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RETURNING WOMEN STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:
A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation Presented

By

MARY BRAY SCHATZKAMER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the

University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1986

Education

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A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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T O

V I R G I N I A N U C K O L L S B R A Y

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I wish to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their encouragement of my work. Earl Seidman as chairperson provided the major stimulus for my beginning and continuing this dissertation, which had its roots in my participation as research associate in a study on the work of community college faculty (Seidman 1985). He carefully read each dissertation draft, wrote useful comments, gave time generously for discussion, and stretched my mind always one notch farther than I thought possible. Peter Wagschal guided my earlier work in Future Studies by giving me a long rope and discreet tugs, allowing me to find my own way but not to get lost. His criticism and encouragement were invaluable. Margo Culley has given me suggestions and support in the writing of the dissertation. I especially appreciate her humor and her kindness, and her example as a feminist scholar.

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A B S T R A C T

Returning Women Students in the Community College:

A Feminist Perspective

September 1986

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Directed by: Professor Earl Seidman

Through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews, this study attempts to understand, describe, and explain, from a feminist perspective, the educational experience of returning (or re-entry) women students in community colleges. Three ninety-minute in-depth phenomenological interviews were held with each of eighteen returning women students at nine community colleges in four states. Participants were twenty-five to seventy years of age and had returned to traditional schooling after an absence of four to fifty years. Aims of the study were to identify the constitutive factors in the past and present experience of the participants, to explore their community college experience as they viewed it, and to discover what it meant to them.

The study examines those factors which appear to lead to growth and change for individual women and to a sense of equity and power in their lives. Forces that limit growth are also identified.

Significant themes in the experience of the participants are such issues as: how older women students are advised and taught in the community college; what it is like to study, keep a job, and care for children simultaneously; and how race, class, age, and gender intersect in the two-year educational setting.

Findings are reported through profiles, in their own words, of returning women community college students as well as through analysis and summary of the interview material. Implications are drawn for other older women considering a return to schooling, and for further research. Recommendations for action on the part of community college administrators, faculty, staff, and students are made.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

"Nontraditional" student populations have gradually been entering colleges and universities in increasing numbers. The definition of the "nontraditional" student has changed as various populations have each in turn claimed their right to more and better schooling. For many decades the "traditional" student in the college or university was primarily upper or middle class, white, male, and Anglo-Saxon. He was young--adolescent to early twenties--and interested in higher education with a traditional liberal arts emphasis for its benefits in putting him on the road to a respectable profession. Only comparatively recently (beginning with Oberlin College's acceptance of women in 1837) was the definition of a college student expanded to include women. Women's colleges and black colleges developed in response to their exclusion from the mainstream of higher education. Colleges and universities have in turn increasingly accepted ethnic minorities, persons of color, non-English-speaking students, and students who preferred specific preparation for a vocation rathan than the liberal arts curriculum.

The latest in this series of applicants searching to enlarge their educational horizons are older students past the age of today's "traditional" college student (eighteen to twenty-two). Although an

occasional older student had been seen earlier on college campuses, it was not until the early 1970s that most colleges saw sufficient reason to keep records of the ages of their students. A number of those older students were women returning to school. Their choice of institution was most often the community college (Tittle and Denker 1980).

The first community colleges were established in the early 1900s. Most of these colleges were known at first as junior colleges, and that name is still preserved in a small number of two-year institutions. Vocational education, transfer preparation, continuing and remedial education, and community service have long been present in the curriculum of the junior college (Cohen and Brawer 1982, p. 15). Cohen quotes Hollinshead who wrote in 1936 that "the junior college should be a community college meeting community needs," thus providing "adult education, recreational, and vocational activities and placing its cultural facilities at the disposal of the community."

In recent years the advocates of vocational (or occupational, technical, or "career") education have been gathering strength in their support for the community colleges as the most appropriate place for this kind of practical education. Political and financial support have tempted community college administrators, and terminal courses and curricula have expanded at a rapid rate (Cohen and Brawer 1982, p. 216). The resultant channeling of the "less able" and lower-class students into two-year occupational programs was seen by critics of the community college as an intentional "tracking" which perpetuated the American social-class system and reserved the four-year colleges

and universities for the privileged groups (Karabel 1972; Pincus 1980; Zwerling 1976). Things were not that simple, however. Many junior college faculty and staff persisted in seeing their curricula as the first two years of a four-year transfer plan, and many students did as well. Others who had never previously considered college as an option flocked to the two-year colleges, where admission requirements were minimal, where offerings for vocational preparation were broad, where tuition was free or inexpensive, and where one could take a single course as a start toward an "associate's" degree or even for recreation. Thus the implicit "tracking" of the divided college idea was only in part successful. Students of all categories were walking through the community college's "open door."

The first large group of nontraditional students were the veterans returning after the Second World War. Many of these first older students chose the junior colleges near their homes and used the benefits of the G.I. bill to get started in college or to train for a vocation. Veterans of the Korean war and the Vietnam war also were more likely to return to a community college than to a four-year college or university (Cohen and Brawer 1982).

The real upsurge in the arrival of older women in the community college came somewhat later. A number of circumstances converged to bring this movement about. Some women who might ordinarily have followed the tradition of staying at home as housewives and mothers found the satisfactions of working at their jobs during World War II

hard to give up. After the post-war "baby-boom" child-rearing years in the late '40s and '50s, many mature women were ready to return to unfinished schooling and to work. Although age records are incomplete, the enrollment of older women in higher education began to rise during the late '50s and early '60s. The '60s were the heyday of the community college, a time when hundreds of new colleges were being built and others expanded (Cohen and Brawer 1982). In addition, the beginnings of a second "women's movement" were being spread from woman to woman, formalized through political organizations, and publicized through innumerable books, journals, and the news media (Thompson 1970).

Besides the mingling of these strong currents, another influential idea fed the educational pool. The concept of "career education" was being promoted by Sidney Marland, U.S. Commissioner of Education in the early '70s (Marland 1974). Public schools and colleges enthusiastically accepted this more respectable way of looking at the hierarchies of work and schooling. Career education curricula in great profusion were designed for all educational levels, including kindergarten. Although the intention of the career education plan was to forge a stronger bond between school and work and real life, one effect was to make more palatable the idea of schools being places for job training. During these years the community college vocational programs (as well as those of technical institutes and short-term occupational programs) expanded rapidly to fill what appeared to be a growing demand.

Among the students in two-year vocational programs were many older women--"displaced homemakers" (Sommers 1977)--who were seeking ways to make themselves quickly employable. Some women returned to school to complete degrees interrupted ten or twenty years earlier, and others began a long-deferred college education. Colleges and universities became aware of this new population and redirected recruitment efforts as the numbers of traditional-age students, the last of the "baby-boom" group, began to decline in the '80s. Community colleges were increasingly chosen by women with families and the part-time older woman student became a dramatic statistic. In one New England university system, 38 percent of the total number of 13,000 students in 1985 were part time--and part-time students were primarily women (Sorgman 1986).

Women now (1986) outnumber males in at least one state university system; on some campuses there are three times as many women as men. Fifty-two percent of the full-time undergraduates and 69 percent of the graduate students in one state system are women. The mean age of women students has gradually risen. By 1990 the average student will be older, proportionately more will be female, and the majority will be part-time (Kasworm 1980; Weinstein 1980; Hall 1982; Sorgman 1986; Weinstein 1980).

Significance of the Study

This study of returning women students is important today because of the demographic factors, cited above, that influence school populations at all educational levels. Significantly related also is the confluence of two historic movements: the struggle of oppressed groups for "equal rights" and the widening stream of offerings in higher education, particularly in the community college. In addition, the community college is the site of a potential conflict situation: wide-open doors and concomitant pressures to close them--tension between "come-one-come-all" and having "standards," between growth and taxes. Finally, the study is significant because of the relative paucity of studies which look at the story of the woman student who goes through those doors.

Demographics of the larger population account in part for changes in postsecondary enrollments. Records clearly show the rapid increase in the older population and the predominance of women in that population; projections for the next fifty years show a continuation of these relationships unless there is an unexpected change in the birth rate. In 1900 in the United States, there were 3 million persons over sixty-five years of age, whereas in 1980 there were more than 22 million. Increases are due chiefly to improved medical care and to immigration effects. Women are living longer than men and thus form a bulge in the demographic picture of the older group. Because the middle years are now stretched out and generally healthier, many

persons are having two or three careers, and many women are moving into their first outside-of-the-home career at middle age and into their first class since high school (American Educators Newspaper of Record, Demographic Predictions 1982; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports 1971, 1981).

A powerful demographic influence has been the high birth rate following World War II. The "baby boom" generation contributed to a great expansion of the college-age population beginning in the '60s, and its effects will continue to be felt as the baby-boomers move through the '80s (when a large number of them will move out of college and into the workplace) and on to the second decade of the next century, when the bulge will reassert itself in the form of a large number of healthy retirees (Jones 1980). Unless there is a drastic change in longevity patterns, at least two of every three of those who are over sixty will soon be women. The last of the "baby boom" (born about 1966) entered college in the fall of 1984 (if at the traditional age of eighteen) and the traditional-age enrollment in the colleges has been comparatively lower since then. The modal age of re-entry women in community colleges was thirty to forty in 1980 through 1982--the age of persons born in the peak years of the baby boom, 1950 to 1960 (Hyde 1980; Jones 1980).

