men's ways of perceiving. (p. xviii)

The design of this study on community college reentry women demonstrated recognition of the importance of the participants' perspective and knowing what that perspective is. Through the use of intensive, in-depth interviews in conjunction with a survey of the participants' perceptions of their collegiate experience, the design of the study observed Jacob's first theme.

The second theme which Jacob (1988) identified as common to qualitative research is that of using open interviews. Naturalistic inquiry focuses on interaction with people as subjects using interviewing as the typical data gathering method (Eisner, 1985). The long interview (McCracken, 1988) has a "special place in qualitative methodology . . . [It is a] sharply focused, rapid, highly intensive interview process that seeks to diminish the indeterminacy and redundancy that attends more unstructured research processes" (p. 7). The long interview is intended to "accomplish certain ethnographic objectives without committing the investigator to intimate, repeated, and prolonged involvement in the life and community of the respondent" (p. 7). This study of community college reentry women used such ethnographic techniques as semi-structured interviews--including using photo-elicitation--and a survey.

While critics of these techniques see them as "subjective and, hence, unsuited to the development of scientific knowledge . . . too time-consuming for convenient use . . . and . . . not, typically, lend[ing] themselves to the
conventional testing of explicitly formulated theories by procedures subject to independent validation" (Meltzer et al., 1975, p. 59), Blumer (1969) stood firm in his defense of their use as seen when he stated:

the overwhelming bulk of what passes today as methodology is made up of such preoccupations as the following: the devising and use of sophisticated research techniques, usually of an advanced statistical character; the construction of logical and mathematical models, all too frequently guided by a criterion of elegance; the elaboration of formal schemes on how to construct concepts and theories; valiant application of imported schemes, such as input-output analysis, systems analysis, and stochastic analysis; studious conformity to the canons of research design; and the promotion of a particular procedure, such as survey research, as the method of scientific study. I marvel at the supreme confidence with which these preoccupations are advanced as the stuff of methodology. (pp. 26-27)

To this point, a description of a qualitative perspective has been given. Now attention will be focused on the method of the in-depth interview.

The interview

In qualitative research, an interview—that “purposeful conversation, usually between two people . . . that is directed by one in order to get information" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 135)--may be the dominant strategy for data collection. Oakley (cited in Finch, 1984) posited that “formal, survey-type interviewing is unsuited to the production of good sociological work on women [preferring] less-structured research strategies which avoid creating a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee” (p. 72). For this study of community college reentry women, interviewing was employed as the dominant strategy for data collection and was used to “gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 135).
When using in-depth interviewing, "because of the detail sought, most studies have small samples. In some studies, the researcher draws an in-depth portrait of only one subject" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, pp. 2-3). After analysis of data from the preliminary study of screening interviews and the Reentry Woman Student Survey (RWSS) that were conducted with 29 informants, for this present study, 7 informants were identified as having evidenced the most change in their perception of their collegiate experience (The RWSS was discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter). Seven key informants constituted a suitable number because the purpose of the qualitative interview "is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world." A principle for selecting respondents is that "'less is more.' It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them" (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). These 7 women were selected based on the criterion-based strategy of extreme-case selection. For this investigation, "extreme case" referred to those women who, in taking the RWSS, were identified as having experienced substantial change while pursuing their college education. These 7 informants were then interviewed in this study in a series of intensive, in-depth interviews.

With in-depth interviewing, the researcher "is bent on understanding, in considerable detail, how people such as . . . students think and how they came to develop the perspectives they hold" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 2). The knowledge that "women are less likely than men to find questions about their lives unusual and therefore inadmissible" (Finch, 1984, p. 74)
leads the researcher to spend considerable time with subjects in their own environs, asking open-ended questions . . . and recording the responses . . . Most often the researcher is the only instrument, and works at getting the subjects to freely express their thoughts around particular topics. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 7)

Concerning the collection of data through interviewing, “the delicate process of allowing, in fact compelling, respondents to inform the investigatory scope takes deliberate care, great skill, and sincere finesse” (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 7). The interviewing must be as unobtrusive as possible. Being unobtrusive is achieved by

making people feel comfortable that their views are legitimate, talking a language that is the respondents’ language, addressing points that have saliency to them, carefully reducing evaluation apprehension through continuous reassurance and limited amounts of “psychometric paraphernalia” and other “tricknological strategies.” (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 8)

Natural inquiry requires a set of “honorable skills,” some of which include:

listening, question asking, flexibility, coping with ambiguity, and resiliency . . . to think spontaneously, to analyze and synthesize data in situ so as to eliminate or illuminate inferences, to avoid moral pigeonholing, to understand self-prejudices, to take useful field notes and accurately summarize information, . . . to become facile in conversing with people and to learn how to move through natural settings with ease. (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 9)

Listening is of particular importance, and the interviewer must “treat every word [of the participants] as having the potential of unlocking the mystery of the subject’s way of viewing the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 137).

Sometimes it is difficult to “listen carefully to what others say, to force oneself not to be swayed by one’s own biases or the central tendency of the evidence at any given moment” (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 9). The female researcher “with
time to listen and guarantees of confidentiality, not surprisingly finds it easy to get women to talk" (Finch, 1984, p. 75).

Because these 7 key informants also participated in the preliminary study and, therefore, were not the stranger which is often typical in studies relying predominantly on interviewing, “a good part of the work involves building a relationship, getting to know each other, and putting the subject at ease” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 135) had already been accomplished. Good interviews are characterized by informants’ feeling at ease, freely expressing their points of views, producing “rich data filled with words that reveal the respondent’s perspectives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 136). Finch (1984) suggested that when a woman researcher interviews a woman informant, establishing rapport is not necessary. “Women are almost always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher” (p. 72).

Although interviews are “subject to the same fabrications, deceptions, exaggerations, and distortions that characterize talk between any persons” (Taylor & Bogden, 1984, p. 81), they remain effective tools for studying social life. As Becker and Geer (cited in Taylor & Bogden, 1984) suggested, interviewers can “improve their batting average by taking account of the drawbacks“ (p. 83).

An interview schedule was used. It served as a “basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topics” were covered (Patton, 1990, p. 280). Interviews averaged about one and one-half hours each, thus averaging the length of interview time described by Ives (1980) and Taylor and Bogdan (1989). Ives (1980) suggested a “pretty good rule of thumb: one hour, give or take a little” (p. 70) whereas Taylor and Bogdan (1989) recommended two hours for an interview.
The projective technique

To further stimulate interview discussion in this qualitative research design, data collection was extended to the use of the projective technique. A projective technique allowed the researcher to “draw on the interests and enthusiasms” of the respondent (Collier, 1967, p. 47). The projective technique used was photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is the technical term for the method of using photographs to stimulate discussion in an interview. “Photo-elicitation is a technique of interviewing in which photographs are used to stimulate and guide a discussion between the interviewer and the respondent” (Curry, 1986, p. 204). According to Ives (1980), “photographs can be great memory–joggers” (p. 75).

Photo-elicitation “allows for very structured conversation without any of the inhibitive effect of questionnaires or compulsive verbal probes” (Collier, 1967, p. 48). Photo-elicitation is also useful to aid respondents who have difficulty reading and interpreting the language on questionnaires or who do not comprehend the wording of structured questions. The photograph, “rather than a question which may or may not make sense to the informant, becomes the focus of the discussion” (Harper, 1984, p. 21). In the projective interview “photographs offer the thought process a fluency of imagery” (Collier, 1967, p. 58).

“Photography may be described as the ‘universal language’” (Ziller & Lewis, 1981, p. 343). The use of photography is a “significant research breakthrough, since it allows researchers to understand and study aspects of
life that cannot be researched through other approaches” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 102).

Photo-elicitation was useful in this qualitative study of community reentry women because, as Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggested, photographs are useful in research in that they “can reveal what people take for granted, what they assume in unquestionable” (p. 105). On the other hand, photographs may “present anomalies, images that do not fit the theoretical constructs the researcher is forming . . . pushing one’s analysis and insights further than they might originally have gone” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 104).

Photo-elicitation allows the researcher to “ascertain clues about what people value and the images they prefer” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 103). “The more provocative the stimuli, the more general the probes, and the more open the queries, the more likely that reality-based (isomorphic) information will be transmitted and that tacit understanding will occur” (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 7).

Although a relatively recent research method employed by social scientists, the photo-elicitation interview has precedence within anthropology. Caldarola (1985) reported that the 1886-1889 Boas expedition was the first known use of “informant feedback based on photographic records” (p. 36). Collier’s (1967) Visual Anthropology included a chapter “Interviewing with Photographs.” Snyder and Kane (1990) explored the use of photo-elicitation in studying sport as did Curry (1986). Ewen (1979) studied women in beauty parlors through eliciting their personal stories in response to photographs.

Collier (1967) explained the value of using photo-elicitation when he wrote that

projective material in the interview functions as a third agent. Photographs . . . become the object of discussion. This appears
to reduce stress in the interview by relieving the informant of being the subject of the interrogation. Instead his role can be one of expert guide leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures. The photographs allow him to tell his own story spontaneously. This usually elicits a flow of information about personalities, places, processes, and artifacts. Photographic interviewing offers a detachment that allows the maximum free association possible within structured interviewing. (Collier, 1967, p. 48)

When photographs are combined with interviews from key respondents, "the result is a rich mixture of material that may be used in a number of ways" (Curry, 1986, p. 205). For one, the photo-elicitation interview is a "way of building trust: as interviewer and respondent talk about the photographs, they may find their interaction rewarding and mutually enlightening and the interviewer may find a ready invitation to return with more pictures" (Curry, 1986, p. 205). Wrote Collier (1967), "photographs make directional conversation pieces that allow you to draw out" (p 47) the informant's interests.

Another way that the photo-elicitation interview may be useful is to tap hidden emotions that would otherwise be missed (Collier, 1967). "The projective opportunity of the photographs offers a gratifying sense of self-expression as the informant is able to explain and identify content and educate the interviewer with his wisdom" (Collier, 1967, p. 48). The informant "becomes the teacher about a reality which is abstracted and presented in the images which lie between the interviewer and the subject" (Harper, 1984, p. 21).

The photo-elicitation interview may also be useful in eliciting truth. Said Collier (1967), it is "probably more difficult to lie about a photograph than to lie in answer to a verbal question, for photographic scenes can cause violent feelings that are revealed by behavior, flushed faces, tense silence or verbal outbursts" (p. 66). Without becoming an "extremely abstract protective interviewing instrument such as the Rorschach Test" (Curry, 1986, p. 206), the
photo-elicitation interview can "trigger emotional revelations otherwise withheld, can release psychological explosions and powerful statements of values" (Collier, 1967, p. 62). The individual being interviewed "comes to a level of understanding . . . that probably did not exist prior to the interview" (Harper, 1984, p. 21). Collier (1967) found in his study of Navajo Indians that the photographs "were read so evenly by all our informants that the responses were similarly structured, both in content and in length. The test showed a very even containment of values" (pp. 55-56). Ewen (1979) found in her study of beauty parlors that viewers of photographs "derive and create explanations from interacting with visual images: reflections and symbols for social reality" (p. 55).

The photo-elicitation interview would not, of course, serve as the single method of data collection. Its use is not intended to replace other more traditional methods but to be used in tandem with them. While photographs may not be able to conclusively prove anything, "when used in conjunction with other data, they can add to a growing pile of evidence" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 103). Along with demographic data collection and survey data collection, the photo-elicitation interview was used in addition as a "way of fleshing out the attitudes of a few key informants" (Curry, 1986, p. 207). Responses from a photo-elicitation interview (see Appendix K, Summary of Results) were integrated with data from a demographic study (see section III of RWSS, Appendix D), survey, and separate in-depth semi-structured interview.

**Research Strategies and Procedures**

A qualitative methodology was used to collect biographical and experiential data from community college reentry women. A discussion of the qualitative strategies and procedures is presented in the following.
Strategies

Numerous investigative strategies were employed. Among them were included sampling issues; processes; and privacy, anonymity, and ethical treatment.

Selection of the Sample

Critical to design are sampling issues. For this investigation sampling issues of setting, subjects, and processes were considered.

The setting. The setting for this qualitative study was the campus (known as a “center”) of a three-campus community college in a small Southern town. The center consists of one two-story 50-plus-year-old former elementary school building which houses a library, front office, closet-sized bookstore, nine classrooms, science lab, computer lab, student center, and three rooms of faculty offices. Eleven full-time and 20 part-time faculty, in addition to five staff members were employed there.

The screening interviews for the preliminary study took place in the privacy of an empty classroom at the center. The survey of the preliminary study was mailed to the homes of those participating in the screening interviews. In this study, the four interviews--orientation, long, projective-technique based, and exit--took place in that same small Southern town as did the screening interviews of the preliminary study; however, these interview took place in the homes of the respondents, in a local restaurant, in the researcher's car in the parking lot of a grocery store, or in the motel room of the researcher. Four of the 7 informants invited the researcher to their homes which lends support to Finch's (1984) contention that women interviewees respond favorably to
women interviewers. “One is, therefore, being welcomed into the interviewee’s home as a guest, not merely tolerated as an inquisitor” (p. 73).

The subjects. The screening interviews of the preliminary study of community college reentry women were conducted between 1989 and 1990. Purposive (Miles & Huberman, 1984) or criterion-based selection (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) was used as qualitative researchers “typically engage in purposive rather than random sampling” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 25). Purposive sampling requires that the researcher “establish the criteria, bases, or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation [and then find] a sample that matches these criteria” (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). For the screening interviews, the typical-case selection strategy was employed. Community college women students who were 25 years of age or older who were taking at least one daytime course in the college under study, to whom this researcher had easy access, and who were willing to be studied were invited to participate. Twenty-nine were available, a number deemed sufficient to give the researcher a basic overview of the perspective of the community college reentry woman. Entry and access were readily available because at the time of the study, the researcher was employed as an instructor at the community college. As word of the study spread, the network selection strategy or “snowballing” or someone “getting to know some informants and having them introduce” her to others (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 84) was employed. In addition to participants’ recommending others, some reentry women requested to be interviewed. The researcher found that “most people are willing to talk about themselves . . . [and] are often flattered at the prospect of being interviewed for a research project” (Taylor & Bodgan, 1984, p. 86).
For the RWSS of the preliminary study, the same 29 subjects were surveyed in 1990-1991 by mail who had participated in the screening interviews. The number 29 was maintained at this point, even though a survey could easily have been mailed to many more women, because the intention was to continue to narrow down from several informants to a few who would then be studied in considerably more depth. Twenty-three completed and returned the RWSS. Twenty-two indicated that they would be interested in further participation in the study; from those 22, seven were identified to participate in this study.

In this study, the selection of the 7 was based on the degree of change (see Preliminary Study/RWSS) their survey responses indicated they had made during their community college tenure. Based on which of those 7 community college reentry women suggested they had experienced substantial change, their willingness to be interviewed further, the richness of their narrative during the screening interviews, the amount of their course work time accumulated at a community college rather than a four-year college or university, and their availability to meet at times mutually convenient to the researcher, 7 community college reentry women were selected to participate in orientation, long, projective-technique-based, and exit interviews that took place in the 1990-1991 academic school year. All four audiotaped interviews--orientation, long, projective-technique based, exit--were transcribed on word processor by the researcher as soon as possible upon completion of the respective interview; these transcriptions will also be referred to as interview protocols.
Processes

The sampling issue of processes was divided into five parts. The processes to be discussed included types of questions, data reduction, data display, pattern and theme drawing, and reporting the results.

Types of questions. An interview schedule was used to offer some structure to the long interview. Spradley's (1979) step 4 was followed in the investigation. Descriptive questions “encourage an informant to talk about a particular cultural scene” (p. 85). Descriptive questions invited informants “to describe, list, or outline key events, experiences, places, or people in their lives. . . . enabl[ing] people to talk about what they see as important without structuring their responses” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 89).

Interview schedule questions were grouped into families/categories of questions with a variety of probes under each family/category. A probe is “simply a device for eliciting more and better information” in an interview “helping your informant tell his story more completely” (Ives, 1980, p. 66). The families/categories of questions were framed around the propositions distilled from the theories of adult development. Each of the 7 key informants was asked the same family of questions, though the probe and the order when asked might have differed depending on the flow of the interview. Examples of families/categories of questions framed around the propositions distilled from the theories of adult development included self-assessment, life events and experiences that triggered reentry, social roles and significant others’ expectations, and transitions with accompanying anxieties. Examples of probes include: Tell me more about your children’s reaction. Elaborate on how you felt. Explain what that meant for you.
Data reduction. To analyze the semi-structured, open-ended interview, Miles and Huberman’s (1984) model of concurrent flows of activity was used. Two of the three flows of activity used were data reduction and data display. Data reduction refers to the “process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that appear in edited field notes” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 23). Wolf and Tynitz (1977) concurred that “some reduction is necessary” (p. 8) but suggested that “engaging in reduction prior to data collection is . . . myopic” (p. 8). Data reduction is an ongoing process, occurring continuously throughout the study. The researcher took into account the inherent weakness of relying on respondents to self report in the present information on feelings which they experienced in the past (Harris, 1985; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Whyte, 1984) although precedent has been set with such studies as Ryff and Migdal’s (1984) in which they asked middle-aged women to “recall their young adult years and complete the measures in terms of their remembered feelings” (p. 473). In in-depth interviewing, the researcher must spend “enough time with people to ‘read between the lines’ of their remarks and probe for sufficient details to know if they are fabricating a story” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 99).

Data display. Data display is defined as “an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion-drawing and action-taking” and could include “matrices, graphs, networks, and charts” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 24). These displays are part of, not separate from, analysis (see Tables 1 in Chapter 3, Tables 2-4 in Chapter 4).

Pattern and theme-drawing. Searching for patterns of behavior is preferable to searching for statistical laws of behavior (Shimahara, 1984). It is the “social-cultural patterns of experience, or relationships among events [that]
are the matters of importance, not the quantification of human events" (Sherman et al., 1984, p. 26).

Spradley's (1979) domain analysis--task six of D.R.S. was the method of analysis used to determine patterns and themes that are reported in Chapter 4. Domaining indicated how participants' terms were organized by systematically establishing semantic relationships among what Spradley (1979) calls terms and included terms. In the domain or category "self-assessment," for example, cover terms--or terms for cultural knowledge--such as "feelings" were identified as they emerged from the data analysis. Included terms--or, the names for all the smaller categories inside the domain--were identified. The feeling of "anger" was an example. The single semantic relationship linking the two categories is "a kind of"; for example, "anger is a kind of feeling." In Chapter 4, cover terms and included terms consistent with answering each research question were identified, and subsections were organized according to the relevant domains or categories. Descriptive questions (see Long Interview Schedule, Appendix G) generated the responses that were then organized by domain analysis. The 4 domains, 12 cover terms, and 24 included terms are listed in Appendix M; Appendix N lists semantic relationships used in the investigation. A computer software program, GOfer (1989), was used. The software program facilitated the data storage, retrieval essential to the qualitative analysis process, and the analysis process.

Reporting the results. Another processing issue concerning the qualitative researcher is the reporting of the results. Faraday and Plummer (cited in Halfpenny, 1979), in their paper presented at a British symposium, raised the issue of whether researchers can reproduce the understandings of the members of the cultures they have studied. Moving from qualitative data to
the final research report poses serious difficulties. "How does one transform thousands of pages of typed scripts, interviews, biographies, diaries, dreams, observational notes and so forth, onto a coherent, valid and analytically sound "account"?" (p. 817). The range of possible solutions depends on the "extent to which the sociologist imposes his or her own analytic devices upon the subject, or the extent to which the subject's own world is allowed to stand uncontaminated" (Halfpenny, 1979, p. 818). This researcher's analytic devices have been honed through course work in qualitative research and ethnography. Also, in a concerted effort not to contaminate the informant's own world, this researcher included excerpts of informant's comments wherever suitable in the analysis of the results.

Privacy, anonymity, and ethical treatment

The University of Florida Institutional Review Board reapproved on January 25, 1991, this researcher's request to continue research involving human subjects. This approval verifies that subjects are not placed at risk by the research. Also approved was the Screening Interview Informed Consent Process form (Appendix A) which each informant in the screening interviews of Phase I had signed to guarantee her the right to privacy, anonymity, and ethical treatment. "The natural inquiry paradigm respects the integrity of the people and/or situation being explored" (Wolf & Tymitz, 1977, p. 9). Anonymity was insured by virtue of the respondents selecting pseudonyms. "It is almost always wise to use pseudonyms for people and places in written studies" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 87).

Procedures

Data gathering proceeded in two parts. First a preliminary study consisting of a screening interview and the Reentry Woman Student Survey
(RWSS) was conducted. Second, this study consisting of a series of four intensive, in-depth, open-ended interviews was conducted.

**Preliminary Study**

The preliminary study was comprised of two parts. These parts included a screening interview and the RWSS.

**Screening Interview**

In the preliminary study, a purposive-based selection of 29 community college reentry women participated in screening interviews designed to collect general information about the impact of the collegiate experience on community college reentry women. Each screening interview averaged one hour in length. A screening interview schedule (Appendix C) informed by a data analysis of the pilot study (D'Ortona, 1990) was used and included such questions as "How has your family reacted to your returning to college?" and "How do reentry women feel about grades?" Screening interviews were audiotaped. The researcher remained cognizant of Ives' (1980) position that interviewing with a tape recorder is a "triangle with the tape recorder itself the third party" (p. 49), thus taking steps to provide a relatively noise-free environment for the interviews. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed by word processor by the researcher as soon as possible following the interview. The average length of these transcriptions or interview protocols was 10 pages single spaced. Data collected from the screening interviews were coded, domains were determined, themes were identified, and results were reported (D'Ortona, 1990). These results contributed to informing the composition of the 55 items of the RWSS.
The Reentry Woman Student Survey (RWSS)

All 29 participants who were interviewed in the screening interviews of the preliminary study were mailed the Reentry Woman Student Survey (RWSS) (Appendix D) and cover letter (Appendix B). Twenty-three reentry women responded; of those 23, 22 expressed interest in being interviewed further. The content of the RWSS was informed by the analysis of data collected from a pilot study (D'Ortona, 1990) (see Chapter 1) and from the screening interviews, the research on the emergence of reentry women in higher education, the literature of adult development, and a study on adults in career transition (Gilkison & Drummond, 1988). The purpose for using the RWSS was to identify a subgroup of subjects or key respondents from whom additional, more intensive, data were gathered.

The RWSS was divided into three sections. Section I explained that there were no "right" answers, that the informant's first impression would make the best response. This section also assured confidentiality in reporting data, though names would be requested on the instrument for this researcher's record keeping.

Section II contained directions for completing the RWSS. Two responses were requested, one in the left-hand column and one in the right-hand column. The choices for response included: 1: Completely true. 2: Mostly true. 3: True and false. 4: Mostly false. 5: Completely false. The left-hand column was headed "When First Enrolled" and represented the respondent's feelings when she first enrolled at the community college. The right-hand column was headed "When Most Recently Enrolled" and represented the informant's feelings when she most recently took a course at the community college. Examples of the survey's items included: "Feel I am as competent as classmates," "Writing skills
are adequate," and "Feel intimidated by professors." The 55 items were selected to further verify information gathered from the audiotaped, semi-structured screening interviews conducted during the preliminary study.

Section III was a request for demographic information including name, address, phone, age, race, marital status, number of children, economic status, educational level of family members, and future academic goals. In this section the informant also had the opportunity to indicate whether she would like to participate further in the study through intensive in-depth, open-ended interviews. The informant could also request a transcript of her previous audiotaped interview to verify the accuracy of its representation. Space was also provided for any additional comments or suggestions. The researcher's business card and a stamped, addressed business envelope were provided. After two weeks, a reminder (Appendix E) was mailed to those who had not responded.

Data collected from the RWSS were analyzed in two parts. From Section II of the survey, key informants' responses in the "When First Enrolled" column were subtracted from those in the "When Most Recently Enrolled" column. Those numbers for each informant were added, a process that result in a discrepancy score which, when compared to the discrepancy scores of all 23 informants, indicated those women who had the highest discrepancy scores, or, in other words, had experienced the most change from the day of enrollment in community college to the date they completed the RWSS. The discrepancy scores (see Table I) for the total sample ranged from 1 to 53 with a median score of 29.85. From these computations, 7 key informants were identified who had indicated substantial change in their perception of their collegiate experience. The discrepancy scores (see Table 2 in Chapter 4) for the 7 key informants
ranged from 29 to 53 with a median score of 35.3. Based on the criteria of those
the highest discrepancy score, the informants' willingness to be interviewed
further, the richness of their narrative during the screening interviews, the
amount of their course work time accumulated at a community college rather
than a four-year college or university, and their availability to meet at times
mutually convenient to the researcher, these 7 key informants therefore became
the candidates for selection for the four interviews of this study.

Table 1

**RWSS Discrepancy Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name of informant</th>
<th>Discrepancy Score*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tigress</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylee</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annette</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scooter</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambi</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynney</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marnie</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The highest number represents the most change.

Three of the candidates who qualified for further study by virtue of their discrepancy scores--Kylee (47), Bambi (35), and Lynney (30)--were disqualified for not meeting other criteria. Kylee canceled her long interview appointment on the morning of the interview; Bambi had taken the majority of her college work at a nearby university; therefore she was never invited for further interviewing. Kathryn, with a discrepancy score of 35, meeting all other criteria, and being available that morning, became the substitute candidate for Kylee. Jessica's narrative during the screening interview had been richer than Lynney's; therefore Jessica was invited instead of Lynney for further interviewing.

Section III of the survey contained demographic information. These data are reported in the "Description of Participants" section of Chapter 4. A visual display of the demographic summary can be seen in Table 2 of Chapter 4.
This Study

This study was comprised of four interviews. These interviews included an orientation interview, long interview, projective-technique based interview, and exit interview.

Orientation interview

The orientation interview immediately preceded the semi-structured, open-ended interview and took approximately 15 minutes. The orientation interview was used to establish rapport between the researcher and the subject, explain the study, secure the key informant’s written permission to audiotape the interview (Appendix F), and answer any questions the key informant might have had about the interview process. The orientation interview was audiotaped and interview protocols word processed as soon as possible after the interview by the researcher. The orientation interview did not generate data as it was designed to answer participants’ questions, establish rapport, and secure permission to interview and audiotape. The types of questions and concerns raised were noted.

Long interview

The long, or semi-structured, open-ended, interview was used in this study. The intensive, in-depth interview averaged one and one-half hours and was designed to probe more deeply specific information about participants’ perception of the impact of their community college experience. An interview schedule (Appendix G) was used. The interview schedule was constructed from adult development theory. Examples of questions which were asked included: “Why did you decide to reenter college?”; “What event triggered your reentry?,” “What was the attitude of your family about your reentry?” The long
interview was audiotaped and the interview protocol word processed as soon as possible after the interview by the researcher. The average length of the interview protocol was 22 pages, single spaced.

Data collected from the long interview were coded. Codes were informed by the literature of adult development theories. Included among the list of code terms were "reasons," "social roles," "anxieties," and "self-confidence." Spradley's (1979) domain analysis procedure was used. Numerous domains were identified, including coping techniques, competition, and academic goals. Relevant domains along with major patterns and themes are reported in the results in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. A list of the 4 domains, 22 cover terms, and 44 included terms used in data analysis is included in Appendix M.

**Projective-technique-based interview**

In this study, two weeks after the long interview, a projective-technique-based interview took place. The key informants were shown a group of photographs and magazine pictures. The photographs had been taken by the researcher. Subjects (Appendix J) included faculty and staff members, bulletin boards, and scenes from around the community college center. The magazine pictures had been selected by the researcher from various contemporary popular publications. Because selected photographs "can represent the photographer's own view of what was important" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 103), and wishing to avoid any appearance of researcher bias in selection of the photographs and magazine pictures, the researcher asked an expert panel of independent raters to code them as to subject categories.

Raters were asked to look at 44 plastic-sleeved, numbered magazine pictures to determine which 35 or so they would include in the study. The raters'
coding instrument can be seen in Appendix H. In this instrument, raters were asked to circle the numbers of the photographs and magazine pictures which they thought should remain in the study; also they were asked to suggest names of categories that came to mind as they looked at the magazine pictures. Raters' categories included finances, family, motherhood, education, freedom, relaxation, time, success, coping, and pressure. Analysis of their rating data revealed two categories of magazine pictures that were obvious by their exclusion: adult male-female relationships and fantasy. The expert panel of raters was also asked to look at 22 plastic-sleeved, numbered photographs to determine which 15 to use. Within moments, the raters expressed difficulty at completing their task because they could not relate to the photos of the people sitting at their desks and were, therefore, eliminating them, even though they realized that for the key informants, these photos of faculty would have relevance. It was decided that the panel of raters would not select which photos to include. The raters also confirmed that use of both photographs and magazine pictures was valuable to data collection as the photographs would elicit specific response about the collegiate experience and the magazine pictures would elicit more general response.

Informants were requested to follow the directions below in responding to the photographs and magazine pictures. The informant was given an instrument (Appendix I) on which to record her choices.

Directions: Place yourself in this situation.

1. You are sending a series of 17 photographs and magazine pictures through the mail to your long distance best friend with whom you have not visited for the last two years.

2. You want to show your friend what it has been like for you to be a
community college reentry student.

3. From these photographs and magazine pictures in this notebook, pick 7 photographs and 10 magazine pictures.

4. With #1 being the most important choice, in what order would you send them? Please write your choices on this sheet.

5. Also, please select 1 magazine picture which represents the antithesis (or opposite) of your community college experience.

6. There are no “right” or “wrong” choices. Please go with your “gut” reaction.

The researcher left the room for the 20 minutes designated for this exercise. After the key informant had had sufficient time to make her selections, the researcher discussed with her why she made the specific choices and why she ranked them as she did. The projective-technique interviews were transcribed on word processor by the researcher as soon as possible upon completion of the interview.

Data collected from the projective-technique-based interview were also analyzed according to the tenets of selected steps of Spradley (1979) and Miles and Huberman (1984). Data were coded based on the same codes used in analyzing the long interview. Data analysis revealed no new codes or new results. Therefore relevant domains along with major themes and patterns from the projective-technique-based interview were folded into other interview data from the long interview and are reported in the results in Chapter 4 of the dissertation.

Exit interview

Immediately following the projective-technique-based interview, an exit interview was conducted. It took about 15 minutes and gave the opportunity
again for the key informant to ask any questions about the investigation. The exit interview also gave the researcher the opportunity to express her gratitude to the key informants for their participation. In addition, the exit interview established closure to the investigative process. The exit interview was audiotaped and transcribed by word processor by the researcher as soon as possible after the interview. The exit interview did not generate data collection as it was designed to establish closure and to thank participants for their participation. Questions raised and reactions expressed were noted and reported.

**Analysis of the Data**

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry women’s self-assessment processes, their struggle to balance their new student role along with the duality of roles already performed, the experiences that triggered their reentry, and the transitional nature of their collegiate experience, through the application of adult development theory. The specific questions guiding this study were derived from the research on adult development.

Despite a growing interest in qualitative studies, we lack a body of clearly-defined methods for drawing valid meaning from qualitative data. We need methods that are practical, communicable, and not self-deluding; scientific in the positivist’s sense of the word, and aimed toward interpretive understanding in the best sense of that term. (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21)

To analyze the data collected from this study of community college reentry women with methods that are practical, communicable, not self-deluding, scientific, and aimed toward interpretive understanding, a blend of two of Miles and Huberman’s concurrent flows of activity along with selected steps from Spradley’s Developmental Research Sequence Writing Tasks (D.R.S.) were used.
Credibility of Study

Eisner (1981) suggested some of the potential problems inherent in qualitative research. "There is no test of statistical significance, no measure of construct validity in artistically rendered research. What one seeks is illumination and penetration. The proof of the pudding is the way in which it shapes our conception of the world or some aspect of it" (p. 6).

Qualitative data are attractive. They are a source of well-grounded, rich description and explanation of processes occurring in local contexts. With qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations. Serendipitous findings and new theoretical integrations can appear. Finally, qualitative findings have a certain undeniability (Smith as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1984) that is often far more convincing to a reader than pages of numbers. (pp. 21-22)

However, that very undeniability “has its problems” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 22), such as internal validity and reliability.

Validity

Validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings (Goetz & LeCompte, 1982) and represents the primary strength of qualitative research efforts (Goetz & LeCompte, 1982; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In qualitative research threats to external validity are related to transferability rather than generalizability of data because qualitative research findings are embedded in context. Transferability is dependent upon the degree of similarity (fittingness) between two contexts. The naturalist does not attempt to form generalizations that will hold in all times and in all places, but to form working hypotheses that may be transferred from one context to another depending upon the degree of ‘fit’ between the contexts. (Guba, 1981, p. 81)

Inclusion of thick descriptions (Owens, 1982) will address the issue of
transferability.

Internal validity “deals with the question of how one’s findings match reality” (Merriam, 1988, p. 166). In this present study, this researcher has attempted to achieve high internal validity by following the suggestions of Goetz and LeCompte (1984) which are to collect data from informants for long periods of time, interview informants, and to self-monitor. Claims to internal validity were also improved by use of repeated interviews.

Repeated interviews may achieve a different content and quality of information when they are intentionally directed at getting below a preliminary description of events and opinions and seek to elicit an understanding of the respondent's meanings in relation to the topics being discussed. (Laslett & Rapoport, 1975, p. 968).

Strategies that were observed in this present study in order to ensure internal validity, as delineated by Merriam (1988), included triangulation--using 29 informants in the preliminary study, 7 of those in this study's four interviews; collecting data from the screening interview, the Reentry Women Student Survey, and the four interviews of this study--orientation, long, projective-technique-based, and exit interviews; member checks; participatory modes of research; and clarifying researcher's biases. Shimahara (1984) concurred with the importance of internal validity in naturalistic inquiry and suggested adherence to “stressing verbatim accounts of events, confirmation of findings by informants; ... and the use of audio-visual instruments” (pp. 71-72). Areas of vagueness about an interview transcript were resolved by “check[ing] back with the respondent for clarification ... [by] telephone,” thus heeding Patton's (1990) admonition that “guessing the meaning of a response is unacceptable” (p.353).

Further “conclusion verification” was use of a “check for representativeness,” (Appendix L) and “checking for researcher effects on the
site and vice versa" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 28). In addition, attention was paid to “using extreme cases” to test a conclusion about a pattern “by saying what it does not resemble,” and “getting feedback from informants” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 28).

Reliability

Reliability is defined as “the extent to which one’s findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 1988, p. 170). Since reliability is “problematic in the social sciences as a whole simply because human behavior is never static” (Merriam, 1988, p. 170), Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggested that the terms “dependability” or “consistency” would be more appropriate. Halfpenny (1979) concurred that the interpretivist approach “does not provide confirmation . . . but instead increases the plausibility” of findings (p. 816). He saw triangulation for the interpretivist as becoming a means by which plausibility is constructed.

According to Eisner (1981), artistic approaches to research have no comparable mechanism for generalization. However this should not be interpreted to mean that generalization is not possible. While it is sometimes said that ideographic research does not generalize, I think such a conclusion is incorrect. But if so, then how does one generalize from a nonrandomly selected single case? Generalization is possible because of the belief that the general resides in the particular and because what one learns from a particular one applies to other situations subsequently encountered. (p. 7)

The researcher has attempted to ensure the consistency of this study’s results through use of Merriam’s (1988) suggestions to explain the research tradition behind the study, use triangulation in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, and keep an exhaustively detailed audit trail, a process that is further described below under “Objectivity.”
Objectivity

In qualitative research, objectivity relates to the confirmability of data rather than the openmindedness of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Keeping an audit trail is critical to achieving objectivity in a qualitative investigation (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984). An essential part of keeping an audit trail is the use of “some regular log or diary that tracks what was actually done during the operations of data reduction [and] display” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 28). Spradley (1979) advocated the necessity for “field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artifacts, and anything else which documents” (p. 69) the scene under study. The researcher maintained a research log that tracked the procedures that took place, a journal of personal impressions of the process, and triangulation of data collection methods. Immediately following an interview, the researcher honored this “critical time of reflection and elaboration” by writing entries in her journal (Patton, 1990, p. 353). A journal recording this researcher’s “experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems” (Spradley, 1979, p. 76) as they arose was kept. The journal “takes the place of ‘Observer’s Comments’ recorded in participant observation field notes” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 104).

Researcher Qualifications and Biases

Consideration of researcher qualifications and biases is important to the credibility of a research investigation. Issues included the researcher’s educational background and experience, commitment to the study, relationship to informants, and cognizance of the dangers inherent in qualitative research.

Researcher Qualifications

The researcher’s special interest in community college reentry women
stems in part from her recently earning a Certificate in Aging and Adult Studies from the University of North Florida. Also, over the course of the academic pursuit of her Ph.D., she has written seven papers on the subject of reentry students for class assignments. Being 25 or older, female, and in pursuit of higher education, the researcher, could, by some definitions, be considered a reentry woman.

The researcher is further qualified to investigate the impact of community college on the adult development of reentry women because she has taught college-level English for 20 years, all but six of which have been at the community college level. She holds a B.A. in English with a minor in education from Florida Presbyterian (Eckerd) College, an M.A.T. in English/education from Duke University, an M.Ed. in Counselor Education from the University of Central Florida, a Certificate in Adult and Aging Studies from the University of North Florida, and is a doctoral candidate for her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Florida.

Clearly, the interest and commitment of this researcher to the study of community college female reentry students is deep rooted, consistent, and focused. The previously described factors served as a strong foundation for the construction of the present study.

Researcher Biases

Reminded Merriam (1988), "the researcher must also be aware of the extent to which his or her presence is changing what is being observed--including the changes taking place within the investigator" (p. 181). Wolf and Tymitz (1977) recognized the naivete in claiming natural inquiry to be fully unobtrusive. They describe how natural inquiry depends on "gathering . . . data from interviews which build upon one another [such that] each question is an
interaction of the sum of the insights formed from previous transactions" (p. 8). Such interactive methods as conversational interviews “allow respondents to share their stories, experiences, anecdotes, and perceptions” unobtrusively (p. 8).

The researcher was continually cognizant that she enjoyed a friendship with some of these 29 women, that some of them looked to her for career guidance and occasional personal counseling. While some researcher self-disclosure could be expected and may actually be wise--“it is probably unwise for interviewers to hold back their feelings completely” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 101)—the researcher would be advised to “be discreet in the interview, but to talk about yourself in other situations . . . relat[ing] to informants in terms other than interviewer-informant” (p. 101). Also, this researcher was continually alert to the fact that she felt an emotional investment in the “cause of reentry women”—that she felt their story quite remarkable and begging to be told. This researcher also made it a point to remember that in her exuberance she must not unnecessarily interrupt key informants nor interject personal thoughts. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggested, “good interviewers need to display patience” (p. 139). In a concerted effort to counter any personal high regard this researcher might have felt for these reentry women, she kept in mind her training in interview techniques and the value of remaining as unobtrusive as possible.

In addition, realizing that, as Merriam (1988) described, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection” (p. 182), this researcher kept in mind that data will, therefore, necessarily be “filtered through . . . her particular theoretical position and biases” and tried not to exclude “data contradictory to [her] views” (p. 182). As Wolf and Tymitz (1977) warned, however, “undue
concern regarding contamination of data makes the inquiry artificial" (p. 8).

This researcher accepted Merriam's (1988) challenge to the researcher:

> The best that an individual researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process, from conceptualizing the problem to disseminating the findings. Above all, the investigator must examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-a-vis these issues. Self-knowledge can form the guidelines one needs to carry out an ethical investigation. (p. 184)

Miles and Huberman (1984) warned of the "dangers of over preoccupation with method rather than substance and the development of a crippling, mechanical orthodoxy" (p. 28). "Rigor mortis ... to easily confirmable but inane analyses" (p. 28) can set in. This researcher, by being cognizant of the inherent dangers, made every effort not to fall prey to this debilitating condition.

**Chapter Summary**

The qualitative perspective has been discussed in this Chapter. Second the design of the present study has been described. Third, the procedures for analyzing the data have been outlined, and fourth, the credibility of the study has been discussed. In Chapter 4 an analysis of the results of the collected data is presented.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry women’s self-assessment processes, their struggle to balance their new student role along with the duality of roles already performed, the experiences that triggered their reentry, and the transitional nature of their collegiate experience, through the application of adult development theory. The specific questions guiding this study were derived from the research on adult development.

1. In what ways and around what issues did these community college reentry women engage in self-assessment?
2. Did experiences or life events have any influence over these community college reentry women’s decision to continue pursuit of higher education?
3. In what ways did assuming the role of college student affect the social roles already performed by these community college reentry women, and what expectations did significant others have of their performance?
4. Did these community college reentry women undergo any transitions during their collegiate experience, and, if so, what were they?

In this chapter, issues that related to participation in this study are addressed and a profile of the women who participated is presented. The
analysis of results that concludes this chapter is organized to reflect each research question and its companion proposition.

Study Participation

The 7 participants in this study were community college women students 25 years of age or older who were taking at least one daytime course in the college under study, who were willing to be studied when invited to participate and to whom this researcher had easy access. The 7 participants had been identified from the 29 informants who had been available to give the researcher a basic overview of the perspective of the community college reentry woman. Entry and access were readily available because at the time of the study, the researcher was employed as an instructor at the community college. As word of the study spread, the network selection strategy was employed. In addition to participants' recommending others, some reentry women requested to be interviewed.

For the Reentry Woman Student Survey (RWSS) in the preliminary study, the same 29 subjects who had participated in the screening interviews were surveyed by mail. From those 23 who completed and returned the RWSS, 22 indicated that they would be interested in further participation in the study; from those 22, 7 were identified by indication of substantial change to participate in this study. Table 2 ranks the informants according to indicated change.

The 7 key informants ranged in age from 26 to 44. Six informants were Caucasian; one was African-American. One married and one divorced informant had no children; the separated informant had 3 children; the other 4 divorced informants had 1 to 4 children. The four who were divorced reported annual incomes of less than $10,000; the one who was separated reported an annual income of $10-20,000; the two married informants reported annual
incomes of $20-30,000 and $30-40,000. Three (not married, 2 with children) of the 7 were employed. One of the informants enrolled in community college in 1986, 1 in 1987, 2 in 1988, and 3 in 1989. Two (1 from 1988, 1 from 1989) of the 7 graduated during the time of this study.

Table 2

Informants Indicating Substantial Change on RWSS

(1=most change; 7=least change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Discrepancy Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Tigress</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Annette</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Rose</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Scooter</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Kathryn</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Carrie</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Jessica</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of Participants

Table 3 below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample. The respondents are arranged in the order of discrepancy scores from the RWSS.
Table 3

Summary of Demographics (Arranged in Order of Substantial Change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tigress</th>
<th>Annette</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Scooter</th>
<th>Kathryn</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Carrie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic group</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>AA*</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(thousands)***</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>10-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#years of edu.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
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<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reentry date</td>
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<td>1/89</td>
<td>8/88</td>
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<td>8/86</td>
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<tr>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6/91</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6/91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* "C" means "Caucasian"; "AA" means "Afro-American"

** "JW" means "Jehovah's Witness"

*** "less than" is indicated by a minus sign
Scooter is 26, Caucasian, Episcopalian, divorced, has no children, and lives on a reported income of under $10,000. Her mother and father both have master’s degrees. Scooter stands 5’7”, weighs about 115 pounds, has long blond hair, brown eyes, and freckles. “They’re part of my personality,” she laughed. “I like to go to the beach since I live so close to it. I enjoy school very much. It’s a big part of my life right now. I like art and ‘artsie’ things.” She is employed part time in her mother’s picture framing business. Scooter enrolled in the community college the fall of 1988 and graduated June, 1991.

Carrie, 32, Caucasian, Protestant, previously divorced and currently separated from her second husband, is the single parent of two sons, 17 and 14, and a daughter, 7; they live on a reported income of $10,000-$20,000. Her father earned his GED and her mother a high school diploma. She described herself as “5’6” and fat.” Carrie enjoys gardening, sewing, and is active in church. She served in the Coast Guard for eight years as a photojournalist. Enrolled in the community college the spring of 1989, Carrie graduated June, 1991.

Jessica is 35, Caucasian, Protestant, twice divorced, and the single parent of a 9-year-old daughter; they live on a reported income of under $10,000. Her father earned his bachelor’s degree and her mother a master’s degree. Jessica stands 5’8” weighs 125 pounds, has shoulder-length dusty blonde hair and brown eyes. She is very tan. She and her daughter recently auditioned for and won parts in the community theater production of Oliver. She

\(^1\)Fictitious names were selected to ensure anonymity of informants.
is employed as a floral designer. Jessica enrolled the fall of 1986 and has four courses to complete before graduation.

Rose, 37, Caucasian and Catholic, is married to an engineer building consultant, and they have no children; they own their own home and live on a reported income of $20,000 to $30,000. Both of her parents are high school graduates; her husband is college educated. British, Rose stands 5'3", has shoulder-length hair, and is fair skinned. In good health now she “had a hiccup about 18 months ago. My thyroid stopped working, so that was a BIG hiccup” which was life threatening in her case. “I was bed ridden; I couldn’t clean my own teeth.” With poor health behind her now, she enjoys aerobics and swimming at the health club. “I’m always out and about.” She also gardens, likes to go to movies, theater, and to vegetarian restaurants. A former airline hostess, Rose is currently secretary to her husband’s new building consultant business. She began classes the spring of 1989 and, after having lost a semester’s courses to immigration red tape, she hopes to complete her degree by December, 1991.

Annette, 38, African-American, Jehovah’s Witness, and divorced, is the single parent of three sons, ages 14, 17, and 19, and a daughter, 12; they live on a reported income of under $10,000. Her father did not graduate from high school, but her mother did. Annette stands about 5 feet and weighs about 200 pounds. She loves nature, particularly “clouds, trees, and water.” Annette waitresses and cleans motel rooms. She began community college the spring of 1988 and will graduate upon successful completion of the math portion of the CLAST (see Definition of Terms) test.
Tigress,\textsuperscript{2} 39, Caucasian, and Catholic, is married to an aircraft estimator; they are parents of a 5-year-old daughter and own their own home, living on a reported income of $40,000 to $50,000. Both her parents graduated from high school; her husband is college educated. An Italian American, Tigress has brown curly hair, brown eyes, olive complexion, and stands about 5'1." She said, "I'm a very strong, energetic, and athletic person." After her husband was diagnosed with Guillan Barre disease, she enrolled in the community college the summer of 1987 and is one course shy of graduation.

Kathryn, 44, Caucasian, Protestant, and divorced, is the single parent of 13-year-old daughter who lives with her and a 17-year-old son who does not; their income is under $10,000. Her father is college educated, and her mother has a two-year nursing degree. She described herself as

\begin{quote}
5'7," 124 pounds, and I have sort of sandy hair that's beginning to show some signs of gray (laughed). I love to be outside, so I'm probably tanner than a lot of people are. I have blue eyes, and I am not gorgeous. I'm REASONABLY ok attractive for somebody who is 44 years old. I do try to take care of myself and eat healthily.
\end{quote}

She began in the fall of 1989 and is one-third of the way through her community college program.

The reentry women who are married have college-educated husbands thus supporting the findings of O'Connell (1977). The above profile of the seven informants supported the findings that reentry women are members of a diverse population and, therefore, difficult to classify (Holliday, 1985; Lewis, 1988).

\textsuperscript{2}This informant requested this animal alias in order to symbolize her fighting spirit.
Rationale for participation

The informants described a variety of reasons for their participation in this particular investigation; some expressed multiple motives. Three informants said their interest in participating resulted from their desire to help the researcher. For instance, former English student of the researcher's, Scooter said,

I would like to help you in the completion of your Ph.D. It's neat to me because it's something you kind of gave us FIRST! It's neat to be a part of your project now, to help you go on and continue your education when that's kind of something you helped us do.

Kathryn expressed a somewhat similar sentiment in that she agreed to help the researcher as a favor to Tigress; at the time, Kathryn had never met the researcher, but said, "You were so highly thought of." For Annette, participation was her way of reciprocation to people who had helped her in the past. Annette said, "Thank you for asking me. I hope it helps you as much as . . . all the people that helped me" while I was in college.

Some of the informants related to the personal joy they were experiencing by having been included. Kathryn said, "Thanks for the opportunity. It was lots of fun." Annette remarked when thanked for her participation, "Oh, I enjoyed it!" "Tigress" said, "I am looking forward to an interview with you." "Rose" wrote "I would be only too pleased if I could be of further assistance to you." Scooter, after the photo-elicitation interview said, "Is that it? I'm not glad it's over."

Some informants found participation in a research project to be flattering. Kathryn said, "I feel it a privilege you included my story." Annette said, "Thank
you for your patience and for considering my information be so very important." Said Tigress, "I'm very proud to be a member of this. Thank YOU."

Another reason for participation was to "further the cause" of reentry women. Tigress, for instance, said she would have been "disappointed" had she not be selected to participate in this study because she thought that the "reentry woman story" was an "Important" one to tell. Kathryn, who at the time she reentered considered returning to college a "horrendous penalty in life," was impressed that "someone cared" and, therefore, was willing to share her story.

**Preconditions for participation**

Numerous factors predicated an informant's willingness or ability to participate in this study. In exploring her personal history, the informant would have to undergo thoughtful self-examination in order to come to terms with explanations for her behavior, reasons for her priorities, and evaluation of her decisions. Verbalizing these reflections would require permitting the researcher to probe areas which might be painful or embarrassing. The study participants, therefore, were reentry women who were, at some level, willing to engage in and endure the emotional discomfort that facing oneself might elicit.