Other factors connected with adult women's search for education include increasing numbers of divorced and single women, many with children; more women working, or wanting to work, outside of the home.

More women have been politically active in women's organizations and associations for retired persons, "silver-haired legislatures" and Gray Panthers. More women are seeking education in programs of all kinds--informal, nonformal, short-term or long-term, credit and non-credit, undergraduate and graduate, tuition or free, at community centers, Elderhostels, technical institutes, two-year and four-year colleges, and universities (Fisher-Thompson 1981; U.S. Office of Education, National Center of Education Statistics 1980).

Recent college enrollment statistics show significant changes in gender and age distribution in all colleges. The Project on the Status and Education of Women reports that

> between 1972 and 1979 total college enrollments increased by 2.3 million; about half of this increase was due to the enrollment of part-time students 25 and over. In large measure, this growth can be accounted for by the enrollment, or re-enrollment, of adult women, who outnumber men students in the 25-and-over age group by roughly two to one, and whose attendance at postsecondary institutions has led women to outnumber men students at the undergraduate level for the first time since World War II [1981].

Re-entry women are the largest source of new students and their participation in higher education is expected to increase for some time to come. More than one-third of <u>all</u> college students are at least twenty-five years old. The number of women thirty-five and over who enrolled in college has <u>doubled</u> since 1972. Women outnumber men in college, but in the traditional age bracket the numbers are roughly equal; <u>it is the increase in numbers of women over thirty attending school which accounts for the difference</u>.

Projected trends indicate that by the year 2000, 52 percent of

undergraduates will be women, 50 percent will be over twenty-two, 85 percent will be nonresident, 41 percent will be at two-year colleges. At community colleges, older students in 1981 constituted 40 percent of enrollment; over 50 percent of those enrolled (1985) in four-year colleges and community colleges are women. More than half of the community college students, and about one-fourth of the four-year students, attend part time. (Information on college demographics: Fisher-Thompson 1981; Project on the Status and Education of Women 1981; Sorgman 1986.)

The figures cited above show clearly that women--like members of "minorities" or persons whose parents never considered the possibility of going to college--are enrolling, most often in community colleges, in far greater numbers in the past few years. This rise in "nontraditional" college enrollment coincides with a general rise in emphasis on "equal opportunity" brought about by civil rights actions and recorded in legislation (Kanowitz 1969, 1973, 1981) and in educational literature (Jencks 1972). Though women and older people were not the original beneficiaries of the civil rights and equal opportunity struggles, they have benefited by Title IX and the Older Americans Act, which were the latest in the series of attempts to redress inequities.

It is hard to say which came first--the enrollment of the older student or the promoting of special educational offerings--or whether it was rather a matter of alternate steps for each side. At one

university in Massachusetts it is only in the last few years that brochures have been printed advertising gently the advantages for the "older" or "nontraditional" student. Older American students who wish to live on campus are housed in the dormitories together with students from other countries, as part of the "nontraditional" group.

The community colleges have a more aggressive recruitment program. Bulletin boards and mailings advertise special services directed chiefly toward older persons or women: a club called "Aspire" for re-entry students; the "Program of the Week" at the Women's Center; a new class, beginning soon--"Math without Fear" or "Fit at Fifty" or "Caring for Your Aging Parent." A large roadside billboard recommends: "Take the first step--come to [the local] community college." Newspaper and television ads show an older student, most often a woman, with an armful of books or sitting at a computer terminal. Outreach programs, taking place in local community centers, prisons, or high schools, are a common feature of many community colleges.

The number and complexity of community colleges and the magnitude of their growth have been well documented by Cohen and Brawer (1982). The American Community College is a definitive review of the history and present status of the community college in all its manifestations and adaptations. It records the pros and cons of commentary since the beginnings: authors who lauded the first "junior" colleges or who later stressed the "community" part of the new name and who have promoted the open-door inclusive character of

"lifelong education" (Eells 1931; Gleazer 1980; Medsker 1960); and the critics who are concerned with the word "college," claiming that the community college, in trying to be all things to all people, has not been able to be fair to any group in terms of what a college education should be (Astin 1982; Clark 1960; London 1978; Zwerling 1976). Cohen and Brawer are also among the authors who discuss the community college's rapid refocusing on occupational or "career" education, which has attracted many returning women (Cohen and Brawer 1982; Cross 1971; Eliason 1977; Tittle and Denker 1980). The expansion of "career" education in community colleges, as elsewhere, continues to stimulate controversy about "quality" (Pincus 1980). In a discussion of the problems of "quality and the open door," Carter (1983) suggests that in the next two decades community colleges should concentrate less on expansion and access and more on quality and standards--being careful also not to allow "emphasis on excellence as an excuse to exclude . . . . Goals should still be more concerned with inclusion rather than exclusion."

These continuing tensions have deeply affected the work and morale of community college faculty (Seidman 1985). How do they affect the education of returning women students? Considering the numbers of older women returning to colleges of all kinds, but particularly to community colleges, and considering the astonishing growth of community colleges, it is surprising that there are not more studies which examine these phenomena from the point of view of the

woman student. There is indeed a large promotional literature about women students in the community college which consists mainly of descriptions of, and recommendations for, programs. Among topics addressed are women's centers and access to occupational education. The content and general tone of these reports may be described by the titles of some of them: Community College Women: A Golden Opportunity (Eliason 1977); Second Wind: Program for Returning Women Students (J. Carter 1978); "Serving New Populations" (Walsh 1979). (See also Brawer 1977; Dibner 1976; Eaton 1981; Mezirow 1978; O'Neill 1977.) Other studies have chronicled the activities of adult women students as part of the wave of "new" college students (Astin 1976; Cross 1971).

There is, however, little research which examines the experience of the returning women themselves. Useful studies which include interviews, and which demonstrate the need for further research of this kind, are Tittle and Denker's Returning Women Students in Higher Education (1980), and the series of the Project on the Status and Education of Women (1981, 1982). Data in these studies indicate that older women who turn to the community college may do so because it is usually closer to home, less forbidding than the four-year college or university, immediately helpful and welcoming. Tuition is less expensive. The college offers programs that appear to lead quickly to higher earnings and two years seem more manageable than four when there is a family to care for. Special counseling and women's centers are advertised and available. There is little admittance red tape and

usually only a high school diploma or equivalency is required for entrance.

Some concerns about re-entry, older women report, are financial need, and the image of college as only for white middle-class women (the elite, the privileged). They question the college's relevance to them and are afraid of isolation because of their age. They often lack home and community support, help in child care, and a method of transportation. Tittle and Denker's (1980) "vignettes" of ten returning students were based on a strict interview schedule derived from Levinson's (1978) theory of male adult development, although half of the students were women. The kind of college to which the interviewees were returning is not identified in these interviews. Problems for returning women are summarized as the following: anxiety about ability, indecision about careers, conflicts related to school and home, paucity of needed information, the "alien language of academe" and unsatisfactory counseling services. Crucial questions were: "Am I intelligent enough? How will I compare with eighteen-year-olds? Will my husband be resentful? Will my children suffer? Do I have the right to make demands for my self-improvement?"

Among institutional barriers for returning women were lack of child-care services, difficulty of coordinating college with child-care and job, need for financial and legal aid, poor counseling, transportation problems, faculty and staff attitudes based on sex stereotypes, absence of female role-models on faculty and staff,

problems in scheduling and availability of courses, and discrimination against part-time students. Tittle and Denker conclude that

> the effects of college experience, regardless of type of institution, have not been examined for returning women. However, returning women are more likely to be part-time, nonresidential students and are more likely to be in public rather than private or highly selective institutions. (Tittle and Denker 1980, p. 168)

Much important information about the returning woman in the environment of the community college is available in the studies cited. Significant and useful as this information is, a sense of the concrete day-to-day life of the students as they go about their work is absent; and absent too is a sense of the inner life of the women as they choose their classes and interact with faculty and with other students; a sense of how their college life affects, and is affected by, their work outside the college and their family life, and what these interactions mean to them as women, as workers, and as human beings. The value of in-depth interview studies of these aspects of women's experience--women's work, motherhood, being middle-aged--is demonstrated in British and American feminist research (McGrindle and Rowbotham 1977; Oakley 1976; Rivers et al. 1979; Rubin 1979). A similar approach is needed for illuminating educational experience.

Building on the research of Tittle and Denker, this study will explore, through in-depth interviews, the meaning of the experience of older women students who return to school after some years of absence from traditional education and who choose a community college as their first point of re-entry. Questions underlying the research are: What

is it like to be a returning woman student? What are the aspirations, expectations, and concerns of returning women students? How does the community college experience fit into the context of their everyday lives? In a time when women are returning to school in record numbers, when the press for equal rights for women is a dominant political issue, and when, among institutions of higher education, the community college proclaims most strongly an egalitarian mission--do these returning women students find their educational experience adequate and equitable?

Statement of the Problem

The purposes of this study are two-fold: (1) identification of the constitutive factors in the experience of returning women students in the community college and discovery of what their educational experience, as they see it, means to them, (2) identification of those factors in the experience of individual women which lead to, or limit (a) growth and change in their educational pursuits and (b) a sense of equity and power over their own lives. Through a qualitative analysis of in-depth phenomenological interviews of eighteen returning women students from nine community colleges in four states, this study will attempt to understand, describe, and explain, from a feminist perspective, the phenomenon of one fast-growing, nontraditional student population in higher education.

Extent of the Study

Although the central focus of this study is the investigation of the experience of returning women students in the community college, certain broad questions about women and education remain as framework and backdrop. Important to the context of the study are at least five related areas of inquiry: (1) demographics of aging, gender, and education; (2) the history of the community college as "open-door" institution; (3) life-span developmental psychology of women; (4) history of the women's movement; and (5) feminist sociological research.

The first and second of these backdrop areas--demographics and the community college--have already been discussed above. The last three are closely connected with one another and are concerned with the psychological, social, historical, and political aspects of women's education, and with what is known about the life-span development of women in relation to learning and schooling, what the record says about the history of women's struggle for equity in education, how and why feminist research has developed (particularly in sociology), and the extent of its effect on individual women who attempt to continue their schooling and work.

Most of the women students in this study are in their middle years, "a largely unexplored phase of the life cycle" (Brim & Abeles 1975). When the mean age of students in the community college is

twenty-seven, with the range broadened to include eighty-year-olds (Chickering 1980), our learnings from the study of child and adolescent development no longer serve. Fortunately a new literature is becoming available due to the influence of the women's movement and to the higher proportion of older persons in Western countries. Though in no way approaching the multiplicity of research and writing on early human development, work on later life development has expanded greatly in recent years (Baltes 1978; Birren and Woodruff 1973; Eisdorfer and Lawton 1973; Erikson 1980; Jarvik 1978; Lowenthal 1975; Maas and Kuyper 1976; Neugarten 1968). There is clearly more research on the aging process in general than on the aging of women. The life-span development of men has had more attention than that of women (Kohlberg 1969; Levinson 1978), although recent studies have concentrated on women (Barnett and Baruch 1979; Fuller and Martin 1980; Rubin 1979; Wetzel 1982). Other studies show differences between men and women at different life stages in their responses to issues of morality, justice, and life choices (Erikson 1980; Gilligan 1982). There seem to be important differences in the defining of stages in women's and men's lives (Barnett and Baruch 1978). This research is related to the subject of equity and returning women students in significant ways, particularly the relationship of aging and learning (Baltes 1978; Botwinick 1978; Diamond 1978). Though most longitudinal studies show no loss in intellectual capacity with age, and in some cases a continual rise even through age eighty, the returning woman student often has a sense of uncertainty about

diminished capacities. Experiences described in interviews of women (McGrindle and Rowbotham 1977; Seidman 1983; Tittle and Denker 1980) demonstrate how their school lives are often affected negatively by cultural stereotypes that come home to roost in their own visions of themselves. For people who are both female and old, Bell (1975) and Sontag (1980) see women as victims also of a "double standard of aging." Older men are generally considered more able and powerful than older women.

The study of aging and of life-span development is relatively new in the history of the social sciences, but the struggle for recognition of women as persons other than wives or mothers has gone on for a much longer time. The classic works I shall not discuss here; it is sufficient to say that it is impossible to understand what is happening for women today without a comprehensive reading of this "women's studies" literature, from Wollstonecraft (1792), Mill (1869), Gilman (1915), Woolf (1929, 1938), and Klein (1949) to the newest wave (with the general rumblings of the '60s) which probably began with Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex (first published in 1952), continued with Friedan's Feminine Mystique (1963), and gained momentum with the work of many women writers--poets, novelists, social scientists, journalists: Ellman (1968), Firestone (1970), Flexner (1970), Rossi (1973, 1976), Lerner (1977), Olsen (1978), Morgan (1982)--to name only a very few. A passage from Tillie Olsen's Silences (1978) captures the meaning behind much of the recent "women's movement"

literature:

> Linked with the old, resurrected classics on women, this movement in three years has accumulated a vast new mass of testimony, of new comprehensions, as to what it is to be female. Inequities, restrictions, penalties, denials, leechings, have been painstakingly and painfully documented; damaging differences in circumstances and treatment from that of males attested to; and limitations, harms, a sense of wrong voiced. (Olsen 1971, p. 41)

Later in this same work, Olsen describes "the differing past of women that should be part of every human consciousness." Among these pasts, she writes, are the imposed conditions of unclean, taboo; being, not doing; bound feet; corsets; powerlessness; fear of aging; fear of expressing capacities; marriage, slavery, dissembling, manipulating, appeasing--"the vices of slaves."

Some women's literature has concentrated on the problem of equity in education for women. Women writers have traced the tortured story of women's gradual progress from being--some of them--the "daughters of educated men" (Woolf 1938) to being admitted with reluctance into the select company within institutions of higher education (Deem 1978; Greene et al. 1983; Sexton 1976; Spender and Sarah 1980). Though we have seen that the <u>numbers</u> of women in colleges have finally surpassed those of men, the question of equity in schooling is still murky: are women actually being treated fairly and equitably, with all that implies, as students? An example of a problematic area is that of relative numbers of female faculty compared with those of male faculty. Is the question of equity for the older women student related to the problem of equity for women faculty in community colleges, as well as in other colleges? Reports

by women academics over the last twenty-five years indicate the slow progress that has been made in the establishment of women's positions in colleges and universities, both as faculty members and in administration (Newcomer 1959; Bernard 1964; Price 1981). The combination of rapidly increasing numbers of women students and the slow increase of women faculty is a theme which has been referred to also in the Seidman (1983) study. (Actual numbers of women faculty in community colleges have increased to 40 percent or more, a record considerably better than that of four-year institutions.) Faculty are often aware, students less so, of the contradictions inherent in the fact of a minority of women faculty serving as models and mentors for a student body which is becoming more female than male--largely due to the increasing numbers of older women students.

Feminist research is already a source of new ideas on equity in academic institutions. Theoretical work on women, and usually by women, as originators of a different style of observing the world--psychological and sociological research from a woman's point of view--appears to be still in its infancy. Women social scientists in England, Denmark, France, and the United States have begun to develop their own research styles in the investigation of social and psychological questions and to attempt to free themselves from the patterns and constraints of what they now see as flawed research based on assumptions of the dominant male culture (Bunch and Pollack 1983; Gilligan 1982; Lerner 1980; Oakley 1972; Roberts 1983). With the

rapid changes and shifting factions in the widening women's movement and the spreading interchange among women researchers in several countries (Roberts 1981), a feminist slant is appearing more frequently in current journals, as well as in publications of organizations like the Feminist Press and its counterparts in Great Britain, France, and elsewhere. Though this study is limited to returning women students in this country, it is clear that the press for equity in education among women is not limited to one institution in one country.

A Note on Limits of the Study

One difficulty with this kind of study is finding and keeping limits when in some ways there appear to be none. To examine all the literature in the fields I have suggested here is an impossibility, considering the proliferation to an unprecedented degree of work by and about women in the last fifteen years. I have set certain boundaries, but have then pulled the edges in even closer: I have concentrated on, for example, life-span development only as related to women and learning in the middle years; women's movement history through the most notable writings of the last fifteen years; and recent feminist sociological work which pertains to education of women--rather than the whole gamut of feminist research. The literature on community colleges is extensive but not all applicable to this study; the demographics of aging, gender, and education are

contained in relatively few reliable sources.

The limits of qualitative versus quantitative studies--and vice versa--are well known (Smith 1983). In this study I have given up the possible advantages of the clean simplicity of an experimental study which could not be appropriate for what I wanted to know (see Methodology, below). In exchange, I have plunged into research which has presented me with a "vast matrix of interlocking message material" (Bateson 1979) to be transcribed, studied, coded, translated, interpreted, and analyzed, with the methods of the field researcher (Johnson 1975; Lofland 1971; Rubin 1979). Anthropologist Jules Henry (1965) has said that "science is the relentless examination of the commonplace." The self-reports of the commonplace, everyday life of women "of a certain age," in this period of ferment, searching for equity through education, and of their reflections on their experience, was the material for my search. The next chapter on methodology will further clarify and define the limits of this inquiry.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I shall describe the epistemological basis for choosing in-depth interviewing as the instrument for investigation of the experience of another person, the selection of participants to be interviewed, the interview process, working with the data, and the process of interpretation and analysis of the material. As a first step, I should like to make a statement concerning bias--or point of view--in the form of a short history of the development of my interests and values as they are related to the subject of this research.

Point of View

My mind is not indeed a blank slate on the research questions of this proposal. In fact, my interests and values and close acquaintance with my research problem are the instigators of this study. I am an older woman student who returned to graduate school after many years of work and family obligations. I am definitely a minority, in terms of my age, on a university campus, but little by little I have noted the increasing numbers of my counterparts. In talking with other older women, I found correspondences in our experience and our reasons for being here. In addition, I discovered that the university may have only a few of us, but the community

colleges with which I have become acquainted through the experience of a research assistantship during my graduate study appeared to have many more older women students. Gradually I began to think seriously about this situation for women in education as an important area for further investigation.