**Analysis of Data**

A reporting of the results and an analysis of the data are organized to reflect each research question and its companion proposition. Immediately following the questions is a list of the cover terms and their included terms (see Chapter 3) that are relevant to the domain that informs the question. At the conclusion of each question's section is a summary that discusses the applicability of adult development theory to community college reentry women.
Research Question 1. In what ways and around what issues did community college reentry women engage in self-assessment?

Two cover terms with five included terms in the domain of self-assessment emerged. They were "decision to return" with "financial independence," "self-improvement," and "academic majors"; and "decision to persevere" with "self-confidence" and "competition and grades."

Decision to Return

Several factors shaped the self-assessment process of a reentry woman. These included her decision to return to and her decision to persevere in college once enrolled. The informants’ self-assessment process for deciding to reenter college was two-fold. It included grappling with their reasons for returning and determining at least preliminary direction in academic majors.

Informants reported numerous reasons for reentering college that fell within the diversity of reasons for women’s reentry found by Clayton and Smith (1987), Holliday (1985), and Nordstrom (1989). Two primary reasons that emerged included the need for financial independence and the desire for self-improvement.

Financial independence

One reason offered by the informants for their return to college was their strong desire for financial independence corroborating the findings of Clayton and Smith (1987), Datan and Hughes (1985), Dziech (1983), and Holliday (1985). All the informants reported money to have influenced their decision for reentry; however, Kathryn, Jessica, Scooter, Carrie, and Annette stressed financial independence was a critical concern.

Four of the informants--Kathryn, Jessica, Scooter, and Annette--reported living on annual incomes of $10,000 or less. Carrie, being supported by her
estranged husband, reported that she and her three children live on $10,000 to 20,000. The two married informants reported the highest incomes, Rose at $20,000 to 30,000, and Tigress at $30,000 to 40,000. All seven informants mentioned money problems as figuring into their decisions to pursue their educations.

Tigress reported the highest income, but due to her husband's hospital bills, she has had to "put in for a scholarship . . . in the teacher shortage area. $4000 a year. That helps. $2000 for tuition, books and everything ." Anticipating the 90-minute commute to the university in the fall, she said, "I'm going to have to get another car. This one has over 100,000 miles on it." Frightened that her husband's illness may take his life, Tigress said, "I personally feel very pressured for time. I'm kind of nervous about having to take three years to get my last two years done."

Another informant, Kathryn, lamented,

I've already wasted two and one-half years of my five years of alimony just trying to find myself. Now I'm going to go for it in a big way. I continually feel the clock is ticking on me. That is significant as far as my education is concerned.

In order to return to college she had to consider whether she would have enough money to pay her living expenses. She exclaimed, "I'm living hand to mouth, now." Because of the familiarity of having lived there when married and the security of a guard on the premises, Kathryn and her daughter together made their decision to live in the ocean side condominium at $200 more a month than an apartment in town would have cost, knowingly sacrificing the personal "extras."

We have made the decision, so we go without things like new CLOTHES, we don't eat out, we don't go to movies; the extra money goes into the GAS TANK because we live so far out, and it goes into our rent.
A 3 million dollar law suit brought against her former husband's now-defunct construction company was also a financial obstacle to her returning to college. Even though she was secretary of the company on paper only--"somewhere between making bread and baking cookies" her husband had her sign "this piece of paper"--she is consequently the target of the suit because the other 200 employees have declared bankruptcy. "I don't even have the money to hire a lawyer to tell me how to declare bankruptcy!" If her car is confiscated during the court proceedings, she said, "it's a long bicycle ride [25 miles] to school."

Kathryn did try to supplement her income by working for an area optometrist. Initially delighted when he offered her $7.00 an hour instead of the $5.00 she had expected, she saw her hopes for financial security soon shattered, however.

Our paychecks were bouncing. I was fending off his creditors on the phone when I had just divorced a man whose creditors I'd been fending off on the phone, not to mention my own that were coming after me for 3 million.

Kathryn, for instance, saw "TREMENDOUS freedom" in "getting to the point where I'm employable and can take care of myself economically." She told herself while she was employed as a $7.00 per hour optometrist's assistant, You have got a choice here. You can spend the rest of your life going from job to job getting paid menially and being at the mercy of somebody else, or you can take control of your life, get yourself an education, PICK out what you want to do, and have some say so over who you work for instead of having to take a job because it was the only thing in the paper.

Another informant, Jessica, returned to college to "get a decent-paying job." She explained, "when I first moved to Florida, I got supposedly a real good job that paid $10,500 for the government. HERE that's a great job. Which works
out to less than $600 a month, once everything’s taken out.” She quickly realized that she and her daughter would not survive long on that income. Jessica knew that she could not afford college. Instrumental in Jessica’s deciding to return was the college’s advertisement in the newspaper about the availability of the Pell Grant to single parents. Part of the financial obstacle for Jessica is the high cost of proper day care for her 9-year-old daughter.

Even if you find a sitter that is only going to charge $3.00 an hour, some of your classes are three hours, several times a week, and it works out to over $100 a month which, especially if you are a full-time student and not working, you DEFINITELY don’t have.

With the Pell Grant in addition to her court settlement and child support, Jessica was able to return to college.

Scooter had been left destitute after her divorce. She had previously worked for an automobile dealership in an 8:00 to 5:00 job found making minimum wage “discouraging” and felt she “could do more with [her] life.” She wanted to “improve [her] standard of living” because she had “been poor so long.” Her dream is to buy a house. “Money is kind a small inspiration for me. The education part of it is more important . . . but the money would be nice, too. The payoff. It DRIVES me.” Now heading for a career in engineering, Scooter stressed that one reason she opted to return to college was to have the freedom to PICK and choose what I want to do with my life, and not rely on someone else for support, like a husband. Be able to marry someone just because I love him and not because he’s paying my bills.

Her parents subsidized her relocation to a different town. Had it not been for her mother’s continued financial generosity, Scooter would not have been able to attend college. In the early days of her collegiate career, Scooter’s mother helped pay for tuition and books. Then she hired Scooter to work in the family
frame shop. “She let me work a lot of hours so I could earn good money.” To be able to afford the expense of college, Scooter took in roommates, watched her budget, did not shop as much as she used to, and subsisted on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches the last days of each month. “It was real easy when I started out and just took one class. That was pretty affordable. When you get serious, and you start taking two and three, you have to come up with the money.”

Carrie returned to college because facing an impending divorce, she would soon be the primary support her three children. The uncertainty of how much longer she could depend on her estranged husband’s benevolence to support the family, however, frightens Carrie into pursuing her education as quickly as possible.

A husband that wants to be an ex-husband said I’d better get my butt out there and find a job. . . . We’ve managed to milk him a long way. I guess that’s what we’re doing. . . . It’s so odd. . . . I truly believe that the only reason a man who cannot stand me has supported me for two years is because . . . One, God is looking out for us, but also, . . . it would almost be taboo--it might be scary to him--to just dump us because of HIS belief [devout Roman Catholic]. I could be wrong. We’ll see. But it’s been almost two years. And that’s almost unheard of! No legal separation . . . He’s just doing it, and he does not want to be doing it. But he doesn’t dare not.

Carrie added, “I knew I needed the college degree to open up the doors for me. It’s the bottom line reason.” She had learned from years of minimum wage jobs since her dropping out from 9th grade that “without a college degree, you make minimum wage, you don’t advance, doors are closed, applications don’t get read.” Had it not been for the financial support of her almost-ex-husband, Carrie would not be able to afford college and feed her three children. “I can remember not having food in the refrigerator.” To her, “money, represented one
of the obstacles about getting my college education. Where would the money come from? Every semester, would there be money there? Would I be able to continue?" She knew that if she dropped out of school, the support would stop.

I wasn't working when I started college, and I'm not working now. I did clean houses. Last year . . . . I mean I LOVE to clean, but I just wasn't getting paid enough to clean somebody else's mess. I'd rather tighten my budget here because I just wasn't making big bucks.

Annette, the single parent of four children, faces finances as a constant obstacle to most of what she wants to do in life. When she decided to start school, she was holding down four jobs: nursing, educational assistant for the visually handicapped and blind, cleaning houses, "and then my own family. I count that as a job (laughing)." Separated for 12 years but divorced only one, her ex-husband has not paid his court-decreed share of the burden. "There would be off and on payments, and they wouldn't be as much as he was supposed to pay." She took him to court but has seen little satisfaction. "I don't have a lot. Sometimes I went on $300 a month or less." She received tuition money from the Pell Grant and was employed by the college work study program.

But when you don't get your money half the time when it's supposed to be there, your other bills get kicked back, your checks start bouncing. It's a big TURMOIL. So I really didn't have anything much because after I finished paying for the bounced checks, you end up with nothing. You couldn't rely on it. It wasn't a sure thing. Then when you're not getting any child support either, that doesn't help either. . . . I only got my money [Pell Grant] every term; that was it. And it wasn't enough to stretch, at all.

For Rose, money may not have been an obstacle to her attending college, but was a factor to be considered. Rose originally wanted to take only a course or two in math and English, an expense she could afford. However,
about the time she got "hooked" and enrolled as a full-time student, her husband decided to establish a new business. To accommodate the substantial change in income along with the new expense of college, they sold their home and bought a triplex, figuring the rental income would help defray expenses.

**Summary.** The informants engaged in self-assessment when they took stock of their financial situations. All of the informants with the exception of one--Rose, who is married and has no children--acknowledged their poverty or in the cases of Carrie, Kathryn, Tigress, the tenuous condition of their "wealth," and made the decision to return to college so they could gain the credentials that would later earn them a more secure financial future.

**Self improvement**

A second motivator reported by 4 of the 7 reentry women as reason for their decision to return to college was their desire to improve themselves in some very personal way, or, as Jessica summarized perhaps for all reentry women when she said, "I went back to college to further myself. That's what [reentry women] are striving for, to better ourselves . . . for improvement."

Tigress and Scooter wanted to change their lives in a general sense. Kathryn and Annette were looking for something more specific. The informants' desire for self-improvement supported the findings of Clayton and Smith (1987), Dziech (1983), and Holliday (1985).

Speaking generally, Tigress espoused a wish to improve society by improving herself. Long before the impetus of her husband's illness driving her back to college, Tigress wanted "to accomplish something with [her] life," she said. "I'm not in it for the money. I want the education." Scooter, realizing that "knowledge is power" returned to college "to really change my life around from where I was." She wanted to "expand [her] mind. The more you know, the
further you get. Not necessarily to get a job or make good money but just to do it for [herself]."

Talking in more specific terms, Kathryn believed she needed the positive strokes that succeeding in college would bring her in order to regain respect for herself as a person. Divorced after 20 years of marriage, she had not realized that her "whole existence was being affirmed by two children and a man." She explained, "I had to start all over again as if I was a child to try to love myself, to feel that I was a successful human being without anybody saying I cooked dinner well."

Annette, like Kathryn, was starting fresh, trying to regain her self respect and desiring to set a proper example for her children. Annette sought self improvement by wanting "to take more control of her life." She said, "I used to have [control] until I got married. Then it was like the thumbs were on me. I thought that by going back to school I could find myself again."

Having "found herself" again, Annette believed she would then be equipped to be a good role model for her four children. She said she returned for "my kids, my kids. Trying to get them a better basis of life. If they see me succeed, then they can go on and succeed. You've got to be a good example. You've got a one in a million chance that they may turn out well." It had been the sight of a 13-year old neighborhood girl pushing a carriage with HER baby in it that sent waves of fear through Annette's maternal heart.

I thought about how much time I spent away from my kids working. I counted up how many hours I wasn't with them and they had no parental support. When I saw that girl, it just clicked. I said, I've got to go back to school. I've got to do something.
Summary. Self-assessment played a factor in the informants' having recognized individual, very personal areas in their lives in which they felt a deficit. Weary of feeling shame or embarrassment because of substandard language skills or the inability to make simple computations or being unable to converse knowledgeably about world events, these women vowed to take action to improve themselves.

Academic majors

Informants expressed divergent academic goals. Rose, Carrie, and Scooter had no academic major in mind when they first enrolled in community college. Rose had declared no major but primarily wanted to improve her math and English skills. Eventually she evolved into the political science arena.

Carrie had no “college knowledge,” as she put it, when she first enrolled, so she “took just classes that seemed as if they would be fun, enlightening.” With no academic plan early in her college career, she subsequently graduated with nearly 100 hours when only 60 were required for graduation. Eventually Carrie decided to major in secondary education biology; she said, “but I felt real uncomfortable about doing that because I knew that I didn’t want to teach high school unless I had to, and if I did it wouldn’t be for very long.”

Scooter had no declared academic direction either when she first started at the community college.

When I first started, I just wanted to take a couple of classes because I was so unsure about it, really apprehensive about going back because I was so much older than the other students. See how it was, just kind of feel my way out.

In order to have “some direction,” she initially declared a business major. “The engineering kind of evolved after I took a lot of math classes, and I realized that I
was really interested in science and math.” Scooter said she reached a point “where [she] finally decided [she] had to decide.”

Kathryn, Jessica, and Tigress had specific academic goals when they reenrolled at the community college, but they changed their plans along the way. Kathryn originally considered becoming a counselor dealing with adolescents primarily, but when she realized that she would not have enough alimony to study for a master’s degree in that field, she selected plan two which was to become a nurse.

That was a QUICK thing; two years and I’m getting a good job. Then, I thought, no, I’m developing this love for psychology. I really maybe want to go all the way with that. What I really have decided I think I would be happy doing is teaching. I have had the opportunity to observe a second grade classroom, and I just felt so comfortable in the environment. It just felt right for me. I’m even considering that once I get employable at that level going on for my master’s degree [alimony or not], maybe getting into special education or maybe guidance.

Jessica also changed her original plans because of the dual pinch of limited time and money.

I used to work in federal court when I first came back, so I started going into law. But I figured I'd be 40 to 45 before I could afford to pay rent; I decided I needed something in a couple of years instead. I've always been interested in nursing. Either physical therapy, nursing, or some sort of psychology field. I really haven’t even figured out what I want to do. I want my R.N. before I decide. I want to be employable. And a floor nurse is not what I want to be. But I want the R.N. so I'm employable anywhere in the world. And I want to go on from there; I intend to take it into alcohol, probably.

When asked if that would be alcohol counseling, she replied, “it doesn’t pay well.” Later she volunteered, “I'm a recovering alcoholic. And I feel I can make a difference. The knowledge you have, and you can get your life back together. Self esteem is a big part of it. Because if you’ve been totally robbed of it, then it’s important to build back.” Jessica explained that while anybody can “get a
job—just go to McDonalds,” what is more important is “what you want to do with your life.” She looks forward to having a job eventually that is “going to make a difference.”

Tigress altered her academic plans, too, once she had settled into taking college courses. “I love education.” She expressed concern about the recent layoffs of teachers. “The same thing happened to me 22 years ago. There was a teacher glut, and they didn’t need teachers any more. Instead of finishing out my education, I became disoriented, disenchanted, and left.” At one time she had considered business-oriented fields and possibly medicine. She had also thought about a career in law. But now she is determined to return to her original dream of becoming a teacher. “I want to teach special education. I need a B.A. I’m going to [a nearby state university]. They have a special education program for learning disabled that I’m going to work in. I have always wanted to be a teacher.”

Tigress maintained a positive attitude by constantly reminding herself of her academic goals.

Have a goal. Stay directed toward that goal. When you become disoriented, regroup and regather yourself, and go back to your goal. Write that goal out on paper and tape it to your bathroom mirror. When you look at it, you keep your goal in your sights.

Annette has been focused on a career in computers from the day she entered college, although she realized that she had some other options. “I like to study the human body. Sometimes I wonder if I should have been a scientist.” Everybody in her family is in medicine. “I COULD have,” she explained. “You’re talking to somebody who birthed her own son. Delivered and every thing else.” Annette selected a career in computers, however, because knowledge of computers would open up a wide range of employment possibilities. Also,
Annette admittedly loves a challenge. She saw as a challenge the fact that so few African-Americans held computer jobs. "I could use my mind to overcome a [racial] stigma that some people have."

Annette, too, was spurred on by her goal setting. In describing a magazine picture [from the photo-elicitation interview of this study] of a female archer, Annette said, "That looks like me. You've got to set you eye on a goal and try to make sure you're going to hit that arrow straight. You've got to put everything else aside and get that goal in focus. Once that goal is in focus, you can go!"

Evidence of Annette's commitment to her goals was clearly seen in her decision to put her studying over the need of a son. "My son had been picked up [in another town] for a ticket. I got a phone call that I needed to come and get him out of jail. But I had a major test the next day, so I said, 'I can't do it.' I went and got him the night after the test."

Summary. The reasons derived through self-assessment that were given by this population for reentry into higher education were varied. Concerning academic goals, 3 of the 7 informants had no academic major in mind upon reentry; 4 did. Six of the reentry women altered their choice of major after reenrolling.

Decision to Persevere

The informant's self-assessment process for enabling her to persevere was two-fold. It included confronting her level of self-confidence and confronting her desire to compete. All seven of the informants reported a lack of self-confidence. This lack of confidence often reflected itself in terms of fear.
Self-confidence

Lack of self-confidence is characteristic of the informants, a finding corroborated by the research (Hunter, 1990; Nordstrom, 1989; Prahl, 1981). Carrie remembered her fear in driving onto the community college campus to request scheduling information.

I was nauseous, had sweaty palms. It was a sunny afternoon. People that I knew from church were standing outside, yet I was TERRIFIED to ask where the office was. It was real scary. And look, it's just this little old two-story building. It might as well have been a mountain.

For many reentry women, the lack of confidence derived from a fear that their intelligence level and their mental capabilities are suspect. Kathryn described the anxiety expressed by many reentries: "When you've been out of school for many, many years, you have this feeling 'I don't know whether I have active brain cells or not!' Not having been challenged mentally, college seems bigger than life.”

Jessica feared that her past alcoholism had affected her mental capacity. “Especially with my past [of alcohol], I was really worried about whether I had killed too many brain cells. I thought that some of the smarts were just plain gone.” Jessica's psychology instructor confirmed her lack of confidence after she expressed surprise at earning "As" on a final exam and a final paper. "You do really well. The only person that doesn't believe in you is you.”

Already assessing oneself as having questionable intelligence might easily lead one to doubt her ability to succeed in college work. Informants doubted their ability to succeed in math courses thus supporting numerous researchers who have reported reentry women's specific fear of mathematics (Astin, 1976b; Kostka & Wilson, 1986; Prahl, 1981; Tobias, 1980).
Carrie, for example, said, “I lived with a fear that I was stupid and that I wouldn’t be able to give anything to society and be a good role model for my children. Rose, too, was sensitive about her intelligence. “I walked into my math class thinking this is going to be the end of my world,” her biggest fear being to “admit [her] ignorance.” Rose firmly believes that she would not have been successful in mathematics--and perhaps, therefore, not in college--had it not have been for an instructor who addressed the issue of math anxiety early in his course. Rose trusted his advice to “relax” and believed “he was going to take us step by step and teach us math--and he did. That has gotten me all the way [from Developmental] through Finite.”

Carrie had also feared mathematics when she first began her community college career. “Starting with absolutely no math skills whatsoever and finishing calculus with a B. It was the most stress that I’ve had--you know, the math sequence is the toughest and scariest, and I finished it.

Kathryn admitted, “I was afraid that I would not be successful.” Her “big fear” was that “math is going to get to be a bigger and badder monster [laughed].” This attitude certainly was reinforced by her having grown up in a time “that women were still expected to be homemakers.” Consequently, her father had not encouraged her to attend college because “he felt that I would just waste the money by getting an education, then getting married, and it would never be used.” Her own mother, a woman who had herself benefited from two years of training in nursing, had reinforced Kathryn’s low confidence level. “My mother has never been one who has EVER encouraged me, EVER. In fact, she is the one that can be MOST significantly contributed to my low self-esteem. I don’t think she’s ever really believed in me 100%.”
Kathryn explained that her penchant for doubting her mathematical capabilities has been ingrained since her teens.

School was not something I had ever loved to do. . . . I had been programmed in high school as a failure, especially in the area of math. When I struggled with Spanish and Algebra, I was told by my father that I wasn't college material and, therefore, I should change my courses from precollege to business, which I did, and at that time, programmed me for failure as a student. I went on to two years at a business school and always have thought of myself as not having the ability to do math.

This feeling of being programmed for failure haunted Kathryn into adulthood. At 43, "I even came to the school, talked to counseling, and signed up two different times in two different terms, and withdrew because I lost my confidence." Kathryn told a story of how her low confidence in her math abilities followed her even into her brief stint in the work place.

I have NEVER felt confident in math; I always thought Algebra was probably the worst thing that could happen to anybody on earth. And my great quote was, "I'm 44 years old, I have never needed Algebra up to this point. What on earth am I going to do in the next 44 years with Algebra?" So I go to work for this optometrist, and the first thing he does is teach me how to use a lensometer on which you have to add and subtract algebraically. And as he's showing me this, my eyes go to the sky, and I say "God, you have got ONE HECK of a sense of humor!" And it went downhill from there.

To overcome her lack of confidence, Kathryn decided at first to take only two courses at a time. "That got me over the first hump. Then I could take a couple more." She continued, "to come back to school can be terribly overwhelming. You just have to do it at your own pace and be sort of good to yourself at the beginning."

Three of the 7 informants expressed fear that younger students would perform better in college, a finding that corroborated the work of Mangano and
Corrado (1979). Carrie explained that she had fear at returning to college at 36 because she had dropped out of school in the ninth grade. "I left school when they were teaching pre-Algebra. There's a whole ball park of things I've missed. I thought everyone at college would already have a head start on me." The thought of younger students outperforming her became a reality. "I've taken botany and chemistry with a young girl. She does not study, skips classes, goes to the beach, NEVER, EVER studies, and ALWAYS makes a higher grade than I do!"

Jessica shares Carrie's frustration in competing with younger students. Said Jessica, "I have this feeling that I have to work harder than the younger students around me who are making the same grades and are going surfing while I'm studying."

Having graduated from high school or not, reentry women, according to Kathryn, share Carrie's view that others in college might be more prepared. Reentry women are "all intimidated by younger students because they figure since younger students are fresh out of high school, they can remember the basics and are disciplined to study."

Informants' concern about stress and their capacity to handle it well was underscored during the projective-technique-based interview. Six of the 7 informants selected as most representative of their collegiate experience a magazine picture of a female archer; the caption on the picture read: "Don't crack under pressure."

A method for reentry women to combat fear comes from Tigress. She admitted that at first she was "frightened, very frightened because I didn't think I had the capability of doing [college work]." She suggested for the reentry woman who is fearful of her abilities to achieve in college to do the following:
Don't shortchange yourself. Don't fall prey to believing that you can't accomplish anything unless you have a man by your side. Realize that you are an individual and that you can do and achieve anything you put your mind to. Just believe in yourself.

**Summary.** Through self-assessment early in their reentry, informants had to face the fact that they did not know or did not remember how to study efficiently, compute algebraic equations, or write English compositions—in short, how to do college-level work. From the beginning they had to assess their willingness to swallow their pride, admit ignorance, and accept help.

**Competition and grades**

Another important aspect of reentry women's self-assessment was facing the challenges of competition, particularly where grades were concerned. By their own admission, the informants were highly competitive, but not necessarily with one another. All the informants with one exception claimed they did not compete with one another. Tigress, however, said,

I don't think we're conscious of it, but I think we're all competing with each other. We're trying to work with each other to get it, but when we don't, we're kind of like, "How come YOU got it and I didn't?" None of us has openly admitted it. This is the first time I've really ever voiced it.

All of the informants professed to competing with themselves, however. Rose, at first denied it with the assertion, "I'm not a competitive person. I don't do well under competition, and I don't enjoy it. To me, it's stress I don't need, and that's why I don't participate usually." Moments later, however, she added, "Maybe I should take that back . . . . Yes, that's true. I'm a perfectionist by nature. I just want to do the best at whatever I start." Kathryn described the competition as being "like a golf game. You're playing against yourself." Annette agreed. "I compete with myself. Can I? Yes, I can. Should I? Yes, I should. Will I? Yes, I
will.” Scooter said “I like to compare grades, but it’s not so much ‘I got a better grade than you did’ as to keep myself striving for excellence in education.” Carrie confirmed that the competition is with oneself. “It’s competition within yourself, with yourself. I don’t feel competition with another reentry woman at all. I am genuinely happy when other women do well, and I think they are the same way toward me.”

All the informants admitted—to their dismay—their obsession with making high grades. The data that reentry women consistently earned high marks support the findings of Bueche (1986), Hall (1981), and Lewis (1988). Said Rose, grades “mean so much. I love learning and I love being in college, but unfortunately I am allowing it to be tarnished by desires (laughed) to have “As.” She added that she has had to admonish herself “remember why you’re there—to get an education!” While on the one hand she can tell herself, “This is ridiculous. You’ve got to back off on this,” on the other, she realized when she discussed transferring with university officials,

how important my grades WERE. So I feel like I’m being torn a little bit between sitting back and enjoying it and taking the time, maybe, in Humanities, for instance to read a book that we’ve just learned about; instead of taking that time to read a book—which I’ll probably never go BACK to—I’m devoting the time to trying to learn the study sheet down verbatim so I’ve got the exam down. And I think maybe I’m cheating myself.

Kathryn admonished herself about her compulsion to make “As.” She said, “I can’t get over my desire to have an ‘A’ in every class. It’s REAL important to me.” She credits high grades with having given her the “self-confidence and the courage to go on.” She continued, “I’ve got to try to back off of that a little bit because I’m putting too much stress on myself and I need to be able to say that
it's ok to have a 3.8 --just in case, you know! I don't want to be jumping off any bridges.

In an attempt to shed some understanding on reentry women's compulsion to earn high marks, Kathryn offered two possible explanations. One reason may be linked to divorce. "When you come out of a divorce, you feel a sense of failure," so she was trying to "prove [herself] in some area." A second reason for the compulsion over grades may be an age factor. Reentry women in general, according to Kathryn, possess an attitude of: "I am so old that I had better get an 'A.' I HAVE to. Any thing less is just about a failure." She continued,

We demand a lot of ourselves, and because of our age group, we expect that others would expect that much of us, too. That because we have had more life experience, we should be able to draw on that, retain more, and apply more, too.

Jessica went so far as to say "It's kind of scary." Reentry women are so focused on the concept of "GOT to have the 'A.'"

Scooter acknowledged that grades were important, but she tried not to make them "THE most important thing." Scooter added that good grades make her "feel good about herself" and she expressed pride at having graduated "with honors," especially in light of her low G.P.A. upon first returning to college.

Carrie's view suggested she is a little less obsessed with making the perfect score than some of the other informants, although she understands that maintaining at least a 3.5 is critical to earning and keeping many scholarships. Carrie admitted that while she has "to get the highest grades--not the highest in the class, but the highest for me," she does not have to have a 4.0. She added, "a lot of times I was just an average 'A'' She claimed, "You could drive yourself NUTS" and insisted, "I'm not going to be driven to the point of ulcers for 'As.'"
Jessica admittedly “wigged out” when she realized she was “losing it with the math class.” However, even though she “wasn’t a pleasant person to be around, didn’t smile, moved like a robot, sat like a lump in front of the t.v.,” she is proud that she was “hanging in there.” She was enabled in keeping calm by accepting the advice of her tutor-special friend neighbor to look at the “Big Picture. The world is not going to come to an end if you don’t get a good grade in this class.” When the anticipated dreaded “C” actually arrived as a “crusher ‘D,’” instead of going berserk, she reasoned “I’m done with the stupid class. And I still got a 3.0” Also, Jessica returned to a place where she experienced success. Having just “bombed” the Algebra test, she said, “I was SO happy when I walked back through the doors of the flower shop. A little retreat--I know how to do FLOWERS!”

Annette wanted to do well in school, but she was more concerned with completing what she started. Having anticipated that she might have difficulty with some courses, she decided early on that she would not drop a course. “I just refused to quit--ANY of my classes. I guess that’s life. You just go on and you say, ‘Ok, I’m not planning on dropping this. If I have to retake it--fine--but I’m not dropping it.”

**Summary.** All of the reentry women were highly competitive. With the exception of Annette, the reentry women were compulsive about earning “As.”

**Summary**

Adult development literature helps us understand community college reentry women’s self-assessment. Erikson (1950) spoke of people ages 40 to old age, who were thus in his taxonomic stage eight, as having as their task the assessment of their lives. Since only one informant in this study was 40 or older, but all informants reported frequent self-assessment, this suggests that
the study does not appear to support that aspect of Erikson's work. Examined in light of Neugarten's (1968) work with middle-aged subjects, the informants are on task in taking stock of their lives and being introspective. The informants' setting of realistic goals as a result of their self-assessment appeared to support the findings of Stevenson (1977) and Sheehy (1976) that people in the middle stage of life show a need to find realistic goals. As Neugarten suggested of middle-aged women, the informants sought to develop previously unused talents and abilities. Adult development literature further explains community college reentry women's self-assessment in light of informants' diversity of reasons given for reentry, their desire to take charge of their lives, and their wish to preserve their independence (Scarf, 1980; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The references of Carrie, 32, Jessica , 35, Rose, 37, and Tigress, 39, to feeling that they were "running out of time" appeared to support Stevenson's (1977) observation that the period when a person is 32 to 39 triggered in people a sense of a time squeeze. Also apparently supported by the data analysis was Sheehy's (1976) view that when a person is at a developmental plateau, she tends to feel as though time were running out. Reentry women's lack of confidence in regard to their assessment of their mental capacity in general and math ability in particular has been documented by Schlossberg et al., (1989).

Research question 2. Did experiences or life events have any influence over community college reentry women's decision to continue pursuit of higher education?

In the domain of triggering events, three cover terms were dominant. They were "divorce," "illness," and "inadequate skills."
What event or circumstance interrupted the reentry women's normal life routine and propelled them toward attending college? Tigress had noted that the types of women who returned to college most often were “the divorced woman, the widowed woman, and the woman who realizes that she wants to do something with her life.” The participants in this study matched Tigress's observation. Four of those women interviewed gave divorce as the triggering event for their return; one listed her husband's life-threatening illness; and two expressed concern about their inadequate academic skills. Reentry women's returning to higher education because of life events or experiences rather than chronological age supported the findings of Aslanian and Brickell (1980), Evans (1985), Giele (1982), Holliday (1985), Mohney and Anderson (1988), Nordstrom (1989), Rossi (1980), and Ross (1986).

**Divorce**

Four of the 7 informants returned to college because of an interruption in their marital status. Kathryn, for instance, divorced after 20 years of marriage and two children, realized that in her present situation and with only two and one-half years of temporary alimony left, she needed “some sort of career.” However, she said, “When you've been married for 20 years and haven't worked, you're not equipped to get a decent job.”

Kathryn's sister--12 years her junior, but graduate degree educated--made her a deal which would eventually spur Kathryn on to returning to college. “Go to school for a semester, and if you really don't do well, and prove to me that you CAN'T do it, then I'll believe you. But I know how smart you are, and I know you can!”

Before heeding her sister's advice, however, Kathryn relocated from Florida to California, “thinking mom and dad and the family were going to make
everything ok, or find me a husband . . . ANYTHING to avoid having to face the reality of the world.” Six months later, believing she might be reconciled with her husband and missing her son, she moved all the way back, only to find out the reconciliation would not work out. And here I was. I had to do something with my life. I certainly had run out of money, and I COULDN’T go back to mom and dad anymore, so I decided to go to school.

Jessica was also driven back to school because of divorce and the correspondent availability of alimony. Mother of a 9-year-old daughter, Jessica responded to an advertisement in the newspaper for free education (the Pell Grant) for single parents. The courts had recently awarded Jessica a $15,000 settlement from her ex-husband for physical injuries incurred in a domestic fight. With the Pell Grant and the settlement, Jessica was thrilled because she would be able to go to school for the first time full time. I have always wanted an education. I am a single mom, and I don’t believe that unless you luck into some sort of job you can raise children today without being food stamp supplied unless you have an education—a degree.

The circumstances driving Carrie’s decision to reenter college were also related to a change in her marital status and the availability of financial support from an [almost] ex-spouse. Upon separation from her second husband, Carrie saw her chance to return to formal education. Additionally motivated by her family background, with her parents divorced when she was 6 and their parents likewise divorced, Carrie said, “I just assumed that a man was going to make everything all right.” When, by the age of 20, she was already divorced with two children, having “everything taken away from me and having to start all over,” she realized that “I’d better get out there and do it on my own.”
Scooter was thrust back to school because of the loss of her husband to crime and divorce. Having met her husband-to-be at a local state university, she quit school after two terms to marry and be a housewife. Hardly a year later, her property management company handyman husband was convicted of drug dealing and imprisoned for five years. Soon after her subsequent divorce, Scooter’s father relocated her to the small town where her mother owned and operated a frame shop. “It was really difficult. It was really hard to start over. Mom kind of inspired me to start back to school and just take a couple of classes. But I started taking classes and got more comfortable with it.”

**Illness**

The big influence on Tigress’s decision to return to college was her husband’s sudden life-threatening illness. This 39-year-old mother of a 5-year-old daughter, shocked by her husband’s sudden onset of Guillan Barre—a debilitating nerve disease that temporarily paralyzes a person from his toes to the top of his head—“realized that I had absolutely nothing to turn to in order to make a living.”

Tigress had worked previously as a hairdresser and as an aid in the mental health field. She had credentials as a travel agency operator; however, she lacked the money and the self-confidence to open her own business. “I didn’t have the security inside of me to say I could handle it on my own.” Her husband’s illness “was the major focus that turned [her] life around and said, ‘Stop fooling around.’” Aware that “it’s getting tougher and tougher to find good jobs,” Tigress decided to return to college to improve her chances at financial security.
Inadequate academic skills

Annette and Rose credited their own discomfort with their academic skills as the primary influence in their decision to return to college. Annette returned to college out of a sense of shame. She had been working four jobs at the time she decided to return to college. While employed as an educational assistant at the local residential school for deaf and blind children, she came to the painful awareness that her academic skills had slipped to a level so low it embarrassed her.

When I heard myself this summer before I sent the kids home from [school] that my vocabulary . . . because I listened to myself from the tapes before I gave them to the students. It just totally floored me that my vocabulary was so low and my speaking ability was so down . . . It was really just amazing. I just sat back and cried.

Annette also faced the question of “What will I have later when my kids leave?” She realized that “without that piece of paper,” she “wouldn’t be able to do anything worthwhile.”

British born Rose also wanted to improve her skills, specifically in English and math. While no particular traumatic event pushed her toward college, the time just seemed to be right.

I can’t say that anybody or any one thing influenced me particularly. It was just a desire that I wanted to improve my math and English skills. And of course my husband was ALWAYS very supportive of anything I choose to do in that way. My parents were staying for the winter. Three years ago. It was an ideal opportunity. I wasn’t working. Of course once I got into the mold, I just love it so much, I couldn’t let go.

Summary

The literature of adult development helps us understand the life events and experiences that propelled reentry women into higher education. Divorce was the reason 4 of the 7 informants returned to college. These 4 ranged in age
from 26 to 44, clearly not the traditional aged 18 to 22 year-old student. Three of those 4 were single parents. One reentry woman, aged 39, returned because of her husband' life-threatening illness; she is the mother of a young daughter. Two, aged 37 and 38, attributed their return to their embarrassment over their inadequate academic skills; the 38-year-old woman was also divorced and a single parent.

The informants in this investigations reported that they returned to college for life event reasons such as divorce and life-threatening disease of a spouse, matters that were not necessarily related to chronological age. The informants' reasons for reentry appeared to confirm Neugarten's (1968) life events concept.

Research Question 3: In what ways did assuming the role of college student affect the social roles already performed by community college reentry women, and what expectations did significant others have of their performance?

In the domain of social roles, two cover terms with four included terms dominated. There were "juggling of roles" with "adult problems," "toll on families," and "personal sacrifice"; and "coping strategies" with "support network."

A third area reported frequently by informants was that of their multiplicity of societal roles and their on-going battle to balance them in such a way that none of the roles suffered dramatically. Role-juggling affected their success as students. To try to diminish the negative effects of role juggling on their success as students, reentry women developed a variety of coping strategies.
Role Juggling

When women 25 years of age and older make the decision to return to college, they are adding this new role of student to a long list they already hold: daughter, wife, mother, employee, church attendee, community volunteer, and possibly others.

As shown in Table 4 below, the informants juggled numerous roles along with that of being a student. Clearly their decision making had to have been impacted by their multiplicity of roles and the expectations of significant others that were affected by those roles.

Table 4
Informants' Societal Roles

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</tbody>
</table>

**"homemaker" means responsible for grocery shopping, cooking, dish washing, housecleaning, shopping, laundry, yard work**
Balancing this myriad of responsibilities carries with it some hazards because of adult problems, the toll on families, and personal sacrifice. In light of the seriousness of what Kathryn called “grown up problems,” being a reentry woman at a community college could be a real “disadvantage.” Explained Kathryn,

Even though we’re taking school very, very seriously, we have got some other tremendously BIG burdens to deal with. Most of us are raising children; I have two teenagers. I have financial problems. I am being sued for 3 million dollars. I have to deal with an ex-spouse from time to time. And then there’s always the worry that something could happen to my parents. They’re getting up in age. I keep worrying that I’m going to have to drop out of school in the middle of the semester and run out [to California] to help because I’m their oldest child. Also I have to maintain a home, cook meals every night, and get my daughter and myself to medical and dental appointments. So, there are heavy, big, IMPORTANT burdens--distracting things--that the reentry person has got to carry with her.

Kathryn commented on the irony of parenting a student and being a student at the same time.

It is certainly tough to juggle when you’re a reentry student trying to maintain that equilibrium between being a student and raising a student . . . There are times when your studies need to take priority, such as the crucial times at testing; there are other times when the children have to take priority such as emotional crises. Then the books just have to wait.

Carrie, perhaps, summed up the feeling of all the reentry women when she asked herself: “How am I going to do it all? How do I get my homework done, go to school, go to PTO meetings, do laundry, have time for myself. I see so many stressed women.” She continued,

I have gone to college now for 2 1/2 years straight. Full time and in the summer for 2-1/2 years. And taken care of all these animals and all these kids and all of this stuff and active in church, and my kids are active in soccer. I just do, and do, and do.
Emphasizing Kathryn's point that much of the anxiety with which reentry women must deal was "not really related to college." Carrie said, "I've had to miss class because of my teenager, a problem teenager. Teachers don't know about that." Women are coming into school with trunkloads of problems that, of course, a young student doesn't have. And I don't think a man has either. While he's maybe taking one or two night courses, there's someone at home who's doing the laundry and cooking dinner, and he doesn't have [as many] responsibilities.

Further evidence of Carrie's devotion to juggling roles was clear when her instructor, who was going to the mountains during semester break, asked Carrie what her vacation plans were. Carrie replied, "I have to shampoo the carpet, clean out the refrigerator, take the dog to the vet. I DID celebrate by going to the library to check out NOVELS to read." Summarizing, Carrie said, "Our plates are always too full; even if you scoot things around, our plates are still full."

Jessica, too, struggled with juggling her numerous roles. "Everyone I know has kids. Most of us work. There's no time to study. We have so many other responsibilities." During a recent term she tried to balance being a full-time floral designer, full-time student, full-time mother, and part-time actress.

I go to work in the morning, leave work to go to class, arrive back at work. I work from 9:00 to 5:30, go to class during that time also, and by 6:30 at night, I have had to go pick up my daughter from school, go home, make dinner, eat dinner, and be at rehearsal for OLIVER by 6:30 which lasts until 9:00, 9:30, when we get home and crawl into bed. I get up at 4:30 to 7:00 is when I study. And this is 6 days a week that I have OLIVER and work.

One result was she earned the first "D" in her college career in Algebra. The instructor told her, "it takes TWO hours a night.' Well," said Jessica,
"I haven’t had HALF an hour a night [because of] my schedule. . . . I could have had an ‘A’ in Algebra if I’d had the time."

Having tried "doing it all" an earlier term when money was particularly scarce, Jessica learned the hard way that she was not effective as student, mother, or employee when she tried to work and go to school full time.

I saw my daughter for about an hour when I made her dinner before the sitter came and I went to school. I did this Monday through Friday. I only made ‘Bs’ and ‘Cs.’ I don’t think I was a good worker because my mind quite often was on school work. And I certainly can’t say I was a good mom because I don’t see how you can be a good mom one hour a day!

Tigress agreed that while at the same time her family is her “stability,” having a family can also be a disadvantage when one is a reentry student. “I have to realize that my priorities have to be at home. I can’t just focus on myself as the younger students can.”

Your time is not your own. You have to divide your studying time between taking care of your family and their daily activities; keeping a house; and in my situation, taking care of a sick husband, having to take him to doctors. To me, there are TREMENDOUS disadvantages.

She claimed that the “rough part” of college was “dealing with [her] kids, dealing with trying to study, trying to keep [her] goals still in perspective.” When she returned from her three jobs and school, she said that you still have your house to do. You still got to clean, and you got to bolster up the energy to do it. You’ve got to just PUSH yourself in there and say, “OK, this is it. I’m going to do it.” You can’t pay a maid to come in and do it. You’ve got to do it yourself.

She said that often she would be “so exhausted that when I came home, I just couldn’t get up. . . . I’d be so exhausted that my body just refused to listen to my mind and I’d have to just lie down and sleep.”
Her children not always doing their fair share only confounded Annette's situation. "You get tired of telling them 'Vacuum the carpet. Take out the garbage. Straighten up the books' and you just say, 'OK, I'm not arguing any more' and do it yourself."

Sometimes the juggling act takes its toll with the reentry women's families. Tigress explained, "My daughter has complained that 'I don't see Mommie. Mommie goes to school at night.' [Her husband] says, 'I don't see you any more. You're always in the books. You're not even hugging me.'"

Tigress coped with her friends and family not seeming "to want to understand" her academic intensity by taking summer terms off to "renew." She said, "I'm going to try to baby them over the summer, so they'll get enough of me and be sick of me and say, 'I don't want to see her come September.'" That is about the time she will be heading for the university.

Annette with the sole responsibility of raising four teenagers acknowledged the toll which reentry juggling has taken on her family as well. She wished she could "take time back for [her] kids." She said,

my family is priority. And going to the beach with them. That was out many times because I had to study. And when I did take them to the beach, my head was in a book. Even the very few times I went to have a good time, I found my mind was still always in the books. The book may not be in my hand, but it was in my mind.

Having a husband could have posed a problem in the juggling game, said Annette. While the "support of one" would have helped financially, "I can understand how a mate can get jealous because all your time is in a book." Annette's children used to harass her, "You're gonna bust your brain!"

The research seemed to support the views of Carrie and the other informants who are mothers in describing the fragmentation experienced by
reentry women in trying to meet the demands of their families and yet satisfy their own needs as students. Those reentry women who are also mothers express fierce commitment to remaining conscientious parents in addition to being successful students (Carbone, 1988; Datan & Hughes, 1985; Holliday, 1985; Lewis, 1988; Mohsenin, 1980; Sands & Richardson, 1986). Reentry women's experiencing conflict because of role expectations corroborated the findings of Berkove (1979), Huston-Hoburg and Strange (1986), and Roehl and Okun (1985); role conflict experiences were corroborated by Beutell and O'Hare (1987), Gilbert et al. (1980), and Hooper (1979).

Without the added responsibility of children, Rose still consciously worked to prevent her juggling act from taking its toll on her husband. “He's been so good that I don't want to aggravate” the situation. “I really feel that I owe it to him to try to maintain the house for him where he won't have to feel that I've completely deserted everything else to go to school.” The house “doesn't suffer.” Although he did not complain, she feels, it’s only fair if he’s working, and I’m allowed to go through school, that I do my share. I felt that if I do the housework and take care of the cooking—which is just as well because John can’t cook—it puts in my 50-50 share, and I feel I'm entitled to go to school.

Rose, like Annette, would like to have someone come in and clean the house. She could justify that, however, only if she were working in a job full time. “If I've got the time, I've got to be able to do [the housework] myself.”

The only two informants who did not have children speculated about the effect which having added the role of student has on whether or when they may start a family. Rose's husband has said, “It's up to you. If you want the family, you can. But you're the one that deals with it. You're the one that's going to have to give up school.”
Scooter, too, struggled with the issue of school versus family. "I wonder if I'll miss out on my childbearing years because I'll be in school." She continued, "I've always wanted to find someone and settle down and have kids. I've kind of put my wedding aside until I get out of school. School now; family later."

Carrie commented on the inability of some reentry women to manage the juggling act in a healthy manner. She admitted to having contemplated breakdowns herself,

but I can't have one, you know! Not yet! It's not my turn! I watch other women in college that drop out of classes, drop out for a semester, have breakdowns. There was a woman in my chemistry class that started having an anxiety attack right in class.

When Carrie compared this woman's being the single parent of only two teenagers to Carrie's being the single parent of two teenagers plus a young child, she said she is almost envious, "part of me goes, 'How come I can't do that? How come I can't have a breakdown?'"

While Carrie worried that the results of her juggling act may not have always been positive, she believed that, overall, she made a suitable trade off.

If I were working, I'd be crazy in the morning, trying to get the kids off to school and myself dressed. It would be crazy in the afternoon for the kids because nobody would be home when they came home. I've always been more mellow at home when not working. Generally, I'm always at home if not when the kids get home, shortly thereafter. There is no more getting home at 5:30 or 6:00, trying to rush and get dinner. So, it's a trade off. Although things have been taken away because of college, I'm home more. Although [the children] will look back and remember mom always saying, "I've got homework to do' or 'No, we can't do this," I was at home.

With juggling such heavy schedules, reentry women reported choosing to sacrifice sleep, exercise, and church in order to make room for study time. Jessica said she studied from 5:00 to 7:00 A.M. with bedtime being 9:30 P.M. "I never used to go to bed at 9:30. I would have at least stayed up till 11:00, even
11:30 if I'd wanted to see the news." Carrie also studies "primarily in the morning. I'm not a night person at all. Also, since I've been a tutor, I use that time to study."

Rose usually studied "7:00 through half past 11:00. I put in a fair amount. Sometimes I do it later when I'm studying with Tigress." Tigress was a night owl. "I spend 8:00 P.M. to 3:00 in the morning studying and writing and reading." In speaking of some younger students who appear to her to be intimidated by her intelligence, she said, "They don't realize how hard I work."

Regrettably, Carrie reported, she has often sacrificed exercise and church time in order to find time to study. She said in reference to her use of time in being successful in school,

I would make it mandatory to have a time for exercise. It makes all the difference in the world. Exercise makes my brain sharper, makes me feel better, gives me more energy throughout the day. This semester was hard and stressful, and the first thing I let go was my exercise time. Then church time.

Awareness of time preyed heavily on the informants' minds. During the projective-technique-based interview, 5 of the 7 informants selected the magazine picture of the wall clock as most representative of their collegiate experience. Also during the projective-technique-based interview, the magazine picture most frequently selected to represent the antithesis of their collegiate experience was that of a woman relaxing at the beach with no books in sight.

Summary. The addition of student role to the reentry women's other social roles conflicted with significant others' expectations. Tigress would already have completed her college education were it not for her trying to accommodate the needs of her family. Because of their complaints about her
preoccupation with school, she purposely took one term off each summer, thus slowing her academic progress, to be totally at their disposal. Were it not for the young age of her child and her determination that the child not become a "latch key kid," Tigress would have taken more classes per semester. Tigress' social roles of wife and mother have also influenced her career choice. Although she would prefer to study law, she has chosen special education so that she may continue to have free afternoons and summers with her family. The roles of daughter and daughter-in-law have tainted Tigress' enjoyment of her pursuit of education. Her mother complains about Tigress' spending less time with her, and her in-laws accuse her of not putting their son's tentative health above her selfish desire for schooling. Although their repeated chidings bothered her, Tigress persevered with her academic goal.

Carrie's role of mother to three children influenced her academic pace and her interpersonal relationships. To be able to see her children off to school in the mornings and welcome them home in the afternoons, Carrie sacrificed the immediate monetary gains of employment for the long range rewards of education by plugging away at school a few courses at a time. Still trapped in the role of wife because of financial dependence, even though she and her husband are irrevocably separated, Carrie denied herself the pleasure of personal relationships with men because she wanted to be a moral role model to her children.

Jessica's roles as employee and mother affected her career choice. Originally interested in studying law, she switched to nursing because she can complete the requirements more quickly. Being the single parent of a young daughter, Jessica saw her need to be employable quickly as greater than her desire to be a lawyer. She can not spend the quality time with her daughter and
both she and her daughter expect; she misses not being able to tuck her daughter into bed on nights when she must be in class.

Scooter's role as student may be affecting her potential role of wife and mother. Having sacrificed school for the man she loved once before, and having been cuckolded by her husband's drug addiction, Scooter has put any future plans of weddings and children at abeyance until she finishes her degree in engineering.

Annette's role as student has had an adverse effect on her family. Although she assumed the student role in order to earn credentials that would enable her to earn a better living for her family, the time she spent at school and studying—along with working multiple jobs to pay basic bills—robbed her children of her close leadership and guidance.