Aspects of my long-established interests and values are closely connected with the direction and focus of this study. My past experience in teaching has been heavily oriented toward issues of civil rights--work in "inner-city" schools in the '60s and '70s, schools with changing populations, alternative schools, an urban community college with a mostly black student body. In order to promote a "just society" (Kohlberg 1969) among my students, I studied moral development and moral education with Kohlberg at Harvard, and found opportunities whenever possible to enroll in courses related to law and education. Feminism is a more recent but not less vigorous value for me, strongly infused as it is with goals of justice, fairness, equity, and political action. Of the progress of "women's liberation" movement during those earlier days I was only subliminally aware. My experience gradually progressed from awareness of racism to awareness of sexism and ageism.

Returning to graduate school, I recognized that my particular experience was that of "re-returning" student, and that I had been, for reasons that did not seem to apply to most of my younger male co-students, in this category for some twenty-five years. (I had

taken courses during those years in music education, and eventually concentrated on educational psychology.) Schuller and Bengston (1977) describe this process as "recurrent education." Should education, they ask, be a "service largely confined to the initial period of one's life?" They suggest that it makes more sense to find opportunities for "redressing the imbalances which currently place the two major sections of the population, the older generation and women, at such a disadvantage." Ageism thus began its creeping progress through my consciousness. The concept of "lifelong education" (which I had thought of as a contingency plan, not as a first choice) began to seem fair, reasonable, perhaps even preferable in this age of mobility, rapid change, longer lives, and widely available resources for education. I discovered that some leaders in the community college movement had latched on to this ideal as one argument for the mission of the community college as provider of a total education for the total community (Gleazer 1980). Was this institution, as one commentator has claimed, "the only uniquely American, completely egalitarian form of higher education" (Hampshire Life 1979)?

The opportunity to find out more about this question came in the form of a research assistantship with a N.I.E.-funded study on the work of community college teachers (Seidman et al. 1983). As part of this work I interviewed fifteen students in community colleges in Massachusetts, California, and New York. Nine of these students were women returning to school after a few or many years. Their ages ranged from twenty-five to seventy; they were black, white, and Hispanic,

engaged in career programs or transfer programs, or, in two cases, were taking courses for their "own enjoyment" or for "something interesting to do"; they were full-time and part-time students, single, married, and divorced, with and without children; some already had bachelor's degrees and others had not completed high school when they started at the community college. It became clear to me as my interviewing progressed that these women, unlike as they were in so many dimensions, had some commonalities that I was interested in exploring further: a sense of urgency, a desire to make up for lost time, a need for self-fulfillment, a desire to be able to make money as a stamp of their worth, a need to complete an unfinished job, a serious and dedicated quality, and a belief that education was the one thing that could pull them out of their present condition or problems. They turned to the local community college for generally similar reasons: it was close to home, less expensive, less "snobbish" than a four-year college or university, and it seemed to offer better opportunities for combining home responsibilities, jobs, and schooling.

I began this study, then, with a recognition of a vested interest in its outcome. I do not mean that I hoped to demonstrate, for example, that there is or is not an equitable situation for returning women in the community college. But I began with an energy developed from the concerns of my own experience that I felt certain would sustain the minutiae of the exploration, and I recognized that all scientific investigation begins with the observer's "biased" curiosity

and continues on its way bolstered and nourished by her values. It is not, of course, possible to keep one's research pure, "objective," and untarnished by one's interests or values or presence (Bateson 1979; Glazer 1972; Heisenberg 1958; James 1912; Johnson 1975; Matson 1966; Myrdal 1969). It is possible and preferable to search for, recognize, and state such bias (Myrdal 1969). And to be aware, as William James points out, about ideas that seem especially important to us, that "desire introduces them; interest holds them; fitness fixes their order and connection" (James 1912).

Definitions

Because of the frequency with which the following terms will appear in the report of this study, I believe that it is important to explain the sense in which I refer to them. Rather than simply offering a dictionary definition, I have discussed these terms as they have been used in certain contexts and it is in these contexts that I have chosen to use them here. The definitions may thus serve as a brief background for a feminist perspective--or a window through which the experience of returning women students may be viewed.

Equity. Equity, equality, and equal opportunity have related but somewhat different meanings. Equal educational opportunity is one of the "rights" sought by women, as by other oppressed groups. I see the movement of women back to college as part of the larger struggle for equal rights of many different groups throughout recorded history.

The importance of this movement as part of the women's movement may be fundamental to and primary to other struggles (Engels 1942, Olsen 1983). Equity is different from equality in that it conveys the idea of equal treatment. Equal means the same, or "just like." Equal rights says that the rights are the same for everyone involved, and that no one shall be deprived of those rights (the equal rights amendment). Equity is often used as a legal term and has some other meanings somewhat different from the way I use it here. To be treated equitably is to be treated fairly and justly and to be given the rights of all human beings (Rawls 1971). Fairly and justly do not imply identical treatments, but they do imply a way of thinking that assumes that no human being has greater or more rights than another. Fair and just, or equitable, treatment may require more than equal opportunity, but there must be equal opportunity to permit an equitable situation to occur. The word equity has been used frequently in recent years in such titles as The Women's Educational Equity Act, The Women's Equity Project, and the Women's Equity Action League.

Sexism. "(1.) A belief that the human sexes have a distinctive makeup that determines their respective lives, usually involving the idea that one sex is superior and has the right to rule the other; (2.) a policy of enforcing such asserted right; (3.) a system of government and society based upon it" (Shortridge 1970).

Power. A dictionary definition of power--possession of control,

authority, or influence over others--is the way in which we commonly use the word. The implication is negative in the sense that the power "over others" implies a hierarchy, a person or persons dominating or controlling a relationship of unequal persons--an inequitable relationship. Kanter suggests that when power is spread among more people who are "allowed to have control over the conditions that make their actions possible" that more is accomplished, more gets done. And since power is the ability to get things done, the "empowering" of persons who ordinarily do not exercise power will generate more autonomy, more participation in decisions. If people are powerless, their own capacities are limited (Kanter 1977, p. 166). Power, then, is the ability to get things done, to mobilize resources. Its meaning here is closer to "autonomy" than to "domination." It is "the ability to do, and thus it means access to whatever is needed for the doing." Without equity, it would be difficult to have this kind of power.

Oppression. "The root of the word 'oppression' is the element 'press'. . . . Something pressed is something caught between . . . forces and barriers which . . . restrain, restrict, or prevent . . . mobility . . . immobilize. An individual is oppressed by being a member of a group that is systematically immobilized" (Frye 1983, pp. 2-8). One of the best ways to secure the acquiescence of the oppressed is to convince oppressed persons that their subordination is inevitable and natural.

Feminism. A feminist perspective must take account of equity, power, and oppression, because a consciousness of women's customary

condition is a consciousness of not experiencing equity or power, and of being oppressed--being in some ways systematically restricted or immobilized. "Feminism makes the experiences of women intelligible"--makes sense of "what did not make sense before" (Frye 1983). "Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression" (Hooks 1984). The ability to "see and describe one's own reality is a significant step . . . but it is only a beginning. . . . Feminism challenges women to develop political consciousness" (Roberts 1981). Feminist research "is concerned not only with making women visible, but with the theoretical and methodological issues. . . . Taking gender seriously . . . [is] an exploration that can raise new issues and point the way to new solutions" (Morgan 1981).

These definitions are not intended to be construed as absolute or even as the "right" definitions. They are a set of explanatory statements which for many women "make sense of what did not make sense before."

Epistemological Bases for Choosing In-depth Interviewing

For investigation of the problem of this research, I found that a quantitative experimental study could not tell me what I wanted to know: the realities of the experience of another human being and how that person thinks and feels about her experience. Knowing that I could never "know"--in the same sense that I "know" my own thoughts

and feelings--what another person's experience is "really" like, I wanted nevertheless to get as close to that knowing as possible. Therefore, I chose the in-depth interview as the most appropriate research instrument. The following is a brief exposition of assumptions and philosophic positions which undergird the qualitative approach to this study.

The distinction between facts and values, or between objectivity and subjectivity, cannot be taken for granted, and the observer cannot be conveniently dispensed with. William James (1912) makes a strong case for the inseparability of "subject" and "object." If the observer affects, or contributes to, what is observed, there cannot be such an entity as a pure, objective "scientific fact." Social scientist Gregory Bateson goes farther: "There is no objective experience; all experience is subjective." The social scientist looks for "the pattern which connects" and "the notion of context, of pattern through time." Describing the data of naturalistic or field research, Bateson (1979) says that "what has to be investigated is a vast network or matrix of interlocking message material."

A significant part of this study on returning women students was based on the assumption that it is possible to discover motives and meanings of other persons through our connections with them, through their words as they communicate with us and through our knowledge of our own words and actions as we see them reflected in others. As we find verification through our own experience and through hearing the repeated experiences of others, we come as close to knowledge about

other human beings as it is possible to get. Alfred Schutz, in The Phenomenology of the Social World (1967) explores these concepts in depth. An assumption of this research that follows from the work of Schutz and that is basic to this methodology is: If women talk to me about their lives as students, about what led up to their decision to return to school and about what this decision and process mean to them in their lives, I shall then understand more than I do now about the interconnections of women's experience in this country and at this time with what it is like to be a student in American schools--particularly, in this case, in the latest version of "postsecondary" education. I shall then understand more clearly how the returning woman student is situated in the midst of political, social, and economic changes affecting her schooling and indeed affecting her choices, though she may be unaware of these issues.