Kathryn's role of student has affected her standard of living, her parenting, and her interpersonal relationships. She and her daughter sacrifice all but the basic living necessities to enable Kathryn to attend school full time and not hold an outside job as well. Having a mother who is not employed has caused Kathryn's daughter considerable confusion and distress. Kathryn has also chosen to put her studies before her social life.

Rose, although not a mother, has made a concerted effort not to disappoint the expectations of her husband concerning the management of their house and the secretarial responsibilities of his company. Although on the whole he is very supportive, occasionally he has balked at the long hours she has put into studying.

**Coping Strategies**

Informants reported being able to survive their adjustment to collegiate life by developing coping strategies. The coping strategy employed by reentry
women that is most clearly tied to the theories of adult development was the utilization of a support network.

To assist in coping with the adjustments required by college life, women have garnered networks of support. All of the informants testified as to the importance of encouragement from family, although only two reported receiving it unconditionally. Four of the informants, in fact, spoke of the impact which the lack of family support made on their lives. An additional support network for informants was supplied by other reentry women. Informants also discussed their community college’s failure to establish a formal organization for reentry students.

Reentry women expressed a great need for encouragement and reassurance (Mangano & Corrado, 1979). Regarding the importance which family played in the ability of the reentry woman to pursue her ambition to earn a college degree, Rose remarked about her husband, “He is SO wonderful and SO interested.” She felt “he is proud of me.” He liked her going to college and said, “it’s like going to college again for him. A refresher course. ‘I’ve got a whole new wife who talks about all sorts of other things.’ If I could reach my Ph.D. point, he’d love it.” He is also “very sensible.” He advised her not to transfer to a different college, recently, when she ran into immigration difficulties with her present college’s administration.

Scooter’s mother served as her “backbone through all this. She keeps me going. I always bounce ideas off of her. She tells me what she thinks. It’s VERY encouraging.” Both her parents were educators and have stressed the value of a college education, yet Scooter was the only one of four siblings who will become a college graduate. “I kind of enjoy that pressure.” Her brothers and sister always were “concerned about how I’m doing in school and what’s
going on with my life in school.” The whole family, except for one brother, came to her graduation. “Even dad made it,” flying up from Panama for the occasion. “Mom cried. She was real happy.” Dad “took pictures all over the place. I think he was happy.” Through her divorce, bout with alcohol, and now two years of college, Scooter said, “My family has really been great. They’ve been my total support.”

“When I start whining,” Carrie said, “I have to remember I’ve got a man who doesn’t even like me who is paying for me. That I do have a good family and people that love me. A church family. I really need to remember.” She mentioned she is also buoyed by her family’s hopes riding on her in that she is the only one in the family who has even attended college.

The importance of family was also noteworthy by its absence in the lives of some of the reentry women. Kathryn, Tigress, Annette, and Jessica commented on not always being able to depend on family. Kathryn, for instance, lamented that she had no family locally except her daughter.

I have no support system [here]--NONE. I have only a few scattered friends, but all my family live in the San Francisco Bay area. So if there is a serious illness--either my own or my daughter’s--I have NOBODY. I just feel like everything I do, whether it’s my three million dollar law suit or going to school, I’m doing everything alone. Raising my child alone, facing every problem alone; not really belonging TO anybody or not belonging anywhere necessarily. I may get a 4.0 at the end of the semester which is really fine, and I feel really good about it, but it sure would be nice to have someone to take it to and say, “I worked real hard. Look what I got.” But there is not ONE person on earth--except my 13-year-old daughter--and she’ll say, “What are you doing--trying to show off!”

When Tigress first enrolled at the community college in 1987, her husband was “very supportive because he realized that [she] needed something to fall back on if he should pass away.” Her daughter “didn’t like it,”
complaining that her mother was never home. Her husband's attitude changed over the three years since Tigress reentered college. "My husband has felt hurt, left out." Now that she was almost through with her community college degree, her husband and daughter were "REAL happy [because] they're anxious for me to finish." Perhaps indicative of his frustration with her dedication to school, twice during the second interview with Tigress, her husband interrupted the proceedings, even though she specifically told him she needed quiet and time away from their daughter. The afternoon of the first interview, when this researcher was introduced to him briefly, he said something to the effect that "you ought to interview ME as to what I think about her going back to school," implying by his tone that he was less enthusiastic than his wife about her collegiate endeavors.

Her in-laws also nagged at her about being in college. "They should be more supportive of me, but their comments are 'You should have done this 20 years ago.'" Concerned about their son's recent illness, they were saying that "the family is suffering." She countered, "Yes, but won't everybody suffer a lot MORE if" her husband were to die and she were not capable of supporting her daughter and herself.

"All of my family and all of my friends have come down on me saying I'm putting too much time into this." Her mother wanted her to clean her mother's house. During holidays, family expected her to organize and prepare all the festivities. Tigress's friends admonished her to "not be so involved" in school. Some of her friends were "not even talking to [her] right now." Her one ally, her sister-in-law, her "spirit guide," advised her to tell them to "take a flying leap. And I DID. I told one of my friends . . . if you can't accept this . . . I'm sorry . . .
This is what I have to do, and... you’ll have to put up with me the next 2 or 3 years, and that’s that."

Annette suffered from her children’s lack of support. “My kids always said ‘Your head’s always in a book.’” She believed that her children took advantage of her struggle as a college student. “They used it as a wedge because they knew that I’d be home studying at a certain time; they knew I was at school a certain time; they used it.” Even her ex-husband, finally divorced after a 12-year separation, “would be so demanding.”

Jessica’s mother “was all for it” and has been supportive financially, but recently her mother lost her college adjunct teaching position, so the money stopped. Also, although her mother lived within two blocks of Jessica, she refused to babysit her 9-year-old granddaughter. Jessica’s divorced father was and is NOT [supportive]; he can’t understand. To him, I should be married and raising kids and not even worrying about work. Even though I’m divorced, I can’t shake him and wake him up to the fact that I can only make $4.00 or $5.00 an hour. He just can’t comprehend the fact that it is not GOOD enough.

While Rose virtually gushed in her praise of her husband’s support of her academic pursuits, she admitted that he does become impatient on occasion. For instance, the semester she was taking five courses for credit and auditing a sixth, she was spending rather long days at the college. One evening when he came to pick her up at 5:00, he said, “you’ve been here ALL day, since 8:00 o’clock this morning. I think this is ENOUGH!”

Reentry women friends were also highly valued as a support group to nurture reentry women through their collegiate journey. Peer support is critical to reentry women’s success in school (Haywoode, 1983). Peer support comes primarily from structures which students create for themselves out of their care.
for each other. Each one recognizes that her strength and continued participation strengthens others (Haywoode, 1983, pp. 56-57).

Rose, for instance, told of how she met Tigress.

I sat down about half way in the classroom next to the blackboard, and [Tigress] sat down next to me, turned and said, “Isn’t it WONDERFUL to be back in school?” I said, “YES, YES!” And we’ve been friends ever since! Up to that point I was really thinking, “God, am I doing the right thing? Maybe I should have come into an easier class.” We kind of held each others’ hands all the way through. I loved it. I just LOVED it. I made friends immediately. We’ve been friends ever since.

Reentry women friends might not be in competition with one another, but they did sometimes shield one another from the truth about grades. “There have been a couple of times where I goofed up” and one of the reentry women “hasn’t told me what’s she’s got for fear that I’d be upset. It’s just basically that the other one is feeling bad enough as it is.”

Even Tigress, the only one who admitted to competing with other reentry women, emphasized how they help one another. She told of having spent many late night hours on the phone studying for exams with Rose and other reentry women. She was willing to be a friend to reentries and others to share her academic talents. “I’m at every student’s availability,” happy to help in any “way, shape, or form.” She was willing to study with people and help them analyze and write papers “I’m simply out there to get the best we can get out of school.”

Kathryn sensed “warmth and support” from other reentry women. “There is a comradeship, a feeling of ‘Thank God you’re in this classroom so I don’t feel so out of place.’” Further evidence of reentry women helping one another came from Annette. “I exchange phone numbers with different ones, and it helps. If
we have a problem or if we have questions from school after a test, we get in
touch with each other.”

Explained Carrie, “We naturally gravitate toward one another. ” She
continued, “primarily, it starts in class. Then you may get with another group
that that one person knows from another class. I think it starts out in the
classroom and then spreads out campus wide. We’ve always had time to at
least communicate in the bathroom. It’s almost like a team effort.” In physiology
class, for instance,

We would work together over tests, memorization, all the lab work, and it
was always collective. From there we’d talk about child bearing. I don’t
know any group of women who haven’t told their birthing experience
From the academic side, there were a lot of friendships and relationships
that developed, that will go on above and beyond, that became very
personal.

Tigress offered further explanation, “we group together because of our common
bond. We understand our purpose, thought. When we leave our class, we go
and study; put that extra effort in.” By contrast, she said, “younger students
don’t; they hang out, have a cigarette, go to the student center to fool around.”
Added Rose, “if you try to help each other, it makes it so much easier. Even if
you can’t glean everything, it is so much easier if you have three heads instead
of one.”

The community college which these 7 informants attended did not
provide a formal support group or organization for reentry students. When
questioned as to whether the establishment of a formal institutional support
group for reentry students would have been beneficial to their transition through
the community college, all responded that such an organization might have
been helpful, but only 5 said they would have attended meetings. The research
suggested that support groups or formal organizations of networking help fulfill
reentry women's need for reassurance and encouragement (Haywoode, 1955; Waters & Goodman, 1981). To help eliminate anxiety in certain academic areas, highly specialized support groups linked to specific academic areas such as math anxiety, writer' block, and test-taking anxiety should be available to reentry women (Grood, 1985). To assist in determining the amounts and types of support reentry women need, Chickering's (1969) vectors of human development can provide institutions with a means of assessment.

A formal organization could have been helpful in disseminating information, for instance. Said Rose, “it would have been nice to know where to look for scholarships. There has been absolutely no guidance about transferring to a university from the community college.” Scooter added that such groups give one the opportunity to “meet other people that have taken courses you’ll need to take, maybe get notes, and recommendations.” Carrie, too, would have appreciated someone to “assist in showing the mechanics of filling out forms, someone who would explain the value of a long range course plan.”

Carrie also pointed out “it would be very beneficial as networking for babysitting, study habits, commuting, a contact if you had to miss a class because of a sick child. I think it would be great to go with a group to explore a new college.”

Tigress noted that such a formal support group would “make you aware that you’re in the same situation.” Perhaps someone such as Kathryn could have benefited because when she registered for her first two courses, she said, “I felt sort of by myself as far as I’d never met anybody who had gone through a divorce.” Tigress continues, “a student might be able to “hear some ideas about how to deal with the problems that arise.” Scooter concurred that such an
organization would be “excellent especially for people who are new reentry students just starting out. People could benefit from encouragement, hearing ‘hey, I just went through this.’

When I first started back, I wasn’t sure I was doing the right thing. You feel like it’s too late almost, like you’re getting older and you should be in a career by now. A support group would give the encouragement to go on and do it, to assure them that going back is worth all the hard work.

Although she believed it would be difficult to set a meeting time when everyone’s schedules meshed, Annette confirmed the value of such an organization to provide reentry women with role models because it would be beneficial “if you could see someone else who achieved and had major problems and was still going strong as far as still being there, still studying, still getting that grade.” She thought it would be inspirational to “have that model. Well, she did it: I can try it this one term.” Carrie agreed that “it would have been really neat to have had people who said, ‘you can do this . . . really!’

Tigress elaborated on this concept of positive reinforcement when she commented that there are so many times during the semester “when you just want to have someone pat you on the back. The younger students get pats on the back all the time from their parents, but there’s nobody to pat you on the back.”

The two who said they would not have joined a formal organization for reentry students expressed very personal reasons, reasons that actually support the importance of such an organization. Rose admitted that when she first enrolled in the college, she would not have participated because “it wasn’t outside stresses that were playing on my life.” She continued, “at that time I didn’t have enough confidence, probably, to come out and say, ‘I need support
because I'm frightened of making a fool of myself in the classroom.” Kathryn told a similar story of when she first enrolled.

I was so overwhelmed with my own problems that I wasn't a happy camper. So I didn't want that to be exchanged with anybody. I didn't want to have friends that were in the same boat. I just wanted to be alone and suffer miserably.

Kathryn did not believe that a formal support group would be something that would be “that good for” her. “I think I prefer to develop my own support group by seeking out people, getting to know them, and feeling comfortable with them . . . people I have something in common with personality-wise, experience-wise.” She believes that she would not necessarily “have anything in common with or enjoy the company of” all who came together on a particular day just because they were all reentry students.

**Summary.** Assumption of the role of college student has, in all cases, confounded the multiplicity of roles already performed by community college reentry women. The negative effects have included divisiveness within families, increased stress that has altered sleep and exercise patterns, and guilt at the thought of neglecting self as well as family and friends. The positive effects have included pride in developing coping strategies, including networking with other reentry women.

The informants in this study were more affected by their own experiences and life events than they were by chronological age. Jessica's life was influenced not only by her second divorce but the physical abuse inflicted upon her by her second husband. The courts' judgment to award her $15,000 for the injuries incurred would have been her “ticket” to financing her college education with the luxury of not having to hold down a job at the same time. However, another life event of her ex-husband's not paying the $15,000 adversely
affected her income and consequently her standard of living, childcare for her
daughter, her GPA, and general emotional health.

Kathryn’s life was drastically affected not only by her divorce but by the
three million dollar law suit brought upon her as a result of her ex-husband’s
failed business. Aside from suffering the trauma associated with such an
indictment, Kathryn must live with the consequences for the next seven years of
her having declared bankruptcy.

Scooter’s life was completely turned around by the behavior of her
husband. Happily newly married, she was content to be a housewife and
looked forward to bearing and raising children. Had her husband not been
involved with drugs, arrested, and sentenced to prison, Scooter may never have
continued her pursuit of higher education.

Tigress’ contentment at being a housewife and mother was shattered by
the news of her husband’s potentially terminal illness. Had the family’s financial
security not been threatened, Tigress might have postponed her yearning for a
college education until her daughter finished school.

Annette would have felt more control over her life had she had a
husband who would support her and their children. Because of her poverty and
large family, Annette was thrust into a desperate race to learn some marketable
skills before the creditors closed in on her.

Carrie’s life was influenced dramatically by her second divorce and her
commitment to her children. Also, her low self-esteem drove her to educate
herself so that she would make better choices in future life partners.

Roses’s life was turned around by her desire to master English and
mathematics. Her weaknesses in these skills had been influenced by her
physical handicap as a child. Her ability to take the time at this point to reenter college was due in part to her husband's financial success.

Personal relationships exerted definite influence on the informants, sometimes in a positive and sometimes in a negative way. In some cases it was a relative who encouraged the woman to reenter college; in some cases, relatives financially supported reentry women so they could go to school; in some cases, husbands and children withdrew their support when "the going got rough" for the family as a result of the woman being in school; sometimes husbands, children, and parents expressed pride at the reentry's woman's accomplishments; other times husbands, children, parents, in-laws, and friends badgered her because she was no longer devoting what they considered quality time to them. Pressure from personal relationships at different times caused the reentry women to feel guilt, frustration, resentment, on the one hand; in other cases, such pressure served to make the reentry women only more resolute in their determination to complete their pursuit of college education.

Summary

The literature of adult development has helped us understand community college reentry women's social roles and significant others' expectations. Concurrent with the observations of Havighurst (1953), the informants in this study performed numerous social roles. Through their tending to the needs of their husbands and/or children, parents, and other reentry women, the informants seemed to confirm the observations of Gilligan (1982b), Scarf (1980), and Sheehy (1976) that women across their life cycle place importance on attachments, intimacy, and relationships. The informants' reporting that their lifestyle was interrupted considerably by their having reentered school seemed to corroborate the view of Schlossberg et al. (1989) that adjustments were most
difficult for reentry women coping with major life changes such as divorce and single parenting. Kathryn's depression at seeing her 20-year-old marriage dissolve when she had defined herself as a wife and mother fit Scarf's (1980) findings linking depression with mid-life loss of roles what once were the sole source of interpersonal power or meaning. Jessica, Carrie, Annette, and Tigress all depict Scarf's (1980) discussion of depression in the 30s over mistakes one has made in her life.

Sheehy's (1976) identification of patterns by which people make their passages seemed applicable to the data analysis. Kathryn qualified as a Caregiver; Rose and Scooter were Either-or patterns; and Tigress, Carrie, Jessica, and Annette were all Integrators.

Their primary support network was developed from contacts with other reentry women. Their coping by making friends corroborated the findings of Schlossberg et al. (1989). Bonding together in this common experience, they studied together, recommended baby sitters, comforted one another through depression, and cheered one another on to higher achievement.

Supports are particularly critical for adult learners (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Amounts and types vary per individual, but a certain amount of support "can make the difference in how people cope with transitions" (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 64).

Research Question 4: Did community college reentry women undergo any transitions during their collegiate experience, and, if so, what were they?

In the domain of transitions, five cover terms and ten included terms emerged. They were "instructor's behavior towards them," with "negativism,"

The fourth issue observable about that informants was their undergoing transitions, changes frequently accompanied by anxieties. Informants' transitions resulted from interactions with instructors' behavior towards them, acceptance of the advantages of their being 25 or more years of age, realization of their enjoyment at being in college, and altered perception of selves along with anticipation of closure with the community college interlude.

Instructors' Behavior Towards Them

Reentry women--women who often manage homes, hold authority over children, run businesses, and organize church activities--may not be tolerant of teaching behavior that they perceived as ineffective, thus seeming to corroborate the findings of Bowen (1980) that adult learners are more critical than younger students of ineffective teaching. For the most part, informants enjoyed positive experiences with instructors. Occasionally, however, under the college classroom jurisdiction of instructors, reentry women found themselves in conflict with what they perceived to be instructor negativism, prejudice, and inflexibility.

Negativism

Negativism can take the form of sarcasm, something that Rose did not tolerate. "Sarcasm would be the one thing I don't think is necessary, and I think it is harmful in a classroom." Tigress resented sarcasm from a composition
instructor who told the class “You probably won’t learn anything, and you’ll never make an ‘A’ in my class.” This instructor “demoralized the students; he took away their enthusiasm for school; he thought he was BETTER than us.”

Carrie described an extremely negative experience she had had with an instructor whose negativism was communicated through antagonism, an opinion that appeared to corroborate the findings of Datan and Hughes (1985). “The teaching method was very abrupt and very antagonistic. We’d be SO upset, and it wasn’t just me, so weirded out.” To a woman who often arrived a few minutes late to his class because she was on her lunch hour from her job he made remarks such as, “well, thank you for deciding to show up!”

Annette, Kathryn, and Jessica commented specifically on the negative effects of criticism. Annette said, “It depends on how they gave it to me. If it’s nothing that I can make better, then I don think they should be negative about it. Because if they don’t think I can correct it, then nothing should be said.”

According to the research, reentry women quickly discern and strongly object to behavior that disrespectful, embarrassing, and/or inappropriately critical (Warner, 1989). Kathryn said that she accepted corrective criticism in an appropriate time and manner, but

If I feel like it’s inappropriate or too harsh, then it will hurt. It probably will make me a little less comfortable with the teacher for one thing; it probably won’t encourage me to work harder. It will probably stymie my efforts a little bit rather than encourage me.

Jessica reacted even more strongly: “I probably take it very hard. I’ve had very little criticism, and I’m thankful.” Of reentry women in general she said, “we’re fragile, or at least I am, because we try so DAMN hard.”

Annette, Scooter, and Jessica described how instructors’ negative behavior can adversely affect students. Annette explained, “the one thing I like
in teachers... is [when they] never let a student feel he is dumb. Never. Always let him know" that his questions are valid. Scooter corroborated this view by expressing her displeasure at a particular instructor's behavior. "There's a teacher who doesn't really like to answer stupid questions and acts offended." Such an attitude makes a student feel as if “he was wasting the whole class's time by asking. The teacher's answer was snippy... a putdown. I don't feel that any question is stupid. It shows that you are thinking." Jessica emphasized Scooter's point in claiming that she needed to “feel free to raise [her] hand and ask a question or make a comment.” She continued, “I've had teachers who did not like to be interrupted” and let students know that by ignoring raised hands or belittling questions asked.

**Prejudice**

Several informants noted their reaction to incidents that they perceived as indicative of prejudice. Reentry women are “sensitive to condescending behavior on the part of professors” [that] may reflect both ageism and sexism (Sturges et al., 1989, p. 128). Describing examples of prejudice against both gender and age, Tigress said of the same composition instructor, “if you were young and you were pretty, if you waved your little tail at him, he loved you and you automatically got an ‘A.’” Jessica explained that in psychology, “being male was a REAL downfall.” She laughed, however, when she added, “Well, I got an ‘A’ in his class every term!” According to Carrie, this instructor is “immature and said things to women that were really inappropriate.”

Annette expressed offense at behavior which she perceived as prejudice against gender. She said that the instructor seemed angry at women. One time he drew on the board the shape of a head; then he drew a little dot and said it was the brain of a woman. Being [a woman] who has struggled hard, I looked at that and looked at
him and wanted to stand up in the classroom and let him know that he was not the only one who had a problem with the other gender.

This incident adversely affected Annette to the point that her "focus was gone." Her mind was "no longer on" her work. "I had to really, really beat it [that memory] down."

Carrie confirmed the presence of prejudice against gender and age in some of the instructors she had encountered.

There, without a doubt, are some male teachers that are one way to more attractive, younger students--and some of the returning students that are very attractive also get a different type of attention-- not that I WANT that type of attention, but I'm just saying that there is one that will turn his head away although I am a student of his, but if someone else comes in, it's "HEY, how ya doing?" It's real obvious. So, I don't necessarily think it's my age as much as my looks.

One incidence of racial prejudice was suspected by Annette. "I felt sometimes that I was looked over or looked at too much." She mentioned at least one instructor whom she questioned about having selected class readings with a racial bent. "He picked a lot of black writers with a lot of violence and bad language in the readings." When Annette questioned him about his motivation in his selection, he told her "it's modern English." On the whole, reported Annette, she did not experience racial prejudice from instructors.

Inflexibility

Informants reported their intolerance to what they perceived as instructors' inflexibility and the adverse effect it had on their collegiate experience. An inflexible instructor is someone, who as Tigress described it, "does not bend in any way, shape, or form; her or his way is IT." Tigress told of a particular experience with an instructor in whose course she was an A+ student. On two separate occasions about one month apart, Tigress was called
out of this class to pick up her 5-year-old daughter who had taken ill. Both times
the instructor had said “Fine” when Tigress explained why she needed to leave. When she later received a warning notice from the instructor informing her that
with additional absences she would be dropped from the course, Tigress said,

I was very upset, to say the least. I thought that when you spoke to a
teacher it was excused. Well, not with [this instructor]. I went up to her
and said, “I thought these were excused.” She said, “No, and if you miss
one more that does not have an approved doctor’s note, you’re out.”
Don’t you take into consideration that I am an earnest student here, I
have 100% in your class right now, and that I’m there every day. Don’t
you take this into account? That I am an older person, and that I am very
serious about . . . “No,” she said. “If I bend the rules for you, I have to
bend them for everybody else.”

Kathryn reported an encounter with the same instructor who Kathryn saw as
“totally inflexible as far as the needs of her students are concerned.” Kathryn
told the instructor that she needed to miss class because she had to appear in
court in a town 85 miles away. She requested to take the customary pop quiz
early.

She said NO, that I could not do it because she doesn’t give anybody
else that preferential treatment and she refused to give it to me. Her
policy was that she does not give make-up tests; it wasn’t a make-up
test--I wanted to take it a couple of hours EARLY. I’d driven 25 miles in
order to ask her for that privilege.

Kathryn found this instructor “not being amenable to the adult needs.” Needing
to be in court “was a pretty good excuse.”

It wasn’t because it was a sunny day and I wanted to go on to the beach
or “Surf’s up!” I was being sued for 3 million dollars. I SHOULD probably
have been there (laughed). I felt like that was unfair treatment.

Carrie told of another inflexible instructor. On the first day of class he said
in seriousness, “I don’t care if you have children, you’d better find somebody
now to babysit when your child comes down with chicken pox because that is no excuse" for missing any classes.

Carrie further commented what may be true for both this instructor and the humanities instructor who Tigress and Kathryn mentioned, "I don't think he knows that it's ok to say, 'look, I don't expect you to have special privileges, but I am willing to understand and try to be as flexible as I can be.'"

**Summary.** The informants demanded respect and, therefore, had no patience for the instructor was inappropriately critical, sarcastic, arrogant, and/or antagonistic or who exhibited prejudice towards gender, age and/or race. Inflexibility to "grown up problems" was perceived by these women as unfair.

**Acceptance of Advantages of Being 25 or More Years of Age**

Transitions occurred when community college reentry women realized the identifiable advantages to being over 25 years of age and a student, thus seeming to corroborate the research of Prahl (1981). Advantages that the reentry women reported had to do with maturity and involved purpose and directness.

**Maturity**

Jessica remarked, "we always show up for class. We're so INTO learning now--and nobody else is. We are so into learning. I'm REALLY into class, and I always make a comment. I listen. And I feed back." Added Tigress, "we're prepared for our classes. We can answer and discuss and have a good communication with the professor. Younger students sit in the back, goof off, make comments, and laugh--older students don't." Scooter realizes that she has become "more polished than" younger students.

Annette also noted a difference between reentry women and younger students in which older students have the upper hand. "Their [classroom
performance] I think is a little sharper. Mine is a little more expert. Mine comes from experience.”

Carrie concurred that reentry women are at an advantage because they “have more to offer in lecture courses where there is dialogue. Because of maturity” reentry women “take it more seriously, study harder, and are more motivated than younger students,” Carrie asserted. “We’re better students. We bring in a different perspective, one massaged with maturity and experience.” Carrie added, “you won’t see the older woman just ‘hanging out’ or eating pizza. If we’re at school, we’re there to study. We do what we have to do and then go to our respective jobs, roles, whatever.”

Kathryn continued, “when you’ve gone through some life experience, you’ve been made a fool of plenty of times. I make a fool of myself in the classroom and no one’s going to spread it around among all my friends. So I have less to be intimidated about.”

Annette spoke of the confidence which being an adult has given her regarding communication. “You are certain at what you are talking about. . . . Like when I go to talk to someone on an interview; they know that this girl knows something, and she has credentials to prove it. . . . It makes it a lot easier for me to communicate.”

Kathryn commented on the advantage maturity brought to having to give oral presentations.

I don’t feel afraid to get up and speak in front of my peers, although years and years ago, if you’d asked me to stand up in front of people, I would have just DIED. I think just from experience, from having to be in front of people in club work--president of a club, or getting up in front of mothers in Brownies or Cub Scouts--you just kind of get over that fear--Sunday School. You make many presentations as you matured through life without really realizing you’re doing it.
Said Carrie, “we’re better students, take it more seriously, and study harder. There is a motivating factor that’s not there for younger students.” Said Tigress, because of having attended community college, “I’m a more directed person. I’ve always been responsible, but it’s made me more responsible. It’s given me a purpose in life.”

Informants recognized that their maturity also affected the quality of class discussion. Said Kathryn comparing herself to younger classmates, “I’m much more eager to be a participant in a discussion group, especially the ones in psychology.

I’m taking an Adolescent Psychology class now, so you’ve got the comparison between the adolescents sitting in the classroom and the MOTHERS of adolescents sitting in the classroom. My teacher loves to start real controversial conversations. You can FEEL the heat from the embarrassment in the back of the room where the younger people sit. And then there will be those of us mothers sitting right up front. . . . None of us even BLUSH. You know, you can say the body parts in front of us. It’s ok, we’ve heard the word “penis” before. That’s not a biggie [laughter]. I turn back and the whole back of the room is BRIGHT RED. We’ve got to STOP ourselves sometimes because we get so INto it.

Kathryn explained she was one of two reentry women in this class who were “so into it” that they “have to keep slapping [their] hands because [they’re] always raising [their] hands, and then [they] feel like [they] sort of get diarrhea of the mouth.”

Scooter made the point that involving the students would also be in the best interest of the instructors. “We stimulate [instructors’] enthusiasm. We definitely do make a difference,” explained Tigress. Reentry women help the instructor carry the class. “Teachers appreciate” reentry women’s job of learning. They seem to like some of the older students because they do get more out of them,” observed Rose. Kathryn confirmed this: “The teachers do
look to us to try to get a conversation going. The teacher will ask a question and look to us because we may answer while the others may sit there mute with their heads down.” Informants’ reporting of active participation supported the view held by research that reentry women possess a deep reservoir of experience from which they draw to participate in classroom discussions (Dalellew & Martinez, 1988; Tarule, 1988; Warner, 1989).

Reentry women perceived a transition in themselves when they realized that they were more serious about their reentry college work than they had been at 17 years of age. Said Scooter, “I have some kind of direction, a purpose. I’m more organized, more patient” than when she first attempted college at 17.

Said Rose about being an older student, “one is maybe not so insecure in oneself. I don’t have to worry about boyfriends or the sort of things you do when you’re 17. You’re very self conscious if you have a pimple come up.” Added Kathryn,

younger students are sitting back there with their peers. And they are in classrooms with people they are competing with for BOYfriends, or they’re worrying about what impression they make. They are still very much into dating and social life, looking out the window, wanting to get out on their surf boards. That is their number one thought. . . . We’re less distracted by the boys in the class because our focus is different. We’re not there to impress anybody about anything.

Tigress, in comparing her present college experience with her former one, said, “I’m really involved. I am gaining a tremendous amount out of it. The knowledge is definitely more meaningful now than ever because I actually really want to know. I’m always prepared for class.”

Jessica, too, was aware of her newly found maturity as a student. Jessica’s awareness of the change that college had made in her was clear
when she observed, “I used to BE that person sitting in the back row, arriving late and leaving early if I showed up at all.”

**Purpose**

Kathryn suggested the genesis of the motivating factor behind reentry women being so purposeful: “You are not just passing time while you figure out what to do with your life. You are there for one reason—you know that your ability to survive oftentimes DEPENDS on it.”

Scooter suggested another explanation for reentry women’s strong sense of purpose, “people who reenter have a different outlook; they’re here more for themselves and they’re more serious about it. Once you’ve dropped out and come back, after you’ve been in the real world, so to speak, you have a different attitude.”

**Directness**

Reentry women did not hold back when they wanted clarification on something that was happening in the classroom, a directness that indicated change in their self-perception. Jessica, for instance, reported, “I feel freer to speak my mind than when I started all these classes.” “Where I may have had the temptation before not to show my ignorance,” said Rose, now she pushed the instructors for further explanations.

I’ve gained a lot of courage. I don’t feel so embarrassed now if I don’t comprehend it in class immediately to put up my hand and say, “I’m sorry, I didn’t get that.” I don’t feel that I’m being a total dummy that I would have a year or two years ago.

Annette may sum up the reentry position best when she described her own directive attitude toward instructors:

Ok, tell me what I want to know. Don’t play games with me. Tell me what you want me to do, and let me do it . . . . I’m here and you’re going to teach me! You’re going to have to show me what you’re talking about because I don’t know what you’re talking about.
Summary. Community college reentry women recognize and appreciate the advantages that their maturity brings to the classroom. More purposive and directed, they draw from a rich reservoir of life experiences to contribute to class discussions.

Realization of Extent of Enjoyment

The informants experienced transition in their realization of the extent of their enjoyment in being college students. Among those factors most frequently reported as bringing happiness to the informants were high grade point averages, application of education and intensity of emotional response.

High grade point averages

Reentry women are intellectually able (Bueche, 1986), and highly motivated and conscientious students (Nordstrom, 1989; Wheeler, 1990). All the informants expressed pride in their accomplishments in the department of grade point average (GPA). Such pride may be understood better if one remembers the inadequate academic skills and low self-confidence with which many reentry women began their collegiate experiences.

Specifically in her much dreaded math class, Rose attributed her good grade to having given her “the confidence to continue” with college. Kathryn has maintained her 4.0 and is feeling “REAL good” about it. Jessica felt a sense of accomplishment where her grades were concerned because “I've upped my grade point average. It's a 3.2.” She felt particularly proud of the term in which she took “microbiology and all that nasty stuff and earned a 4.0.”

Scooter was also pleased with her improved grades since her earlier attempt as a student at a local university. “I have done so much better,” bringing her 2.1 to a 3.4 “which isn't excellent but it's good for me to have come back
from so low." In fact, a nearby university would not accept her with her 2.1 and had suggested she bring up her GPA at a community college.

For Annette, her GPA ranged "from a 3.0 to a 3.9. Didn't make that 4.0. But that was O.K. I was close enough." She was especially proud of her grade in biology. "I aced the class!" Annette's accomplishment might be better appreciated when one considers her claim that her "biggest surprise in coming back to school" was the fact that she actually completed college.

Carrie beamed about her 3.54. "Not bad for a 9th grade drop out!" She felt especially elated about her success with math courses. "Starting with absolutely no math skills whatsoever and finishing calculus with a B. It was the most stress that I've had--you know, the math sequence is the toughest and scariest, and I finished it. Even took more than I needed!" She graduated with Who's Who and Hall of Fame awards as well as a certificate of appreciation for her presidency of Phi Theta Kappa. When Carrie started college she had thought "I'll never be able to graduate; it was a dream to have a degree, but I really didn't foresee myself being able to continue."

One reward of earning good grades was being invited to join Phi Theta Kappa, an international honorary fraternity which requires a high GPA as one of its criteria. Four of the informants are PTK members: Tigress, Carrie, Scooter, and Rose. Of her induction into PTK, Rose said she "was very proud that day when I joined PTK. It will always be a very special moment for me."

Reentry women's concern about grades was substantiated during the projective-technique-based interview. The magazine picture that 5 of the 7 informants selected as the one most representative of their collegiate experience was that of a report card that showed 5 "As" and 1 "B+."
Application of education

Several informants reported changed attitudes and behaviors because of their newly achieved college-given ability to utilize in their daily lives material they had learned at school. These descriptions supported the findings of Kasworm (1990) that reentry women “significantly impact the daily lives of their children, their families, their fellow workers, and their communities. These individuals can translate and apply the knowledge and skill of the undergraduate experience to their daily world of adult life” (p 366).

Rose said that trees, paintings, and “anything I’ve learned about [in college] just means so much MORE to me.” Annette continues to apply her science knowledge to her everyday life. In a recent driving class—necessitated by acquisition of a speeding ticket—the instructor, in talking about proper use of seat belts, had said that improper use “will pull your aorta right from your heart. I knew that was the main artery because of the fetal pig.”

Kathryn, the woman programmed at an early age to be a failure in math, boasted at now being capable of helping her 13-year-old daughter with Algebra homework. Tigress, too, was proud of her accomplishments in math. “I felt wonderful” when students asked her to tutor in math “because you understand that math used to be my ‘D’ subject.”

Annette helped her children by sharing facts that she has learned in her own classes. “I’m just constantly talking books.” If she heard something on the television related to something she learned in class, she started telling her children about it. They might say “there she goes again!” but “they’ve come to me for a lot of things because they do realize that I do have the information.”

Annette was proud of being able to influence others to consider community college, too. When she heard women saying, “I don’t think I can
make it, my skills are too low” she used herself as an example, advising them to look “how far I've come from where I was.” She assured them, “I'm living proof.” She said, “It makes me feel better about myself to remember ‘yes, I had that feeling before’ and to be able to help someone that felt the same way I did.”

Intensity of emotional response

One way to measure the degree of the reentry women's transition in attitude and behavior was to consider the intensity of their emotional response to their collegiate experience. This response became evident through their expression of commitment to pursue their education and their enjoyment of the process.

Kathryn described her commitment about her pursuit of education by comparing her business college courses as a teenager with her community college courses at 44:

Before I was in school because I HAD to be. Now I've got some focus and I'm real excited. No matter what happens in life, I want to go THROUGH with this. I mean, even if Prince Charming comes, and he's a MILLIONAIRE, I'm going to get my degree, no matter what. Before, my attitude was, “God, PLEASE send me someone to take care of me so I don't have to DO this.

“It took me SO LONG to even want to be in school,” said Kathryn, and now that the “motivation has kicked in, I don't want anything to interfere.” Whereas she almost had not enrolled in college in the first place because she knew her alimony was temporary, now she claimed, “I'm STILL going to go forward. It's like . . . I even PRAYED that there would be a fire lit under me so that I would get motivated.”

Now there's a fire under me, and I'm going for it. I'm not going to let anything stop me because I want to always be able to be independent and I never want to go backwards again and have to feel dependent on another human being.
"So, as long as I can, I'm going to give it all I got. Now that the motor's running."

Further evidence of her level of commitment to pursue her education was evident in her declaration, "When they put me in that box, I want to have a degree in my hand."

Kathryn's intensity of emotional response about her college work was clear not only in her stated commitment to continue but in her expression of enjoyment in the process.

I'm having a good time. What a PRIVILEGE it is to be able to go to school. . . . I bounce in school, now, instead of holding my head down in shame. And I was. I was feeling ashamed to be here because I had been at that point in my life where I had been an upper-middle class mother living in a nice area doing all the quote normal things, and now I have been reduced. (laughing) To this terribly low level!!! Now I'm thinking "Gosh, this is great. I'm glad to be here. I'm having FUN!!" I'm working hard but I'm having fun. Now I feel it would be a tragedy if I were stopped along the way.

Rose revealed her level of commitment by expressing her desire to take courses twice. "If it wasn't for the fact that I'm anxious to go on, I would almost take all my courses over again. You learn so much more the second time around!" In fact, "I wish I didn't have to sleep. It irritates me that I have to go to bed. It does! There's SO much I want o do and experience, and I just can't bear to lie there and go to sleep."

Rose made no secret, either, of her enjoyment of the process of going to college. "I just LOVE going to school. It's so wonderful to be learning about such a diverse world. I would encourage anybody to go on. You can grow and gain in every way possible."

Annette's intensity of emotional response to attending college could be clearly seen in her early determination to enroll in school. Exhausted from working four jobs, frustrated by her four teenage children, tired of being poor,
and ashamed of her deteriorated language skills, Annette mustered her
courage and approached the college secretary, asking to sign up for any class:

"We can't take the money right now until . . . " I said, "Please." [Even
though] all I had was $10.00 left for groceries for the next two weeks. "If
you don't take it now, I won't be back. I have to do it now."

Annette continued to exude this strong feeling of commitment: "I'm still claiming
my future; I haven't given up on it."

Clearly, Tigress enjoyed school, as well. "I LOVE learning. I'm thrilled to
death about learning." She continued, "I want the education. I've been
THRIVING on it. I really have, and I've loved every moment of it"

Tigress's intense level of commitment to her pursuit of a college
education could be better appreciated in light of her domestic situation. Three
and one-half years after her husband had returned to his aircraft estimator's job,
Tigress's compulsion to complete school had not dissipated. Her biggest fear
was "having to leave [school], having him die on me." In defiance of her in-laws'
pleas that she quit school to spend more quality time with their son, Tigress
responded, "I don't want to go on welfare is where it's at. I don't want to lose my
house." Also, desperately struggling to preserve their current quality of life for
her daughter as well as her self, Tigress explained, "he's lived his life. I've lived
my life, but SHE hasn't." Putting all these heavy burdens in perspective, Tigress
added, "but the desire is really there, so to me, these disadvantages take
second."

Of a college education Jessica said, "I've wanted it for so long! I'm so
stubborn about this now. NOBODY is going to stop me. NOBODY can tell me
right now that I can't do this."

Summary. Community college reentry women enjoyed their collegiate
experience. In particular they were proud of their high grade point averages
and thrilled to be able to pass their college information on to their children. The extent of their enjoyment could be described as passionate.

**Altered Perception of Self**

Having embarked on this journey through community college, a trip which bore a price tag of personal sacrifice as well as money, what was the payoff for the reentry woman at the other end? Aside from the obvious fact of their having been exposed to information they might not have otherwise received, in addition to their appreciating the advantages of their age, reveling in various accomplishments, and feeling happy about the new way they are managing their lives, what effect did these reentry women notice that their college experience had on their lives. According to the accounts reported by the informants, the biggest transitions in attitude and behavior resulted in their altered perception of self. Altered perception of self manifested itself through increased self-confidence which then resulted in improved life management and different choices of significant others. The informants' perception that they had experienced change supported the research (Nordstrom, 1989; Saltonstall, 1990).

**Restored self-confidence**

Reentry women reported restored self-confidence in their ability to manage their daily lives as well as their skills to succeed as college students, thus seeming to support the findings of Finkelstein (1987) who observed that reentry women "moved from fear to self-doubt to feelings of competence and confidence . . . . The women's changes were dramatic; they actually seemed to become different people" (p. 2417A). Carbone (1988) also reported reentry women's increased self-esteem.
Perhaps Rose represented all the informants when she said, “It's a wonderful feeling to have confidence. Some people are born with that, but the majority gain in through education.”

Carrie reported her struggle with every new semester to find that confidence. “It's so funny. I start out at the beginning of each semester after the first week of my new classes, 'I can't do this! I'm going to scrub toilets! It's too hard! I'm not smart enough!'--and then I finish . . . and make 'As.” She admitted to putting herself regularly through this torture even though she now realized that “I could take anything. I might not WANT to do it, but I could learn whatever was presented to me.”

“There's very little that I'm afraid of any more,” said Kathryn, “now that I've gained the confidence to return to college. I'm not afraid of my teachers any more whereas at the the beginning I was intimidated by everybody.” She said that even though so much had happened, she “survived,” was "still smiling, even LAUGHING at some of this stuff now.” Just last summer she was ready “to end it all” because she was “so depressed.”

At the beginning, she felt more like a "violin because I was really feeling sorry for myself. The violin is a sad type of instrument. But NOW, I feel differently. I'm more like a trumpet, blowing loud and clear and feeling very successful and dynamic.”

Kathryn said the turning point which propelled her back to college was when she was sitting at a computer all day, answering phones, or doing stuff that any imbecile could do, I realized that my mentality had not been challenged. I was going to wither away and be miserable doing this nincompoop type job,That I REFUSED to do this the rest of my life. I was TOO intelligent.
With her chronic "self-esteem thing" conquered, "I've gotten over that fear, and it has changed my whole life. It's given me the confidence to tackle anything now. NOTHING is too big for me--I think."

A significant change that had come to Kathryn is a sense of peace about her being in college.

I had a BIG fight with myself because I'm not a career-minded person. I'm a homemaker. I have a nature to nurture. But I have learned now that it's ok to be both, I'm still the lady who wants to have the little house with the white picket fence and sit on the porch on the rocking chair with grandchildren all around. But I'm going to be pursuing a career somewhere between now and then. I'll just be a better educated grandma sitting on the porch.

Scooter saw herself differently as a result of her college-induced increase in confidence level. "Scared to try new things it was really hard to get back from feeling I had gone down to the lowest I could go."

Speaking metaphorically, Scooter compared herself before and after her community college experience. "It started out blue and now it's very yellow. I was very withdrawn and shy and kind of a loner when I first started going to school. Real cool and unparticipating. Now I feel real vibrant and yellow and warm, real secure, real confident."

Jessica believed that she was different from having been to college in that she "doesn't feel pushed around any more." As to whether college had made her more confident she replied, "yes, a LOT more. Even in conversation. I feel more intelligent. I remember stuff." Speaking metaphorically of colors which describe her prior to community college and now, Jessica said, "orange, just because it seems kind of abrupt or sharp or something. It's gone more toward GREEN, which is growing or determined or mellowing a little bit but still strong."
Tigress spoke of a new confidence in having “found herself,” so to speak. This insight that came to Tigress concerned her relationship with a significant other. Though married, Tigress thought that she “needed to have an affair. I thought I needed to step out. God, it was two years before I had sex with any body. [Her husband] wasn’t able to.” She developed a crush on one of her instructors, but then she realized that she could not expect someone else to solve her problems. She “had to solve [her] own. It was a good experience for me because then I realized that . . . I must create ME before there can be any relationship with anybody.”

In answer to the question “what animal best describes you when you first reentered college and what animal best depicts you now after having experienced college?” the informants’ responses suggested that they viewed themselves as changed by the experience. Rose saw herself as a 6-week-old kitten when she began college, “exploring around.” At this point in her college career, she saw herself as a 9-month old cat, “feeling fairly secure and participating.” For Kathryn,

definitely I was an ostrich. I hid my head in the ground. I was down there with my head in the sand. I just didn’t want to be [in college]. I was humiliated. It was embarrassing. NOW, maybe a lion; I’m really getting into it--really roaring about it.

Tigress described herself in the beginning as “kind of a lamb . . . but maybe a little more aggressive than that. I’ve never really been too timid.” Now she saw herself as a “roaring tiger. I mean I’m going for the gusto!”

Jessica said that the first animal that came to her head to describe her early behavior was a “squirrel, at first, just fidgety and nervous.” Now, with just four courses to go, she saw herself as “more like a tiger, more aggressive. I will FIGHT for what I want--which is a grade.”
Scooter suggested "an animal that is nervous. Maybe a caged lion--nervous and uncomfortable, impatient" would have described her a couple of years ago. Now "very relaxed . . . maybe a bear. Every time I'm at the zoo, the bears are always sleeping . . . very relaxed, no anxiety now."

Carrie said she was a "frightened kitten going in and now I kind of feel like a golden retriever. Just kind of tired and content and healthy."

**Improved life-management**

Further evidence of changed attitudes and behaviors for reentry women manifested itself in their sense of accomplishment with their newly acquired ability to manage their lives in ways that they perceived as "better." The assessment that their community college experience improved their lives supported the findings of Carbone (1988) on the positive impact that college education can have on reentry women.

Kathryn, for instance, said, "right now I'm doing everything better in my life. I'm handling everything better in my life because this college experience has helped my self-esteem."

Jessica agreed that having been to college she, too, did "EVERYTHING" better. "I'm more responsible. I set a good example for my daughter. It's made a change in just about everything." Rose's acknowledgement of college's positive effect on her was equally as enthusiastic. She claimed to be more courageous,

not just in the classroom. In all sorts of things. If we had a repair man come to the house, and I didn't understand what he was trying to tell me, I would now question him again whereas I may have had the temptation before not to show my ignorance.

She continued, "my whole LIFE is better. EVERYTHING has been enriched."
Annette felt proud in accomplishing completion of her education given the hardships she has had to deal with along the way. "Quite a few of the girls I'd started with are going through college because, as they tell me, my problems stand out way more than theirs. And I did not have the support which THEY had."

"You don't get wrapped up in your marmalade sandwiches or whatever. It's a wonderful thing, knowledge, opens up the whole world to you." Continued Rose, "mainly I just don't get so caught in my own small insignificant life is the biggest change in me. Definitely it has changed my perspective, the way I look at things."

Different significant others' choices

As reported in this study, reentry women indicated their desire for self improvement as a reason for their return to college. While increased confidence, high grade point averages, and acquisition of employable skills could all be termed "self improvement," an area that deserved specific attention was the improved concept on the part of reentry women in their choice in partners of the opposite sex. Reentry women's acknowledged improvement in important relationships as a result of the collegiate experience seemed to corroborate the findings of Saltonstall (1989).

Several of the informants spoke of how their selection of men to date had changed as a result of their having been in college. Kathryn, for instance, "used to think marrying for money was the best way." Now, by having gone back to school, she said,

The intellect of the people who I date is important to me now whereas before it was not. Now that I feel so stimulated mentally, I realize that I do not enjoy the company of those who are not intelligent. BORing, REDneck (laughed).
She told of one person she dated who was not an educated person. He did not understand the amount of time she needed to devote to her studies.

He thought I was giving him the brush off when I said, "I can't see you this weekend; I've got two tests the first of the week, and I've got to study." So I let him go because I didn't think this was somebody who would ever understand.

Scooter's thoughts about men had also changed as a result of her having been in college. "I used to always look for the real cute guys, nice build. Now I tend to look more for the individual, how he thinks, what he's doing." Scooter said she has "raised [her] standards." Now she was looking for a man who is on her level intellectually. My last husband was . . . satisfied with doing his 9:00 to 5:00 . . . job . . . . Now I think I'd like someone who has some kind of goal or inspiration to do something with his life to make even a little difference. Not just a job but to have some kind of meaning behind it.

"When I got married, I wanted to have this family. I just thought I'd be married forever, be a mom, and everything would be hunky-dory," said Carrie. That "wasn't the case," however--twice. Carrie now believed that college had made a difference in her future choice of men.

Yes. YES!! A HUGE difference. I'd love to believe that I've learned not just facts, figures, and terms, but that I have learned about myself and have gained the self-confidence . . . to distinguish, decipher, choose, and pick . . . quality instead of destructive, restraining relationships. Not just men, but ALL . . . relationships.

She told of having dated Coast Guard Academy men but never feeling "good enough, like I couldn't hold my own in conversation, that I looked different and acted different. Just uncultured, rough, whatever." Later in New Orleans when she was "just a third-class photojournalist working out at the YMCA," she attended college parties but "felt so insecure . . . out of it, . . . set aside and separated," sure she "would put [her] foot in [her] mouth."
Now, Carrie said, with two years of college behind her, “I want to be with someone who has intellectual ideas and thoughts and concerns.” With her appetite “whetted a little bit,” she now knew that she was

NOT illiterate, uneducated, and can actually form ideas about the economy, politics, the banking system. NOT a WHOLE lot. But going from a person who wouldn’t read stuff in the newspaper except for “Dear Abby” and the comics and whatever was on the front page to now developing that habit of delving into the more in-depth articles and knowing something about what they are talking about. I don’t feel like I have to apologize, that I’m not lagging. I’d be MUCH, MUCH choosier, MUCH choosier--I would go for quality of the relationship over money, looks.