Selection of Participants

For the purposes of this study, the "returning woman student" is twenty-five to seventy years old; her education has been interrupted for a period of at least several years--at least three or four but more often ten to thirty, sometimes more--and she has returned to continue her education in a community college. She has finished high school, may have had a short period of further study, or may have a degree in one field and be returning for study in a

different field.

Eighteen participants were chosen from community colleges in four states: California, Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia. (See Appendix A.) The choice of states was made on the basis of a geographical spread as well as a difference in per capita expenditures for community colleges in different states: California was strongly supported (third in the United States in per capita expenditure by the state); Massachusetts was forty-eighth, and New York and Virginia were in the middle--twenty-fifth and twenty-eighth (Chambers 1979). The choice of these four states also offered a wide variety of large and small, urban, suburban, and rural community colleges in large cities and small towns.

As a random sample of the population of returning women community college students, eighteen participants is too small a number; moreover, a sample cannot be truly random in an interview study when the subject must consent to be interviewed. Although the aim of this qualitative study was exploration in depth, I considered a range of ages, ethnicities, class backgrounds, marital and family status, number of children, and fields of study in order to be fair to the actual population of returning women enrolled in community colleges and to maximize the possibility of looking at a wide spectrum of experience. Because the issues of equity and power are central to this research, and because race, gender, and class are significant elements in the experience of individual women and in the unequal distribution of educational resources, it was important to cast as

large a net as possible in the search for participants of diverse backgrounds.

I supplemented the nine interviews from my pilot study (Seidman 1983) with nine more, distributed among the three original states and adding two participants from Virginia. (For table of participant characteristics, see Appendix A.) I also interviewed five older returning men students as a frame and additional context for the understanding of the position of women who may have a different view of their imperatives from that of men. In addition this study has been informed by interviews with counselors and faculty members of several community colleges (Seidman 1983) and with other persons whose work has led them into repeated contact with returning women students.

Access

How were older women student participants located? Seidman (1983) found that location of participants was most successfully done through informal channels, and wherever possible through peers rather than superiors. The uncertainties about motives of teachers and administrators (students, for example, possibly feeling that their success in school might be connected to consent for the interview) could possibly affect the relationship between interviewer and participant, and thus affect the interview material. For the interviews, students were located through other students in student

affairs offices, through counselors and friends of friends not connected with the college hierarchy (the "snowball effect," Rubin 1979), through relatives, and through other sources which I believed would least obligate the students to any mode of behavior or to a "public" voice, or prejudice their attitude toward the interviewing process before meeting with the interviewer. In some cases, an interested women's center coordinator was a useful source. In other cases, I uncovered prospective participants by sitting in the college cafeteria or walking through the halls or talking with faculty and staff about their work. This process naturally produced many more prospects than were actually selected, thus allowing for final selection to be made according to the categories described above and in the table (Appendix A). This process could not of course guarantee "representation" of every category of returning woman student; it resulted, however, in a larger proportion of "minority" women than actually attended their community colleges. I preferred to err in this direction because my investigation was concerned with equity for all women. As will be apparent upon looking at the table, final selection of participants was carried out with an eye to locating women whose age, ethnicity, and field of study fulfilled reasonable requirements for a fair sample and for diversity.

The first nine (pilot project) students were interviewed in California, Massachusetts, and New York State; the second nine also included two students in a Virginia community college. Final distribution by state: Massachusetts, 7; New York, 5; California, 4;

Virginia, 2. (See Appendix A for table of participants.)

Interview Process

The process of the in-depth phenomenological interview which I have used in this study followed closely the methodology developed by Seidman (1983, 1985) and Sullivan (1982). The process can be generally described as open but focused. I did not use an interview schedule, but neither was the interview as casual as a conversation or open to indefinite length. The purpose was for the participant to review the constitutive factors of her life before coming to the community college and the details of her community college experience; and then to reflect on her past life and present experience and to talk about the meaning that this educational experience had for her. The purpose was meaning-making. My task was to listen, with a "third ear" if possible, as the student reflected aloud on past and present experiences and considered them in relation to significance in her life as an older student, as woman, as family member, worker, and learner. Each participant was interviewed three times, each time for the length of a ninety-minute tape. All interviews were audiotaped. Interviews were whenever possible spaced at least two days apart to allow time for reflection, and no longer than a week apart. The interviews were held in a place mutually agreeable to participant and interviewer. With the permission of the college library staff, a

small room used for audiovisual materials or a group study room provided privacy and reliable electricity. At least one of the three interviews (usually the third) was held at the participant's home if possible. (In one case, I held an interview at my home, for reasons of convenience and time-saving.) Important considerations were equity, reciprocity, and sensitivity to the other person's time constraints and sense of comfort with the location. (This aspect of interviewing is attested to in feminist research especially. See McGrindle and Rowbotham 1977; Oakley 1976; Roberts 1976; Rubin 1979.)

Previous to the first visit, contact had been made by telephone, with confirmation by letter, and a date set for the first meeting. I found it more satisfactory for the process to allow for this one contact visit before the interview series begins. During this shorter visit, the purpose and nature of the research was explained and the prospective participant filled out a brief information form (see Appendix C) which included data on age, program, and goals; she then made a final decision about whether she was willing to be interviewed. If so, dates were set for the next three meetings. At the first of these, participant and interviewer discussed the "Written Consent Form" (required for university-based research, but also essential for clarity, prevention of misunderstandings, and simple courtesy) and both signed, indicating mutual agreement (see Appendix D for copy of this form). This process allowed time for any final uncertainties to be resolved.

Each of the three interviews opened with a focusing question from

the interviewer: Interview No. 1: Could you tell me about your life before you came to the community college? Interview No. 2: What is it like to be a student at this college? Interview No. 3: What does this experience mean to you in your life? These questions were flexible as to wording and were rephrased when the meaning of the question seemed unclear to the participant. After the interview began, I asked questions rarely, and then usually for clarification. I commented occasionally to move the talk to another level or to check on my understanding. But mainly the words were those of the participant. Almost always, I found that participants said, "I can never talk for an hour and a half!" And almost always they wanted to continue when the tape was ended. (The rationale for this interview methodology is explained in greater detail in In the Words of the Faculty [Seidman 1983].)

Interviews were transcribed verbatim (I shared the task with a typist), resulting in manuscripts of sixty to one hundred single-spaced pages for each participant. Because of the volume of this work, it is possible that some compromise with the totally verbatim transcript could have been made: for example, abbreviating interviewer statements (Rubin 1979) and omitting management details that were unrelated or unimportant to the focus of the interview. I hesitated to do this, however, because of the possible research value of having the total record.

Profiles

Some interviews (in transcript form) were strong in all three sections, complete in the sense of not missing significant material (so that there are no puzzling omissions in the story), compelling in the story-telling and meaning-making. These interviews were selected for "profiles." A profile as developed by Seidman (1983) is derived from the transcript of an interview series. The words of the interviewer are omitted and the participant's story stands alone. The words are entirely those of the participant unless it is necessary, for reasons of clarity, to add a word or phrase, which will then appear in brackets. Eight profiles appear in chapter 9. The total process of profile-making is both an intellectual and aesthetic one: the words "construct" and "compose" are both needed in a description of the profile-making process. The important thing is that it is the participant's words we are hearing. The process may be compared with cutting a diamond to the shape that brings out its best qualities. "Profiles" thus composed and constructed are compelling communications; they may be compared with similar work of Terkel (1972). For these reasons, and most of all because it is a "method of reporting that is most commensurate with the method of research" (Seidman 1983), I was committed to presenting at least part of the results of this study in the form of profiles. Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are centered on particular areas of student experience in the community college: first steps, counseling, academic work, competing

allegiances in the form of work-study or off-campus work and family obligations, and the complexities of race, class, and culture as they interact with gender and affect the schooling process. For these chapters I have used major excerpts from the interviews.

Options for Interpretation and Analysis

No interview process can guarantee that the protocols will be full of references to, or insights into, the basic topics of primary interest to the researcher, though the in-depth interview makes this more likely. A question such as, for example, "Were you treated fairly as an older woman student?" might elicit only a brief convergent response (Lofland 1981; Schumann 1982). "How were you treated?" would be an open-ended question, and even more open--"What is it like to be an older woman student?" The in-depth interview provides enough time, an atmosphere of trust, and a setting which encourages the free flow of reminiscence and reflection so that there is opportunity for a full story to emerge and for reflective meaning-making to take place. When transcribed, that story, in its full and concrete detail, becomes the data (material) for the analysis and interpretation which is a "continuing process of recording, refining, and reformulating" (Rubin 1979).

Thus the analytic process was concerned with the composing of the profiles and the identifying of broad general categories of experience

which emerged from the data. But it was also concerned with the concrete details of each participant's day-to-day life accounts. Extracting themes and illustrative excerpts, collecting and filing the material so that it could be easily retrieved, was a continuing process that planted the seeds for later interpretation. (For in-depth discussions of field research and qualitative analysis methods followed in this study, see Johnson 1975; Lofland 1971; Rubin 1979; and Seidman 1985.)

The process of analysis began in part with the first field experience and built gradually as the material was collected. This analytic and interpretive process was a combination of the meaning that the participant made of her experience and the meaning that I, as researcher, found in the words of the participant, seen through assisting lenses of other observers and writers in related inquiries. The presentation of results is, in part, in the words of the participant interviewees and in part an interpretation of the thematic material that emerged during the ongoing process of field research and analysis.