Even married Tigress replied “most definitely!” when asked if being an educated woman would now change her choice of life’s partner.

**Summary.** Informants reported restored self-confidence that affected not only their school work but their everyday lives in a positive way. The confidence empowered them to believe that they could manage their lives better. Even their selection of men to date or friends to associate with had been influenced by their perceived increase in self-confidence.

**Closure**

As informants anticipated graduating from the community college, they frequently spoke about anxiety. Informants expressed anxiety from fear of the unknown and sadness about their impending separation form the community college.

**Fear**

Kathryn, the one who had two-thirds of the way to go yet, said,

I think fear will begin to rise up, only because [graduation] will be nearly the same situation I felt going into the community colleges. It was the unknown; I was afraid. Already I do think of going on to a higher level of education, and I feel nervous about THAT, as if I were starting all over
again. All of sudden, THOSE teachers are going to be BIGGER than life and the teachers in THIS school. Something I’m just going to have to get over.

Jessica said that when she transferred, “it will probably be a whole new fear before that celebration hits” again.

Annette expressed anxiety about what she anticipated at a university. “There’s this giant class . . . teachers talking on microphones, no one-on-one, the line is a mile long to see the teacher.”

Rose admitted, “I’m a little nervous--I’m a lot more that a LITTLE nervous--that I’m going to be able to achieve and maintain in a decent standard when I get to a bigger and harder school.”

Carrie, who recently graduated, said, “classes [at a nearby university] are going to be TONS harder. They’ll be larger. . . . There is a little bit of fear, but it’s an excitement fear; it’s not a fear-I-can’t-do-it fear.” She continued, “I don’t like closure; I don’t want to leave. I’m thinking that I’m going to miss out on the neat experience I’ve had at the community college, not that I’m not going to be able to do the work.” She added that she was not looking forward to “the size. . . . the traveling.” She would like to car pool, but said, “if I have to, I will drive up there by myself.” Perhaps her apprehension is fueled by her previous brief experience at Loyola which was “very intimidating, very scary.”

Scooter was “nervous . . . about going to a new city, and kind of starting over, making new friends, and getting settled in. . . . I’m going to go full time when I get over there. That’s going to be a big change.”

Sadness

Several informants reported feeling sadness at leaving the community college. This emotion arose from a sense of loss of friends and having to move away from family. Rose spoke of sadness when she said,
most of my friends are leaving, now, because I'm a term behind everybody. So I'm going to hurt on my OWN because everybody is going. This little school is not going to be as it was to me any more. Sad, sad, when something wonderful is taken away from you.

Carrie, too expressed sadness at "leaving behind some good friends" and having "to start all over again now that I'm going to the university."

**Summary.** The reentry women must eventually face separation from the community college. Of the seven informants, two recently graduated, two had completed requirements within one course or one test, two would be finished in one or two terms, and one had two-thirds of the way to go. The informants requested counseling to assist them in their transition through this final phase of community college life, thus seeming to support the research (Bowen, 1980; Fisher-Thompson, 1981).

**Summary**

Adult development literature helps us understand the transitions that reentry women experience as they journey through their college experience. Understanding the theory of Schlossberg et al. (1989) on adult leaners' transition in college as going through the stages of moving in, moving through, and moving on can also be helpful to educators. The informants' objections to what they considered to be ineffective teaching characteristics seemed to support the findings that reentry women quickly discern and strongly object to behavior that is sexist, ageist, and/or racist (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The various anxieties that informants reported appeared to confirm Scarf's (1980) observation that despair and depression often accompany role shifts. Informants' grief upon separation from the community college seemed to support Schlossberg's et al. (1989) view that adult learners experience a mourning process upon anticipating leaving and require assistance with their
transition. The informants experienced a sense of loss, a finding apparently corroborating the view of Astin (1984).

Carrie fell into Stevenson's (1977) category of the "Catch 30" transition that finds people questioning their actions or inactions while searching for priorities. The next transition from 32 to 39 fit Jessica, Rose, and Annette, and is characterized by commitment definition and life-style stabilization. Stevenson (1977) saw the ages between 39 and 42 as the "Catch 40" transition, a paradoxical time when one is faced with the gap between what one could have been and what one is. Tigress and Kathryn fell into this category.

Scarf's (1980) definition of middlescence was applicable to all the informants. As she described, they experienced feeling pushed by inner and outer pressures to recreate themselves and become someone new.

Change is not only desirable but is necessary in order for people to change and restructure their lives so they may grow successfully into adults that find fulfillment and satisfaction (Erikson, 1950; Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1976; Stevenson, 1977). Sheehy (1976) observed that "times of crisis, of disruption or constructive change, are not only predictable but desirable. They mean growth" (p. 31).

Part of the adjustment for reentry women may be in their realizing that the feelings they are experiencing--feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, guilt--are natural aspects of adult development (Gilligan, 1982b; Scarf, 1980; Stevenson, 1977). People need to know that "a sense of stagnation, disequilibrium, and depression is predictable as [they] enter the passage to midlife" (Sheehy, 1976, p. 16).
Current Status

Although the final interviews had already been recorded, transcripts had been typed, and data had been analyzed and reported, when the dissertation was undergoing the final phases of completion, information continued to trickle in by letter or telephone as to the current status of the seven informants. The following summary of that information is provided to offer yet further insight as to the impact that the college experience had on these community college reentry women.

Annette has completed all her course work at the college and will receive her AA degree upon successful completion of the math portion of the CLAST exam. When asked what kind of job she held currently, she replied,

Because of the recession, it's so hard to get into a job. I have a few prospects in line. They're like government jobs, state jobs. One is at the police department. Because I need to supplement, I went back to being jack of all trades here. I went back to motel house cleaning from 8:00 till 1:00, which is fine and gives me a few hours in the afternoon; when my kids come home—I'm home. I wanted to make sure that was there. And another one is waitressing. I used to be a waitress before. I'm hoping that the waitress will really supplement. The only reason I'm keeping the housekeeping job is because of my daughter and my son, but mainly my daughter. I think of her. This way I can take her with me to work during the summer. She can earn some money from me. At the same time, I know where she is, I know what she's doing.

If she were hired by the police department or the government she would request that they hold the job for her until her children went back to school in August. “If not, than I'll just have to take the job. But I would much rather spend the time with [her daughter] this summer.”

Annette continued to look for a computer job while she supported herself and her four children by cleaning motel rooms and waitressing. “Sometimes I feel like I'm fighting a losing battle. I see so much prejudice, even when I go in
for interviews.” When asked what she told herself in such situations, Annette said, “that those type of people are ignorant. They look at the outside and not at the personal skills which could benefit their position. I feel that I am an asset, and if they don’t hire me, then they’ve lost a good asset.”

Since Annette had been in college she had noticed that her children’s “ability and drive to go to school and to finish has changed.” Her eldest son made the decision to go to college: “‘Ma, you gotta go or end up like the bums out on the street, like the ones who hang out on the corner.’” He was enrolled at a community college in a nearby town.

Jessica revealed that she would have to quit school because the alimony and the child support were “not coming in, and I’m going to have to work full time. Pell Grant does pay for school, but I’m going to have to quit school until a loan comes through, which JUST KILLS me.” Jessica took her ex-husband to court, trying to get what was rightfully hers.

I just went to court, and the judge agreed with me and said I was going to get $15,000 for the knee, which is how I was going to go to school and live for the next two years. When the judge said, “Yes, you owe this to her,” [her ex-husband] said, “I don’t have it, and if I did, I would give it to her.” So there’s a lien against his business, his homes, but I have no money.

On a happier note, Jessica recently applied for a scholarship from a local hospital. Out of 4,000 applicants, Jessica won. The scholarship would pay $200 per quarter for one year and was renewable. She looked forward to returning to college in the fall.

Pell Grant money enabled Scooter to continue her engineering career at a local university. With this financial aid, she would not have to work full time while trying to go to school full time.
Carrie took statistics over the summer and planned to attend classes at a nearby university in the fall to major in biology, minor in journalism, in addition to earning a teaching certificate. Environmental education communication was her long range goal where she would be able to utilize her interest in science and her experience in journalism. Enthusiastically Carrie exclaimed, “It’s big bucks, too, if you go with private corporations, for people with a hard science degree with communications skills to be able to communicate in and be the go-between between scientists and the public.”

Kathryn tackled physical science in the shortened summer term. “I’m feeling a little overwhelmed--but there are other ‘reentries’ there and we’re supporting each other.” Contrary to her fears, she earned an “A,” came to “know the value of pulling together” with other reentry women; nine studied together, “bonding,” and “all were rejoicing at everyone’s success.” She also passed the CLAST examination, with a perfect score on the essay and “enough” on the math, in spite of her pretest attitude of “I knew I’d fail and have to take it again.” Phi Theta Kappa asked her to become a member. “No one could have told me two years ago that I had enough brain cells operating to even stay in school--let alone maintain a 4.0. It’s amazing what we old bags can do when we have to!” She had applied for financial aid and had declared bankruptcy.

Rose took six more hours over the summer. Through her newly found confidence, she was instrumental in having an incompetent composition instructor replaced in the middle of the summer term.

Tigress finished her last course, state and local government. Rose threw a surprise graduation garden party for her. Kathryn and the researcher shared in the celebration.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore reentry women’s self-assessment processes, their struggle to balance their new student role along with the duality of roles already performed, the experiences that triggered their reentry, and the transitional nature of their collegiate experience, through the application of adult development theory. The specific questions guiding this study were derived from the research on adult development.

The following questions derived from a review of the literature tested a set of propositions distilled from the theories of adult development and drove the investigation that will be reported in the dissertation.

1. In what ways and around what issues did these community college reentry women engage in self-assessment?

2. Did experiences or life events have any influence over these community college reentry women’s decision to continue pursuit of higher education?

3. In what ways did assuming the role of college student affect the social roles already performed by these community college reentry women, and what expectations did significant others have of their performance?
4. Did these community college reentry women undergo any transitions during their collegiate experience, and, if so, what were they?

During the 1989-1990 academic year, 29 community college reentry women participated in a preliminary study that consisted of a screening interview and the Reentry Woman Student Survey (RWSS). The same 29 reentry women who participated in the screening interview were mailed the RWSS. Of those 29, 23 responded; 22 of those reentry women expressed interest in being interviewed further. From a data analysis of the RWSS, 7 reentry women were identified to participate in this study. During the 1990-1991 academic year, 7 community college reentry women participated in a series of intensive, open-ended, in-depth interviews, one of which was a projective-based technique interview.

In order to attain a contextual understanding of these reentry women, data were collected by means of the qualitative interviews designed to explore such issues as the community college reentry women's self-assessment during their collegiate experience, the life events and experiences that propelled them into reentry, their social roles and significant others' expectations, and their transitions during their community college journey.

The data collected during the course of this study were analyzed by using selected steps from Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence Tasks along with two of the three-step process described by Miles and Huberman (1984) of data reduction and data display. A computer software program, GOfer (1989), was used to facilitate data storage, retrieval essential to the qualitative analysis process, and the analysis process.
Presented in this chapter are the conclusions associated with this study. In addition, the implications of the research findings for educators, recommendations for further research, and summary of the study are included.

**Findings**

Data from the informants' screening interviews, their responses on the Reentry Woman Student Survey, the long interviews, and the photo-elicitation interviews provided support for the applicability of adult development theory to these community college reentry women. This applicability becomes clear in the following:

1. Community college reentry women experienced continual self-assessment as they journeyed through their collegiate experience; self-assessment permeates the other three adult development propositions in this study. Three major processes of self-assessment emerged from this study.
   a. Self-assessment impacted decisions that community college reentry women made throughout their collegiate experience. Self-assessment influenced their deciding whether they could financially afford college, what personal characteristics needed improvement and how badly they wanted to make those improvements, and whether they had the intelligence to accomplish college-level work. Self-assessment influenced how they handled the trauma of the life events that eventually triggered their reenrolling in college. Self-assessment influenced the manner in which they decided to balance their numerous roles and respond to ambiguous expectations from significant others. Self-assessment influenced their enjoyment of their college experience and their ultimate conclusion that their collegiate experience had made a positive difference in their lives. Self-assessment influenced the reentry women's
confrontation with choices of what path they would take after they separated from the community college.

b. Self-assessment increased community college reentry women’s anxiety about their age. Whether 26 or 44, the respondents were highly aware of their age as compared to the age of what they believed to be the traditional college student. That awareness of age difference plagued them to the point that they assumed that other, younger students would automatically be better students because they were fresh out of high school and therefore more recently exposed to academic subjects and accustomed to disciplining themselves to study. Because of awareness of age difference—and accompanying responsibilities of being older such as being parent, spouse, employee—informants felt jealousy about younger students’ having time to socialize and “goof off.” Informants perceived that some faculty also noticed age difference in an adverse way by catering to younger students. Informants also perceived that the age difference inspired certain faculty to treat older students differently by expecting a higher level of accomplishment from them.

c. Self-assessment allowed community college reentry women to realize that their past experiences would be quite valuable in their educational pursuit. Their revelations on adult issues such as raising children or surviving divorce added a richness and depth to class discussions or written compositions that most younger students could not contribute. Such contributions also allowed the women to see that their opinions were valued, their ideas respected, and their input considered worthwhile. They perceived themselves as assets to the instructor and the class.

2. The timing of life events and experiences in community college reentry women’s lives propelled them into reentry. Reentry women were driven
into considering reenrollment in higher education because of trigger events or experiences such as divorce, fear of not being able to support their children, facing a spouse's life-threatening illness, and/or embarrassment over poor language and mathematics skills.

3. Community college reentry women performed a multiplicity of social roles and experienced ambiguous expectations from significant others. Two major social roles emerged.

a. Reentry women confronted role ambiguity. They agonized over feeling torn between their desire to improve their lives through community college education and their desire to be good mothers, wives, and/or daughters. In the student role they found themselves thrown in this arena of the unknown, questioning their ability to compete with students fresh out of high school, wondering if they were “too old” or would be the “only ones.” They confronted some instructors who overtly catered to younger students rather than mature women students, who attacked a student’s character instead of directing their criticism to her written work, and who stood inflexible to adult problems such as sick children and court dates deterring class attendance. In the role of student, burdened with chapters to read, papers to write, math problems to work, and projects to create, they worried about the well being of their children, spouses, and parents. They wondered if they were neglecting their children or irrevocably harming their relationships. The reentry women felt wounded, depressed, confused, torn--i.e., anxious about the new role they had taken on and its effects on their lives.

b. Reentry women confronted role expectation ambiguity in their perception of mixed messages from significant others. Mixed messages came from husbands who at first encouraged their wives to take on the role of student,
then verbally abused the women for not maintaining status quo on all their pre-
student roles; and/or whose husbands initially agreed to help with household
chores and childcare, but soon rebelled when such helping interfered with their
television watching or nights out “with the boys” or weekend fishing trips. Mixed
messages came from children who initially bragged about their mother’s being
a student, then cried that she was never home or, if home, was irritable. Mixed
messages came from friends who told them to “go for it,” then accused them of
abandonment when lunch dates were no longer met or phone calls were cut
short. Mixed messages came from parents who proudly urged their daughter to
further their education then accused her of selfishness when she declined the
repeated invitations to Sunday dinners and other family outings. In short,
reentry women perceived oxymoronic messages sent by family and friends that
on the one hand encouraged reentry into higher education but on the other
required that it be accomplished without disruption of the normal routines.

4. Community college reentry women experienced continual transition
as they journeyed through their collegiate experience. Three major processes
of transition emerged from this study.

a. Community college reentry women suffered from a lack of self-
confidence at reentry. Beaten down by fathers who counseled daughters away
from formal education toward husbands who would take care of them forever;
worn weary by societal values that taught them to be passive, subservient,
“good” girls; battered (sometimes physically) by husbands who drained them of
self respect--these women understood that for the sakes of their children and
themselves, they had to find or regain self-confidence or else risk being stifled to
death.
b. Community college reentry women experienced restored self-confidence as a result of their collegiate experience, a confidence reflected in an altered self-perception. Their self-esteem was enhanced after realization of the advantages to being a mature, purposeful, and directed student; for instance, in looking at the 18-year-old who sat in the back of the classroom—when she attended—stared out the window, did not participate in class, and did not study, the reentry women could see themselves 10, 15, or 20 years earlier and smile inwardly at the new type of student they had become. Their confidence was renewed when they were able to share information and skills newly learned in college by tutoring their own children or serving as a museum tour guide for their parents. Their new confidence enabled them to manage their lives better than before they had returned to college; this became clear to them when being interviewed for a job or giving directions to the electrician called to their home or engaging in cocktail party conversation. Their restored confidence led them to view themselves as changed in a positive manner from the collegiate experience; this became clear in looking back at having dropped out at 9th grade or having been rejected from university admission because of a low GPA in comparison to having been inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, graduating with honors, and being admitted into engineering school at the university.

c. Transitions brought accompanying anxieties at numerous junctures of their collegiate journey. Sacrifice of their autonomy and independence became apparent as soon as they submitted themselves to the instructor-student relationship. Informants viewed separation from college with anxiety at the thought of leaving the security of the community college environment. Anxiety
surfaced in their expression of fear in their unknown futures, whether in careers or in further formal education

Conclusions

Three overriding conclusions emerged from this study of adult development theory's application to community college reentry women. Each is highlighted in the following:

1. The propositions distilled from the theories of adult development contributed to an understanding of community college reentry women. The propositions explained the community college reentry women's tendency to take stock of their lives, reevaluate their priorities, and reset their goals; the life events and experiences rather than chronological age that propelled the women to make their decision to reenter; their shift in societal roles and mixed-message reactions from significant others; and the transitional nature of the collegiate experience and subsequent anxieties that frequently accompany change. The propositions' contribution to an understanding of community college reentry women was limited, however.

2. The propositions did not go far enough in achieving full understanding of the adult development of community college reentry women perhaps because many of the adult development theorists relied on the use of male subjects in their studies (Clabaugh, 1986; Giele, 1982; Gilligan, 1982b; Horner, 1972; Miller, 1986). Several issues emerged from this investigation for which the propositions distilled from the theories of adult development offer inadequate or unsuitable explanations.

a. The propositions did not adequately explain the betrayal perceived by reentry women whose fathers impressed upon them the inappropriateness of females to pursue roles other than those of housewives and mothers; whose
prior experience in society had taught them that females were incapable of comprehending mathematics; and/or whose husbands belittled or devalued their wives’ opinions or abilities.

b. The propositions did not adequately explain the reluctance on the part of some educators to take reentry women seriously and treat them as if they mattered. The propositions did not account for the subtle tone of marginality as discussed by Schlossberg et al. (1989) extended by institutions of higher education toward reentry women.

c. The propositions did not adequately explain the transformation that community college reentry women experience. The propositions did not capture the metamorphosis of the community college reentry women from directionless, voiceless, unconfident freshmen to more goal-oriented, outspoken, confident graduates.

3. Adult development theory does not adequately address the sociological context of the community college milieu of reentry women. Even those studies that did include women did not necessarily focus on women exclusively or study them in the setting of higher education in general or the community college in particular. Additional studies on the impact of the collegiate experience on community college reentry women would enrich the view of adults—particularly of female adults—currently held by theorists of adult development. To attend to the needs and concerns of reentry women in a conscientious manner, institutions of higher education must combine adult development theory with the sociological context of the community college.

Implications for Educators

By utilizing the information offered by the informants in this study, educators could improve their institutions of higher learning. All learners of
college age, but particularly adult learners, could benefit from judicious enactment of the following which will be suggested in the framework of the research questions derived from a review of the literature that tested a set of propositions distilled from the theories of adult development and drove this investigation.

Research Question 1: In what ways and around what issues did these community college reentry women engage in self-assessment?

a. Given that community college reentry women initially express low self-confidence about whether they belong or can afford to be in college and also exhibit fear about accessing it, institutions of higher learning need to create programs of recruitment, admissions, and financial aid that reflect the needs and concerns of adult learners.

b. Given that community college reentry women may be pursuing careers for the first time or changing careers in mid-life, and given that reentry women may enroll in community college with no major in mind or may change majors after taking a few courses, institutions of higher learning should provide on-going career counseling; such counseling should include resocialization to avoid stereotyped attitudes about career choices.

c. Given that community college reentry women may be attending part time because of family, employment, and financial restraints, institutions of higher learning should provide guidelines for financial aid and relevant time schedules--such as for registration, course offerings, payment of fees, bookstore, orientation--reflective of adult learner needs.
d. Given that community college reentry women initially express reservations about their intellectual inadequacies, insecurity about effective study habits, embarrassment of the stigma of being in remedial classes, and uneasiness about being older than students of traditional age, institutions of higher education should provide adequate advisement, placement, tracking and on-going counseling to empower these women to succeed in college.

e. Given that community college reentry women may respond differently than students of traditional age to teaching techniques, institutions of higher learning should provide procedures for faculty to consider the relevancy of andragogy rather than pedagogy.

Research Question 2: Did experiences or life events have any influence over these community college reentry women's decision to continue pursuit of higher education.

a. Given that community college reentry women return to college because of traumatic experiences in their lives, institutions of higher learning should provide on-going personal counseling.

b. Given that community college reentry women experience adult problems that may at times conflict with student responsibilities, institutions of higher education should provide programs to educate administration, faculty, and staff about adult development theory.

Research Question 3: In what ways did assuming the role of college student affect the social roles already performed by these community college reentry women, and what
expectations did significant others have of their performance?

a. Given that community college reentry women perform a multiplicity of roles and struggle to maintain a balance in light of the additional role of student, institutions of higher education should provide establishment of a day care center, an adult learner support center, and a support group.

b. Given that community college reentry women perform a multiplicity of roles and struggle to maintain a balance in light of the additional role of student, institutions of higher learning should provide sufficient and relevant counseling for adult concerns such as divorce, step parenting, drug abuse, spouse abuse, institutionalization of aging parents, parenting of handicapped, and grief therapy.

c. Given that community college reentry women perform a multiplicity of roles and struggle to maintain a balance in light of the additional role of student, institutions of higher learning should provide programs of orientation to the institution and to adult development theory for reentry women and their families.

Research Question 4: Did these community college reentry women undergo any transitions during their collegiate experience, and, if so, what were they?

a. Given that community college reentry women expect and deserve respect for their age, gender, and race, institutions of higher education should provide programs to raise the consciousness of administration, faculty, and staff to safeguard against display of ageism, sexism, and/or racism.

b. Given that community college reentry women experience feelings of fear, confusion, loss, and depression upon facing separation from the institution,
institutions of higher education should provide exit counseling to assist graduates in their transitions to universities, careers, and/or lifelong learning.

c. Given that community college reentry women often feel marginal in terms of belonging at the college, institutions of higher education should institute policies and procedures that enable adult learners to feel that their presence and contributions matter.

d. Given that community college reentry women often feel marginal in terms of belonging at the college, institutions of higher education should institute an assessment of adult learners' needs and concerns.

e. Given that community college reentry women often feel marginal in terms of belonging at the college, institutions of higher education should institute procedures that show recognition of reentry student effort and achievement.

f. Given that community college reentry women often feel marginal in terms of belonging at the college, institutions of higher education should institute policies and procedures that place adult learner involvement in the institution as a high priority.

g. Given that community college reentry women often feel marginal in terms of belonging at the college, institutions of higher education should institute adult learner evaluation of the institution's total program and its responsiveness to its learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings generated by this qualitative investigation have revealed in detailed description the impact of the collegiate experience on community college reentry women along with its applicability to adult learning theory. Investigation into the phenomenon of reentry women need not be limited to the
framework of the propositions distilled from theories of adult development. Further research possibilities that have emerged from this study include use of one theory instead of propositions, more focus on issues already highlighted, additional issues regarding this population, and use of different populations.

A possibility for a future study would be to concentrate on a single theory instead of a set of propositions from adult development theory. One theory that would be particularly suitable for studying community college reentry women would be Schlossberg's (1981a) model for analyzing human adaptation to transition.

Many of the issues highlighted throughout the conclusions section could be further explored. For instance, a comparison of the effect on reentry women of having or not having access to participation in a formal support organization or survival course or culminating education course could be made. The effect on admissions figures of new reentry women by a recruitment program which featured reentry women as guest speakers in community businesses and in church and civic organizations could be conducted. The effect of an adult learner-oriented video on satisfaction with the orientation program could be studied. Investigations could be conducted on whether adult learners should be expected to the same test-taking skills or same learning outcomes as younger students. The issue mattering and marginality (Schlossberg et al, 1989) could be explored further.

Studied in comparison to reentry women who attend primarily day time classes could be other populations such as: reentry men, younger students, reentry women who took primarily evening courses, or reentry women who dropped out again. Reentry women over 45 years of age could be compared to reentry women 25 to 44. In separate studies, the collegiate experience of
reentry men or the perceptions of family members about reentry women's collegiate experience could be investigated. Concerning instructors, investigation could be conducted into whether their teaching techniques were altered in any way for the reentry woman. Also studied could be their perceptions of reentry women as students or their comfort level in working with adult learners.

An extension of the present study could be a comparison of reentry women at more than one community college, one rural and one urban. Also, a longitudinal study of reentry women from community college through university and beyond could be conducted. An examination might be made of the effectiveness of strategy implemented by an institution in an effort to accommodate adult learners.

Summary

The detailed descriptions of the application of adult development theory on community college reentry women in this study provide educators with a contextual understanding of these learners: their on-going self-assessment; the life events rather than chronological age that triggered their reentry; their struggle to balance their multiplicity of roles, often amidst ambiguous significant others' expectations; and the transitional and anxiety-prone nature of their collegiate experience. Administration and staff of institutions of higher learning have much to learn from community college reentry women by analyzing their experiences from the policy and procedure standpoints of recruitment, admissions and retention, orientation, counseling, curriculum, and program planning. In addition, faculty can benefit from community college reentry women's suggestions about effective instruction of adult learners. The educational potential of reentry women can be fully realized only when the
response of community colleges--from the top-level administration to the frontline faculty--takes community college reentry women seriously, thus decreasing their marginality and making them matter (Schlossberg, et al., 1989).
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APPENDIX A
SCREENING INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

rev. 2/90

INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

1. My name is Valerie M. D'Ortona, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Florida.

2. With your consent, I will ask you a series of questions concerning your experiences at the College, and record your responses on audio tape. You may remain anonymous, being identified only by the code name you select. There will be an effort to report group rather than individual data. No one will have access to my fieldnotes except for my supervisor and myself. After the tape has been transcribed, at the end of the project the tape will be erased.

3. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers; I am interested in hearing your personal opinions and ideas.

4. The benefit to you is the opportunity to describe your personal "slice" of the educational life of the community college re-entry woman. An additional benefit is the practice of being interviewed with an eye toward future employment interviews.

5. If you have any questions about the procedures, you may contact me at the College, (phone number). I will give you my card.

6. You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue your participation in the activity at any time.

7. No monetary compensation will be awarded.

______________________________
Interviewee's Signature       Witness

______________________________
Date

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APPENDIX B
COVER LETTER

January 5, 1990

Ms. «First» «Last»
«Address»
«City», «State» «Zip»

Dear «First»:

Because it has been six to twelve months since the twenty-nine of you kindly consented to let me interview you on the subject of community college female reentry students, I thought that maybe you would be interested in an update on the study.

After moving to Gainesville in June, I enrolled full time as a graduate student in the University of Florida’s Department of Educational Leadership where I have been taking courses and working as a graduate assistant for an assistant professor of school law. With my course work requirements now behind me, I am ready to focus full attention on the dissertation, a task which may take until August to complete. This is where you come in again.

Enclosed is an instrument called the Community College Female Reentry Student Survey. I would really appreciate your taking ten minutes or so to complete it. There are no “correct” answers; your responses will simply give me a clearer picture of how you felt about yourself as a student early and late in your collegiate experience. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience. I need these returned as soon as possible.

Also, please notice at the bottom of the instrument a section where you may respond as to whether you would be willing to give me an additional interview. This interview would take place at our mutual convenience, hopefully in January, and could last a couple of hours; during that interview time, I would also ask you to look at some photographs and magazine pictures to stimulate discussion about your collegiate experience.

Working with you is obviously important to completion of my Ph.D., and for your cooperation, I thank you. Working with you, however, has also been heartwarming and inspiring. Reentry women have a unique story to tell, and I intend to tell it!

Sincerely,

Valerie M. D’Ortona
1. In our previous interview, your pseudonym was ___. May we continue to use that one?
2. How have you been since we last talked?
3. How many hours of community college work have you taken?
4. What made you interested in coming back to college after being out for a while?
5. What were your worries or concerns at the time?
6. What was it like to decide? What was it like when you finally enrolled?
7. How did you feel then? What emotion best describes your feelings at this time about being a college student?
8. Were there personal difficulties involved in making this decision? What were they?
9. Were there family considerations to make? Employment considerations?
10. Who, if anyone, tried to block your making this decision?
11. Who, if anyone, was supportive of your return?
12. What keeps you coming back each semester?
13. What characteristics of the faculty do you find most helpful?
14. What characteristics of the faculty do you find least helpful?
15. What characteristics of the administration and staff do you find most helpful?
16. What characteristics of the administration and staff do you find least helpful?
17. In what ways do re-entry women (aged 25 - 64) help one another in the community college experience? If you don't mind telling me, what is your age?

18. Which of your personal characteristics have helped you best in your academic pursuits?

19. What characteristics do you wish you had to assist you in enjoying success in community college?

20. If you would recommend the community college experience for other women between 25 - 64 years of age, what specifics would you highlight?

21. What is your reaction to the criticism that community colleges "coddle" their students?

22. What is your reaction to the criticism that community colleges are just "stepchildren" to the universities?

23. Tell me about your parents educational background.

24. What is your spouse's educational background?

25. What is your strategy for success in community college?

26. Why do you think some women don't make it?

27. Has community college changed your life, and, if so, in what ways?

28. What is your reaction to the description of the reentry woman's collegiate experience as being a "transformation"?

29. Where, if at all, do you see yourself fitting into the stages sometimes used to describe the reentry woman's collegiate experience: deciding to come; overcoming obstacles; adjusting; celebrating; and separating.
APPENDIX D
REENTRY WOMAN STUDENT SURVEY

Section I:
The following is a study of the feelings and thoughts of community college female reentry students about their collegiate experience. There are no "right" answers; the best response will be your first impression.

Your responses will be held confidential. The reason your name is later requested on this form is to enable me to reach an individual who may have inadvertently omitted a response or to "nudge" someone who has not returned the completed survey. The final responses, when tallied, will be labeled by number, not name.

Section II:
Directions: For each of the following items, please write TWO responses—one in the left-hand column and one in the right-hand column. The left-hand column represents your feelings when you first enrolled at the community college. The right-hand column represents your feelings when you most recently took a course at the community college. For instance, for item 1, if—when you first enrolled at the community college—you completely agreed that this statement was true, you would write "1" in the left-hand column; if—after the last class in which you were enrolled—you found the statement completely false, you would write "5" in the right-hand column.

CHOOSE: 1: Completely true. 2: Mostly true. 3: True and false. 4: Mostly false. 5: Completely false.

When First Enrolled
Enrolled

1. _____ 1. Feel I am as competent as classmates.
2. _____ 2. Have good study skills.
3. _____ 3. Can fulfill academic goals.
4. _____ 4. Feel some disadvantage in having been out of school.
5. _____ 5. Feel comfortable speaking before class.
6. _____ 6. Have adequate research skills.
7. _____ 7. Make excellent use of time.
8. _____ 8. Am comfortable voicing my beliefs and opinions.
10. _____ 10. Am comfortable seeking academic advisement.
11. _____ 11. Am comfortable in small group situation in class.

When Most Recently

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. ____
13. Enjoy my classes.
14. Family supports my academic goals.
15. Writing skills are adequate.
16. Feel prepared for academic challenges.
17. Verbal skills are adequate.
18. People in class listen to what I have to say.
19. Feel comfortable in large class.
20. Am comfortable raising an issue in class.
21. Feel pressured by time frames in class.
22. Enjoy expressing ideas in writing.
23. Classmates are smarter than I am.
24. Enjoy being called on in class.
25. Understand what I read for class.
26. Teachers are fair.
27. When I look in the mirror, I like what I see.
28. Feel uneasy in class.
29. Math skills are adequate.
30. Enjoy learning new things.
31. Feel I am an important member of class.
32. Enjoy interacting with classmates.
33. Get upset when teachers criticize me.
34. Feel threatened by new ideas in class.
35. Am afraid I might fail.
36. Have high test anxiety.
37. Am not afraid to ask where to find things.
38. Believe teachers expect more of me.
39. Wish I could go to school all my life.
40. Feel some advantages for having been out of school.
Section III:

To be able to paint a composite picture of the interview group, I need the following demographic information. Again, when the results are tallied, your anonymity will be protected. Please forgive the intrusion.

1. name: ______________________________________________________

2. address: ______________________________________________________ zip:

3. phone: ____________________________

4. _______ semester (fall, spring, or summer) and year you enrolled at the community college.

5. _______ semester and year of your last community college course.

6. _______ today's date.

7. _______ age

8. _______ race
9. ______ marital status (never married; married; separated; divorced)
10. ______ number of children
11. _________________________ children's sex and age
12. ______ occupation of husband (or, "not applicable"—N/A)
13. ______ your occupation (other than student) (or, N/A)
14. ______ range of family income
   1: under $10,000
   2: $10,000 to $20,000
   3: $20,000 to $30,000
   4: $30,000 to $40,000
   5: $40,000 to $50,000
   6: over $50,000
15. ______ own your home? (Yes/No)
16. ______ highest school grade completed by husband
17. ______ highest school grade completed by mother
18. ______ highest school grade completed by father
19. ______ religious affiliation (Protestant; Catholic; Jewish; other)
20. ______ state of birth
21. ______ Do you intend to pursue a 4-year degree?
22. ______ Do you intend to pursue a master's degree?
23. ______ Do you intend to pursue a doctor's degree?

Please check whether you would be interested in being interviewed further.
24. ______ Yes I would like to be interviewed further. Give me a call!
25. ______ No, thanks anyway. Good luck!
26. ______ Yes, I would like to read a transcript of my interview with you to verify whether you have represented me accurately.

27. Comments, suggestions, musings:
APPENDIX E
REMINDER LETTER

January 25, 1991

Ms. «First» «Last»
«Address»
«City», «State» «Zip»

Dear «First»:

Greetings! A few weeks ago I mailed you a survey regarding my dissertation study on community college female reentry students. The response has been very gratifying, with seventeen completed surveys already returned. But to make my report on the study as thorough and complete as possible—to really do justice to the story of reentry women—I need your survey as well.

Please take a few minutes and complete it as soon as possible. Hurry and mail it before the postal rates go up on February 3!

If for some reason you would rather not complete the survey, please return it with that message included. If I don't hear from you at all, I cannot know for certain that you have even received my correspondence.

Again, thank you for granting me the previous interview, and thank you for your time in considering the completion of this survey.

Sincerely,

Valerie M. D'Ortona
APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

1. My name is Valerie M. D'Ortona, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Florida.

2. With your consent, I will ask you a series of questions concerning your experiences at the College, and record your responses on audio tape. You may remain anonymous, being identified only by the code name you select. There will be an effort to report group rather than individual data. No one will have access to my fieldnotes except for my supervisor and myself. After the tape has been transcribed, at the end of the project the tape will be erased.

3. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers; I am interested in hearing your personal opinions and ideas.

4. The benefit to you is the opportunity to describe your personal "slice" of the educational life of the community college re-entry woman.

5. If you have any questions about the procedures, you may contact me at (phone number). I will give you my business card.

6. You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue your participation in the activity at any time.

7. No monetary compensation will be awarded.

_________________________________________  __________________________
Interviewee's Signature                        Witness

Date

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APPENDIX G
LONG INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introductory remarks:

Hello. As you know, I am working on my Ph.D. at the University of Florida. Part of my data collecting for writing my dissertation on the collegiate experience of community college women involves interviewing you a couple of times. You have been selected because your "story" is particularly interesting.

With your consent, I will ask you a series of questions about your experiences as a community college reentry woman (a student 25 years of age or older who is pursuing her college education after an interruption in her studies).

I would like to audiotape our interview, but you may remain anonymous by continuing to use your former pseudonym or selecting a new one. Please be assured that you may decline to answer any of the questions, that there are no "right" or "wrong" responses, that my interest is to learn your personal perceptions, feelings, and ideas about your experience.

Please feel free to ask me questions at any time. Here is my phone number (business card) if you should ever wish to phone or write me.

The interviewing will take place on two dates. Today we will be focusing primarily on the same subject matter as that on the survey you completed in January. In two weeks, I will be asking you to look at some photographs and magazine pictures and talk about them.

Do you have any questions? If not, please sign this form consenting to be interviewed and audiotaped, and let's begin.

I. DECIDING to return to college

    A. Why did you come back to college?
    B. What or who was the biggest influence in your making that decision?
    C. About how much time lapsed between your first thinking about returning and your actually returning to school?
    D. What were your academic goals when you started? Have you achieved them?
    E. What did your family/significant others say about your wanting to return to school?
F. What was the little voice inside you telling you?

G. Why should others over 25 years of age reenter school?

H. What is the best way to reach those people?

II. OVERCOMING obstacles/barriers

A. What are the advantages or disadvantages of being “reentry”?

B. Describe your feelings about being in a classroom again.

C. Describe instructors' treatment of you. How does that compare with the way instructors treat other students, both younger and peers?

D. Describe your treatment by administration and staff.

E. What roadblocks did family or significant others throw when you announced your reentry?

F. How did reentry affect your job, living arrangements, child care, etc.?

G. What was the most difficult experience about trying to access the institution?

H. What could the college have done to make this process easier for you?

III. ADJUSTING/coping

A. What was the worst experience you ever had at this college?

B. How has being back in college affected your intimate relationships?

C. Describe your classroom performance compared to younger students? Peers?

D. How did you react to having to give oral presentations? How did this reaction compare to that of younger students and peers?

E. Name your favorite and least favorite activities in class, and explain why you selected them.

F. Name your favorite and least favorite teacher characteristics. Explain.

G. Were you aware of your teachers' age and marital status? How did that affect your collegiate behavior and performance?

H. How did the teachers' gender affect your collegiate behavior and performance?

I. How did you respond to teacher criticism or challenge in or out of class?
J. Talk about competition and the reentry woman--competition with self, younger students, and peers.

K. What role would a support group for reentry students have played in your collegiate experience?

L. Did you have a mentor? Describe that relationship.

M. What was your biggest fear during your collegiate experience? How did you overcome it?

N. Talk about anxiety and the reentry woman (math; test; composition writing).

IV. CELEBRATING

A. What are you proudest of about your collegiate experience?

B. What do you do better having been to college?

C. What have been your strengths concerning this collegiate experience? Your weaknesses? How have these changed over time?

D. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the best, how would you characterize your enjoyment of being back in college?

E. In your view, where college is concerned, what constitutes “successful,” “failure”? Which were you? What is your formula for success?

F. What was your biggest thrill about being back in college?

G. Your biggest surprise?

H. What was the best experience at the college?

V. SEPARATING

A. If you were president of the community college, what would you change to enhance the successful experience of reentry women?

B. How has attending community college made a difference in your life?

C. What animal best describes your behavior when you first reentered college? What animal best describes you now in that experience?

D. Explain how “time” has been either your friend or enemy during this experience.

E. Designate a color which reminds you of your collegiate experience. Does this color change as you moved through your experience? Explain.
F. What musical instrument best illustrates your relationship with other reentry women? With younger students? With instructors? Explain.

G. What is your family's attitude now at this point in your collegiate experience?

H. What is your view of yourself now that you have "done it"?

I. If you were given a camera loaded with a roll of 12 shots of color film, what pictures would you take to best represent your feelings about your experience as a reentry woman?

J. With graduation in sight, how are you feeling about leaving the community college?

K. If you had it to do all over again, would you? Why or why not?

L. Is there anything else about your collegiate experience which you would like to comment on?
APPENDIX G
RATERS’ CODING INSTRUMENT

Directions:

A. Raters: Please circle the 15 numbers of the photographs which you feel should be used in the study:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

B. Raters: Please circle the 35 numbers of the magazine pictures which you feel should be used in the study:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44

C. Raters: Please name a category that you feel corresponds with the magazine picture numbered below:

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APPENDIX I
INFORMANTS' PHOTO-ELICITATION INSTRUMENT

Directions: Place yourself in this situation.

1. You are sending a series of 17 photographs and magazine pictures through the mail to your long distance best friend with whom you have not visited for the last two years.

2. You want to show your friend what it has been like for you to be a community college reentry student.

3. From these photographs and magazine pictures in this notebook, pick 7 photographs and 10 magazine pictures.

4. With #1 being the most important choice, in what order would you send them? Please write your choices on this sheet.

5. Also, please select 1 magazine picture which represents the antithesis (or opposite) of your community college experience.

6. There are no "right" or "wrong" choices. Please go with your "gut" reaction.

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APPENDIX J
PHOTOGRAPH AND MAGAZINE PICTURE DESCRIPTION

Photographs

A  calculus/statistics instructor at board; taken from back of room
B  physical science instructor at board; equation on board visible
C  empty inside of student center; chairs, tables, vending machines visible
D  composition instructor relaxing in his office beside desk
E  front office secretary and Provost
F  calculus, statistics instructor at his desk
G  empty biology laboratory
H  CLAST materials
I  humanities instructor at desk
J  physical science instructor at desk
K  psychology instructor at desk
L  humanities instructor near art poster
M  empty computer laboratory
N  inside view of library
O  inside women's restroom
P  beginning algebra instructor at his desk
Q  inside corridor of college
R  assistant librarian at desk
Magazine pictures

A  back of bicyclist with backpack; dusk; foggy; Ryder truck visible
B  George Washington’s picture on partial $1.00 bill
C  “On being a woman. On feeling secure”; woman in skirt and blouse
D  “On being a woman. On being a mother”; mother and two children
E  “You need a better way”; woman vacuuming curtains
F  “Are you up to the Challenge?”; two men in business suits
G  “Greatness”; three images of woman’s face, hands supporting cheeks
H  red table cloth, 10 playing cards face up circling a leather box, small white bust with strand of pearls draped on it
I  “Party to Go--Happy Birthday”; basket of cut flowers
J  “Don’t crack under pressure”; woman facing camera with eye closed, beading down on an unseen target, one hand drawing a bow’s string
K  business-suited woman relaxing with legs outstretched in white patio chair by umbrella and table; brief case beside her; drink on table
L  large Duracell battery with face reading “E 1/2 F”
M  “The Future: Can We Really Get There From Here?”; red-toned futuristic painting of business-suited men and women wearing oxygen tanks on their backs
N  woman in bathing suit and straw hat in deck chair, legs propped on rail, facing ocean and seagull
O  12 typewriters and computers
P  grade card with 5 “As” and 1 “B+”
Q  picture of 3 snap shots: bride and groom; mother and father with graduate son; “Happy 30th Anniversary”
R  Seiko wall clock, 10:08
S  two wrist watches, Minnie and Mickey Mouse, 8:50
T  17 seagulls in flight; camera looks into bright sun
U  winter scene; inside; Atlas, book, quill pen, candle, White Label Scotch
V  rocking chair
W  "Isn't it nice to live in a time when women aren't being pushed around so much anymore?"; 4 shots of women in hoop skirt, corset, bustle, and full busted
X  "Why grow old gracefully?"; Oil of Olay, red-headed young woman's face
Y  "Recharge your spirit"; sunset or sunrise, two catamarans on beach
APPENDIX K
Summary of Photo-Elicitation Instrument Results

1. The photographs (in alphabetical order) most frequently selected:
   G. biology lab (5 informants)
   H. CLAST materials (5 informants)
   K. psychology instructor (5 informants)
   N. library (5 informants)

2. The magazine pictures (in alphabetical order) most frequently selected:
   J. "Don't crack under pressure" (6 informants)
   P. grades (5 informants)
   R. wall clock--10:00 (5 informants)
   T. sea gulls (5 informants)
   Y. catamarans (5 informants)

3. The magazine pictures (in alphabetical order) selected most frequently as the antithesis:
   N. woman relaxing at beach (3 informants)
   A. bicyclist (1 informant)
   B. George Washington, money (1 informant)
   Q. wedding, graduation, anniversary (1 informant)
   W. "pushed around" (1 informant)
APPENDIX L
ACCURACY VERIFICATION LETTER

January 28, 1991

Ms. Joyce Brown
2555 Joe Ash Road
Gainesville, FL 32000

Dear Joyce:

Thank you so much for completing the survey and returning it so promptly. I am awaiting the surveys from the other interviewees before I begin to process the data and select those to be interviewed further.

Attached is, as you requested, a copy of the transcript of our previous interview. I would appreciate your doing the following:

1. Remember that since this is a transcript--and confidential--it will never be printed in full (although excerpts will be quoted--anonymously--to illustrate points. Therefore, please pay no attention to spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, etc.

2. Please read the transcript. This is your copy, so feel free to write on it as you please.

3. Please write back to me and tell me (along with whatever else you would like) that either:
   
   A. The transcript accurately depicts our conversation; or,
   B. You would like to have certain changes made (Perhaps the simplest way to handle this would be for you to photocopy and send the pages on which you've made changes.)

Your comments will help me write a more truthful report and help validate the results.

Sincerely

Valerie M. D'Ortona
## APPENDIX M

### COVER AND INCLUDED TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Cover Terms</th>
<th>Included Terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>Decision to return</td>
<td>Financial independence</td>
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<td>Academic majors</td>
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<td>Decision to persevere</td>
<td>Lack of self-confidence</td>
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<td>Competition/grades</td>
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<td>Triggering Events</td>
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<td>Inadequate academic skills</td>
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<td>Social Roles</td>
<td>Role juggling</td>
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<td>Toll on families</td>
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<td>Personal sacrifice</td>
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<td>Coping strategies</td>
<td>Support network</td>
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<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Instructors' behavior</td>
<td>Negativism</td>
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<td>Inflexibility</td>
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<td>Acceptance of 25+</td>
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<td>Direction</td>
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<td>Realization of enjoyment</td>
<td>High grades</td>
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<td>Application of education</td>
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<td>Intensity of emotion</td>
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<td>Altered self-perception</td>
<td>Restored self-confidence</td>
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<td>Improved life management</td>
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<td>Different choices of significant others</td>
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<td>Closure</td>
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APPENDIX N
LIST OF SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

1. X is a kind of reason for returning
2. X is a kind of influence on decision to reenter
3. X is a kind of academic goal
4. X is a kind of feedback from family on decision to reenter
5. X is a kind of advantage of being reentry
6. X is a kind of disadvantage of being reentry
7. X is a kind of teacher characteristic you don’t like
8. X is a kind of teacher characteristic you do like
9. X is a kind of worst experience at the college
10. X is a kind of preferred class activity
11. X is a kind of unpreferred class activity
12. X is a kind of competition
13. X is a kind of formal support group
14. X is a kind of coping technique
15. X is a kind of fear
16. X is a kind of proud moment
17. X is a kind of anxious moment
18. X is a kind of surprising moment
19. X is a kind of suggested improvement in the college
20. X is a kind of animal to describe you at reentry
21. X is a kind of animal to describe you now
22. X is a kind of musical instrument to describe you at reentry
23. X is a kind of musical to describe you now

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24. X is a kind of event that triggered reentry
25. X is a kind of formal support group
26. X is a kind of coping technique
27. X is a kind of roadblock
28. X is a kind of worst experience at community college
29. X is a kind of strength as a student
30. X is a kind of weakness as a student
31. X is a kind of secret to success
32. X is a kind of characteristic as friend or enemy of time
33. X is a kind of attitude of family now
34. X is a kind of change in self-view now
35. X is a kind of reaction to criticism
36. X is a kind of feeling at anticipation of separation from community college
37. X is a kind of reaction to criticism
38. X is a kind of thrilling moment
39. X is a kind of best moment
40. X is a kind of way life has changed because of community college
41. X is a kind of color at reentry
42. X is a kind of color now
Valerie Murdock D'Ortona earned her B.A. from Florida Presbyterian (Eckerd) College, St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1967; her M.A.T. (English/Education) from Duke University in 1969; an M.Ed. (Counselor Education) from the University of Central Florida, Orlando, in 1981; and a Certificate in Aging and Adult Studies from the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, in 1990.

Her professional career includes teaching English and related subjects at Seminole Community College, Sanford, Florida; Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida; and St. Johns River Community College, St. Augustine, Florida. At Seminole, she developed a course in creative writing and sponsored the literary magazine and the international students organization; through the Institute for Foreign Study she sponsored a student trip to England, France, and Italy. At Flagler, she developed courses in Communications in Today's World, Death and Dying in Life and Literature, and Southern Writers. At St. Johns she organized a lecture series for senior citizens, sponsored the literary magazine and Phi Theta Kappa, and was voted Outstanding Teacher of the Year.

Ms. D'Ortona won the distinguished L. V. Koos Scholarship Memorial Fund Award for her dissertation proposal.
I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

James L. Wattenbarger, Chair
Distinguished Service Professor of Educational Leadership

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Sandra B. Damico, Cochair
Professor of Foundations of Education

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Joan L. Curcio
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Phyllis M. Meek
Associate Professor of Counselor Education

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the College of Education and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 1991

Dean, College of Education

Dean, Graduate School