CHAPTER III

FIRST STEPS: INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS

This chapter is concerned with the very first steps that the older women students in this study took to attend a community college. Given the options that exist for study, what influenced these women to choose the fields they chose? Why did they decide to attend community colleges? What were their first experiences in returning to school and how did those experiences influence their choice of further work?

The particular context of each participant's life is, of course, unique. But it is possible to identify some commonalities. For example, one might distinguish in the stories of different women some parrallel developmental influences during the life-span. Can we separate these from our expectations of the abilities of women (and of men) at different life periods based on strongly internalized stereotypical images of "age-appropriate" behavior? Feeling "too old to go to school" is one of these. And at the forefront for women are questions of caring for others--of some kinds of family obligations at all life stages--and of continuing difficulty with spending money on themselves. Are such questions important to returning women students? If so, how do these problems affect the first choices and subsequent decision-making?

As mentioned frequently in the literature, returning women

express certain common desires for their education, and meet common problems in the educational institutions they choose (O'Neill 1977; Project on the Status and Education of Women 1981; Tittle and Denker 1980). But the multiple and complex interactions of each woman's racial, class, ethnic, religious, and national heritage, combined with the specific influences of early family and school experiences, create individual patterns that can best be described in terms of each woman's own story. Another person who reads that story may understand it best by making connections to parts of the pattern that are familiar, where she finds a correspondence in color or design.

Two features characteristic of most of these women at the time of their decision to return to schooling were strong desire and serious intention: "It was getting to the point where money would save the family." "If I really wanted to do something, I was going to need a degree to do it." "Now is the time to take advantage and study what I always wanted." The fields that they chose varied widely. For some the need to earn money was primary and they decided on two-year vocational programs, either as a first or second career. (This did not mean that they had discarded the idea of an eventual B.A.) For others, the long-deferred liberal arts education and a four-year degree was the goal from the start. And for some, there was no expressed ultimate goal: they were there, they said, for enjoyment, fulfillment, enrichment, "to use time constructively," to "see what you're all about." Age and developmental stage are, it appears, correlated loosely with women's goals and programs of study. For

example, the oldest students were less likely to be taking career-oriented courses in order to find better jobs.

In this section, the eighteen participants in the study take the first steps to their community colleges. Excerpts from their first interviews describe briefly their initial decision-making and the background for their choice of college and program. (For longer stories of eight participants composed from the total interview sequence--or "Profiles"--see chapter 8.) Participants are here grouped according to their stated goals. These goals are not always clear-cut. But they may be conveniently connected to aspects of their chosen institutional programs: career (vocational) or liberal arts (transfer). Subdivisions of these categories are related to the clarity with which the students envision their futures and to the amount of time which they devote to schooling. Career programs may be terminal (completed in two years) or lead to further study; both career and liberal arts courses can be taken part time with no degree plans (see Appendix A). Within these categories, participants are introduced in order of increasing age.

Career Programs: Possible Transfer

The first five participants chose two-year career (vocational, occupational) programs. Their immediate aim was completion of the two-year degree, but they were strongly considering the B.A. or B.S.

degree. Their chosen programs were Hotel and Restaurant, Legal Secretary, Secretarial Science, Nursing, and Accounting.

Margaret O'Donnell

Margaret O'Donnell, twenty-seven, was enrolled in a two-year "Hotel and Restaurant" program at a Massachusetts community college. She was interviewed three times at her home in the spring of 1984.

"My biggest fear," Margaret O'Donnell said, "was that I would end up wandering around the rest of my life without any direction at all." She had already seriously tried and discarded one career.

> In high school I really hadn't decided what I wanted to be. I thought I wanted something in the medical field, so I decided that I was going to do X-ray--you could become a professional in two years. I went to a Rhode Island Junior College and became a registered technologist in radiologic technology. I worked in the field for eight years. I became very good at what I did but also very bored.

O'Donnell had been an exceptional student in high school--National Honor Society, top of the class. She was "very ambitious, very motivated." Her favorite subject was math, and her math teacher was disappointed to find out that she was going to a two-year college. He said, "You're too smart to stop at two years--I strongly suggest that you get a bachelor's degree."

> And I didn't. I was going to get married at the time--that's what everybody else was doing--thank God I didn't do that. But X-ray was not for me. I had job burnout. I thought that I would be able to spend more time with patients. As it turned out, they more or less processed them through like cattle--get 'em in, get 'em out. I didn't expect to be treated as badly as I was--it was degrading. Doctors just talking down to you like you were an inferior person and you didn't count. I felt helpless. Having it day after day after day wears on you after a while. You

become cold, turn off feelings to protect yourself.

O'Donnell decided then that the only way she could get another job was to go back to school. She went to a counselor at the community college nearest to where she lived. She found that the college had "a very good Hotel-Restaurant program" which seemed to fit her image of herself as a "people-pleaser" and offered a contrast, she believed, to the inhumane quality of her technician work. She had "never not succeeded in school" but this time, she said, "it was terrifying. I was petrified because I knew it was going to be difficult and I was afraid I wouldn't be accepted because I was older. But I found out that the other students accepted me without any problem."

O'Donnell's approach to school was very different the second time around. She was going to do this two-year program because she needed new skills to get a good job, but she hoped to go on to a four-year degree. This was what she always wanted to do but after high school she was too much in a hurry to be independent and self-supporting.

> The first time I went to college I was just out of high school. I was young enough so it wasn't that important yet. But the second time I am putting myself through, so I know how important the education is. . . . I can expand my horizon by having a major in business. I'm trying not to get locked in one career so I've got to go back to school again to become re-educated. That's how I plan to do it when I start going back to school nights for my bachelor's.

O'Donnell's mother had been divorced and had supported the family of three children. "I grew up with a career woman as my model," O'Donnell said. "I figured if I wanted to get anywhere in the world I

would make my own money and I would be independent." She was eager to change careers and start again.

Elena Zamora

Zamora, twenty-nine, was interviewed three times at a community college in Massachusetts in the fall of 1984. She was enrolled in the Legal Secretary Program.

Elena Zamora was the second oldest of nine brothers and sisters. She thought of herself as the "black sheep of the family" or sometimes as Cinderella, because she was the one who had to do most of the housework and care of younger children. Zamora's father used to "cut steel" for a car factory which moved to the United States from Puerto Rico. When she was asked at her first elementary school in New Jersey whether she knew any English, she said yes and promptly sang a nursery rhyme she had learned in Puerto Rico. She was assigned to fourth grade. Her older sister said no and was put in third grade.

She was married soon after high school graduation. "I wish I had the courage," she said, "on my wedding day when I was getting dressed, to say, 'I don't want to go.' I thought about it then and I thought about it when I was in front of the priest. But it would have embarrassed my family."

After a year of being married, Zamora was pregnant with her first son. She kept working--her jobs for these years included "packer and racker" at a plant, cashier at Howard Johnson's, and one third shift, 12:00 to 7:00, factory job--and was pregnant again in a year and a

half with her second son. "I got divorced," she said, "when my daughter was born and my husband told me that he was going in the Army. I said, 'Good.' My heart was hard, it was like stone. I went to the Welfare Office. They said, 'Go to your congressman.'" After some help from Legal Services and the Army Recruiting Station she was able to get a monthly check for child support. "I deserve more," she said, "for the years I helped him when he was in school." She then made a hurried decision to enroll in the nearby community college. Zamora commented on how unprepared she felt:

> I never was aware that in high school you filled out for colleges and for financial aid. I had a guidance counselor. Never told me anything like that. They didn't explain anything, you know, like the SAT. They say college prep or business, and I never knew why I took business.
>
> I decided to go back to school and I got everything together in a rush. I was so excited that I was going to college I tried to be greedy--I took five classes. I didn't make it [that time]. I didn't realize how hard it was.

A year later she tried again, with more success:

> The year after that is when I came back, but this time I decided to try to be easy on myself, so I went to the Bridge Program cause I had been out of high school for a while. I remember I used to be very smart. I think the Bridge Program is great--it opens up your mind. Everybody is there to help you.

Zamora's plan was to work as a legal secretary and continue to study to become a lawyer.

Roberta Stephens

Roberta Stephens, thirty-six, was enrolled in a two-year Secretarial Science program at a New York State community college.

She was interviewed three times at the college in the spring of 1982. At the time of her interviews, she had been in the urban community college for about a year. Recalling her decision to come back to school, she said:

> My cousin goes here and I was looking for a college to go to, that's how I got to [this community college]. It is a little inconvenient for me to travel to [the city] college from my house, so I came here. The first time I came I liked it, everybody here is pleasant. The next time was when I filed for my grant. My only thing that I get is TAP (tuition assistance program)--all I want is the tuition. I went to administration offices and I talked to the people there--everybody I met was nice. Even if you don't know anybody you are not a stranger. Even the guards, they are very friendly.

Stephens recalled with pleasure her school days near Atlanta twenty years ago:

> Oh, I loved to go to school--I would never miss a day. I didn't go to my junior prom cause I studied and I made an A on the test. I went to an all-black school. We never sang the national anthem, we always sang the Negro national anthem. I remember I was two minutes late for a class. My math teacher gave you twenty hits in your hand with a strap and my hand was so sore and I couldn't tell my father, he would have killed me. Even today I won't be late for anything. I did a lot of speeches and a lot of writing especially during Martin Luther King's time. . . .
>
> I graduated from high school in 1964. They had valedictorian, salutatorian--I was third. The counselor was the one that got me the scholarship--I would have been one of the first blacks to go to the University of Georgia. I didn't want that, I said no. My father was poor and that would put too much pressure on me. That's when I came to New York. . . . I enjoyed my time on the farm but I knew that one day I would leave and come to the city.

She came to New York at seventeen. Marriage to a city patrolman at eighteen, and two children; then divorce. After the divorce, she was determined to go to college. Now she was on her own and supporting herself. The process was slow and carefully planned:

> I would tell the kids I even molded them so I could go back to college; I spent time teaching them to take care of themselves cause I planned to do something else. Last year when I was making plans, they were questioning me, "You are really going?" I finally registered, my son would say, "Gee, Ma, you really going, huh." And he helped me with my homework. My daughter helps me with the housework.

Stephens said that she was the only one in her family to go to college, and it was not easy for her. Her plan was to become a good secretary and finish her B.A. while working at a secretarial job. She had a night job as cocktail waitress and didn't get home until 5:00 in the morning. Getting up at 9:30 was "really rough. . . . Just the idea of me after twenty years trying to get back into school--and half the time I walk around like I was lost." It took her about a month to get herself together, to get "the hang of it." At first she was making C's but after about four weeks she made a 96. "Coming back to school," Stephens said, "for me it's a whole new world."

Marta Melendez Wilson

Marta Melendez Wilson, thirty-eight, was interviewed three times at her home in the spring of 1982. She was enrolled in the nursing department of a California community college.

Wilson came from a big family in California:

> I'm one of eleven children and I'm seventh born. My mother was left a widow with eleven children. Each one of my older brothers and sisters would support the family until they married and moved away, and I did the same thing. It wasn't cool to be Mexican, but somewhere along the way we got a good strong feeling of identity.

The family spoke English most of the time at home because her

mother wanted to learn English. Neither mother nor father had finished fifth grade; both were born in Mexico. "None of my brothers finished high school," Melendez said. "There is a double standard about what's allowed for boys and what isn't allowed for girls. Education isn't macho. But--be good girls and go on through high school." All of the brothers were carpenters like her father--and even some of their children. The girls all were graduated from high school, and Marta was the first and only one to go on to college.

She was a good student at the Catholic high school where she was put into the college prep class. When she tried to get out of Latin and into Spanish to be with her friends, the principal would not permit it. "That was positive," she said, "that he wouldn't let me out." Senior year the counselor gave a test "to see what you do best at." Her results came out office work and she remembers having the feeling "of course, you wouldn't encourage me to do anything else." The others in her college prep group were encouraged to go on to college.

During the time Melendez was working as a stenographer a friend who worked in a supermarket was going to night school. He said, "Why don't you go to school with me?" At that instant she realized she had a choice:

> It was like--bopp!--I can do it. Why not?. . . I was twenty-one when I got married. I was working as a stenographer and I met my husband. He was a college graduate and he had a good job and I told him that someday I was going to school. We also wanted a family so I said, "I'll go to school, and my mother can take care of the kids." . . .
>
> I just wasn't that confident about how I would do in the

> classroom. I was afraid of coming out looking dumb. I was afraid of not making it, because college was a real mystery at the time.

During Christmas vacation of her first community college year her children (twins) were born, close to two months early.

> School started the week after and I went back to school. I think I missed one day. And that's when I decided I don't want my mother to take care of my babies, I wanted to take care of my own babies.

Seventeen years and two more children later Melendez was "anxious to do something else by then. I had done all of this stuff and now I wanted to do something for myself." This time she decided on a full-time nursing program.

Mary Beth Nash

Mary Beth Nash, forty-three, was interviewed three times at her home in the spring of 1984. She was enrolled in the business department (Accounting) of a Massachusetts community college.

Mary Beth Nash was an adopted child brought up mainly by her adoptive mother's mother. She met her biological mother (Grace) when she was twenty-three and today they are close friends. Close to her also were an older and a younger brother, both "natural" to her adoptive mother; her adoptive father, who was custodian at her junior high school; and her grandfather, who taught her to whittle and to raise chickens.

"I always enjoyed school," Nash said. "My mother came across my first grade report card recently--'oh, you always got good marks.'"

But as far as schooling, she was never encouraged at home. When she didn't do well in ninth grade, her grandmother said, "You need to think about getting out and getting a job." She persisted and finished high school. "When I got to junior and senior year I took bookkeeping and loved it. I missed the Honor Roll by getting a C in English."

Great-uncle Joe taught her to play the trumpet, and she played taps at the cemetery every year. She married at nineteen, had one daughter (Beryl), and was divorced. She has never left Massachusetts and for most of twenty-five years she has worked double shifts at laundromats, gas stations, and hotels.

> I was working the gas station but I wasn't real happy, cause I had to go out and pump gas, and check oil, and do windshields and transmission fluid. So Warren, my little brother, said, "You're not stupid. Why don't you go back to school?" I said, "Are you kidding? At my age. I've never either had the time or the money all at the same time to do it." Warren said, "Well, you can at least learn to be a computer operator or something--you like machines. It's about time you did something for yourself." I got kinda excited about that idea. So I called the community college and made the appointment to go down and see them and talk it over. When I found tuition was $317, I said, "That'll be the end of that." But I took an application home that day, filled it out, and sent it in.

She continued:

> In the admissions office there were three of us that day looking for information. One of the things I found out: I was eligible for tuition waiver and the Pell grant. I felt better somehow. It just made me feel more independent. So my financial aid was real good.

Nash began with Computer Programming but very soon switched to Accounting. Her high-school bookkeeping, she said, was a good foundation for this program.

Career Programs: Terminal

Three participants chose two-year programs which they hoped would lead to immediate employment. The programs were Gerontology, Individual Studies (emphasis on Recreational Music), and Drafting.

Althea Williams

Althea Williams, forty-two, was enrolled in the Gerontology Program of a Virginia community college. She was interviewed three times in the library of the college in the spring of 1984.

Williams grew up in Brooklyn in one of the few black families in an Italian and Jewish neighborhood. Her father was killed in World War II. With her mother and a great-grandmother, great-uncle and great-aunt, she was the only child in a house with "a weeping willow tree in the backyard." It was, she said, "the average American family, all-American dream, nice home. . . . My mom gave me my allowance and I would go buy knishes. Everybody's mom would 'git' you if they saw you doing something and take you home." Part of the summer she went to Alabama and Ohio to visit relatives. "It was like a ritual."

In elementary school, she remembers, "the boys could get totally involved when we had recess. But we--like little robots--you could only exert yourself so much, because after all, you are a girl. Sweating is out of the question." Williams remembers enjoying school. She took the academic course in high school and competed for

certificates and trophies.

Books are still her favorite pastime. "I read--that's my hobby. From the time I was little my mother used to buy me books. She gave me The Three Musketeers, which was about that big. For my birthday last year my oldest daughter bought me the complete works of Ray Bradbury."

After high school Williams started at Brooklyn College but went only a short time. She went to beauty culture school and got her license, worked as a nurse's aide, and married at twenty-two. She moved to Virginia, her husband's former home, eight years later. One of her favorite things to do was to take very old relatives out for a walk. She was divorced two years ago.

> Last summer I just told the children, "I am going to school, that's it, regardless. I am going." And I came, I took the placement tests, and today, here I am. . . . I came for one thing--I already knew what I wanted to do. I've spoken to younger students--they're undecided, as far as a career. I knew what I wanted.

Helen Krug

Helen Krug, forty-nine, was enrolled in an "Individual Studies" program at a New York State community college. She was interviewed twice at the college and once at her home in the fall of 1981.

Before she came to the community college where she was a student as well as a part-time secretary in a work-study job, Krug had had a variety of jobs and educational experiences. Her longest work period was as a secretary to the vice president of a private college. She

was divorced and the mother of two grown children. She was "betwixt and between" before coming to the community college. It "seemed like a good time" to think about going back to school, and the community college was closer than the state university. Here in her words is the narrative of her first steps in the community college:

> With no income coming in I was eligible for financial aid and maybe this was the best time in my life to go full time and so I said, "Why not?" And I pored through the community college catalogue--I would hate to count the times--because I wanted to put something together. I hated to waste all of my previous credits even though I knew I didn't want a degree in business. I didn't want to get back into that office situation again.
>
> I had so many if's running through my mind I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I had been looking at the want ads, trying to keep abreast of what was going on. I went to the counseling center at the community college and they directed me to a chairperson of Business. I just decided I wasn't ready to talk to a department chairperson. Price-wise, I knew that the community college was the best place for me to go. You know you just can't beat it. And when you're talking about gas money, that's the closest to me. I wouldn't have to be away for all the meals. So accessibility was very important to me.

Krug had a special interest that had been developing over the years: recreational music. The interest began with the barn dances she remembered from her childhood when her father played the guitar and the harmonica; it developed further with the purchase of a piano and a first course in the rudiments of music; and further yet with the idea of marketing sing-alongs after her first success in leading such a group. Most of all she was interested in working with music as recreation in retirement homes. "Perhaps," she said,

> visiting people in retirement centers, that may be my place. I could function there more readily than as a social director in a hotel chain. I could lead people into having all-around good old-fashioned times. So that's why I am at the community

> college. Music and recreation--it's what I'm taking. I feel like I have been let loose. I really am not going to be happy ever just doing office work again.

Sylvia Cobb

Sylvia Cobb, forty-eight, was enrolled in a two-year Drafting Program in a New York State community college. She was interviewed twice at the college and once in her home in the spring of 1982, the year following her divorce.

Cobb was an only child, "a depression baby." She was proud of the tradition of competent women in her Massachusetts family: a "bright and strong-willed" grandmother, a great-great-aunt who introduced manual training to the schools, a great-aunt who ran a school, and a mother who ran the Red Cross Motor Corps during World War II. There was "no tradition of sexism" in her family. Neither of her parents works, she says, because her father was in the Navy and is now on 100 percent disability. They "just sort of run the house together."

Cobb was "very much of a loner" who read a lot, liked walking on the beach, and in school "lived out the window most of the time." During high school she was seriously thinking about becoming an occupational therapist or a medical illustrator or going to forestry school and "was talked out of them all." "To get into the liberal arts" and go to an Ivy League school was "just kind of expected." Unhappy with the "monolithic quality" of the women's college campus

she attended at age eighteen, she came back home after a year to finish her B.A. in sociology at the nearby university. Her mother persuaded her that "a woman could not enter the world without secretarial skills," so the next step was Katherine Gibbs.

The next twenty-five years: marriage, moving wherever her husband's work or study took them, a good job at Time, Inc., two children (now in high school and college). Her husband had finally finished his Ph.D. studies and they moved once more to a university town, in New York State. She described what led up to her decision to enroll in a community college drafting program:

> I had been taking art courses at the university for my own pleasure. The crisis time was when I was discovering that I wasn't going to have mothering and housewifing as a life-long career. I realized that I was going to have to go to work. I wasn't competent to live on my own. I discovered that it was just a real practical problem and not some inherent character flaw.
>
> I like visual things and I draw, and my first requirement was that it was something that would be harmless to my drawing. I didn't want to go into commercial art where I would be compromising my drawing skills all the time. Drafting had all the advantages of keeping up the hand and eye coordination and the visualization skills without having an emotional content at all, so that it doesn't interfere or spoil anything else you might want to do.
>
> I set about investigating the field. I went and talked to the state employment office, and I found some people in industry and talked to them. "Is drafting a good field and will I be able to make a living?" I was assured that it was a fine skill to have and I could always find a job.

Sylvia Cobb chose the community college because the only other possibility was "a town which was too far away." (She still had one son at home and a daughter in college.) Because of her previous college experience, her first steps were not a problem, and she needed

no help.

> The first day--it wasn't shocking or uncomfortable. I was certainly aware of the fact that I was older than everybody--no one is forty-eight except me. I think I was in a somewhat favored position as an older student because you stand out so people know who you are.

Career Programs: Transfer

Two participants planned to transfer to four-year colleges. Their career goals were clear; the community college programs they chose were Engineering Technology and Early Childhood Education.

Leslie Porter

Leslie Porter, twenty-five, was enrolled in a pre-engineering technology course in a New York State community college. She was interviewed three times at the college in the spring of 1982.

Porter had not been interested in her studies in high school. Her father, a microbiologist, offered to help, but, she said, "I didn't want the help." The school said, "She does not apply herself."

But as soon as she got into college, things changed. "I wanted to get out of the house. How perfect, to go to a two-year school, to live away from home, and then to work and make some money, buy a car and do some things you want to do, and then go [back] to school." The first two-year school was an agricultural-technical college where she became the first woman to enroll in an eight-hour-a-day program for mechanics. "I think they were waiting for that first girl," Porter

said. "My grades just zoomed from high school. I really liked what I was doing. I would say that I had the best two years of my life so far in that school." She was recruited after graduation from that college by a company which employed 50,000 people. When she decided to leave and "get that four-year degree," she had become a "trouble-shooter" with the title "Automatic Equipment Mechanic" for the company which paid her well. Other people who worked there said, "Get out while you can." She has never regretted the move. She said:

> I started working at the company six years ago. I was nineteen and I was hired as an apprentice to go through a three-year apprenticeship program. Once you have gone through this apprenticeship they want you to stay there. I knew that I didn't want to stay there for the rest of my life. I looked at options for going to school.
>
> I applied to a bunch of four-year colleges. I talked to a guy at one college and he recommended that I go to this community college. He said that for two years you can go there, it's a lot cheaper. I hadn't heard of this community college before that. I mean this guy probably saved me $10,000, you know. I was really considering going to a four-year school.

Porter planned to transfer to an engineering school at the end of two years in the community college.

Kathleen Bresnahan

Kathleen Bresnahan, thirty, was enrolled in the Early Childhood Program of a Massachusetts community college. Her plan was to transfer to a state college after completing the two-year program. She was interviewed twice at the college and once at her home in the fall of 1981. Bresnahan had entered the Early Childhood Program after her husband's death two years ago. She told me how her decision came

about:

> When [my daughter] was in first grade I decided to take one course and see if I'd enjoy it. The community college--you get their things in the mail, their fall semesters, their spring semesters, summer courses, evening courses. I didn't know anyone that was going there. . . . When I came down here--the first thing when I came in was the size of it and it scared me to death, because it was so big and there were so many people. You get lost in it so easy.

Bresnahan said that family members and friends had told her, "If you're going to go to school, get something where you're going to get a good job that pays." The field she was interested in, however, was Early Childhood, and "you definitely don't get a lot of good pay."

> The first day I came to register, the cafeteria must have had about three thousand people. I just came down to talk to someone to try one course, but they were great. They directed me to someone in that field--an Early Childhood adviser--so I told that adviser I didn't really know what I wanted but I wanted to try and see. She advised me to take one course, Introduction to Early Childhood. So I just took that one that first semester.

Bresnahan was ignorant about grants or financial benefits. "I had no idea there was anything like BEOG, I knew nothing about it." She paid the tuition the first semester, but her adviser informed her in time to get some help for the second.

Bresnahan's interest in studying child development dated from the time that she brought her child to Head Start. "The little bit I learned the more I wanted to learn about--different methods and theories." She added, "If the community college wasn't here I wouldn't have gone. I don't think I would have ever gone to the university. The community college was close and it was small compared to the university. One day I went [to the university]--I was looking

for the library. I couldn't find it."

The community college, originally so forbidding, began to seem friendly. And the Early Childhood Program was especially comfortable. Bresnahan found reassurance and encouragement in her tentatively chosen field right from the beginning.

Career Programs: Part-time

Two participants were part-time students; one or two classes a semester was the limit for both. But they had a purpose in mind for each course. They were not filling empty time.

Sherry Kaufman

Sherry Kaufman, forty-three, was interviewed three times at the home of the interviewer (Jayne Turet) in the spring of 1985. She was recently enrolled in the Media Production department of a Virginia community college--after seven years of assorted classes, one or two at a time.

Sherry Kaufman was originally from the suburbs of Philadelphia. Her father was a dentist who much preferred music to dentistry. Her mother was a "stay-at-home mother" who took care of her two daughters and who, in her sixties, became a community college student. her grandparents were immigrants from Russia. "We would always go down to their farm on the Jewish holidays and feed the chickens and collect

the eggs and my grandmother would make cookies."

Kaufman said that in third grade they wanted to move her back because she "had such a hard time reading." "The reading problem," she said, "really did not work itself out. I had problems a long time. I never learned how to sound words out." Reading was never a pleasure for Kaufman--"I still don't read very much."

After high school Kaufman enrolled in a two-year dental hygiene program and worked as a dentist's assistant until her first child was born. She had married a dental student who went into the Air Force for two years. During this time she had two babies. "It was very hard," she said. "In 1965 we came here [to Virginia] and Phil opened a dental practice. I took my dental hygiene boards and I started working one day a week for Phil."

For the next twenty years, Kaufman's life differed little from that of her friends. Her primary responsibility was home and chidren, but she also engaged in a multiplicity of activities--Girl Scout Leader, volunteer work with retarded children, a local TV station, the Sisterhood at the synagogue, classes in swimming and dance. "When I decided to go back to school at the community college," Kaufman said, "it is the best thing I could have done."

> I started at the community college in our area in about 1978, mainly because I was tired of doing volunteer work and I felt like my mind was getting kind of stale. I had two children who were adolescent at the time and of course was busy running here and there and taking them to lessons and doing what not. I just decided that I would like to go back to school and learn mostly things that I had not had a chance to learn when I was in dental hygiene school. I only wanted to go two mornings a week. . . . I decided to concentrate on learning things that I felt would

> help me, that would be beneficial to my life in the long run. I got tired of being a stay-at-home mother, even though I did all of this community work. It still did not fill something in me.

Sherry Kaufman was, at the time of her interviews, in her eighth year of part-time study at the community college. Her interests had finally narrowed to art and photography, and she had recently made the decision to get an A.A. degree.

Antonia Gonsalves

Antonia Gonsalves, forty-nine, was at the time of the interviews enrolled part-time for a single course (Real Estate). She had previously taken a number of classes in two community colleges over a period of fourteen years. She was interviewed three times at the home of the interviewer in the fall of 1983.

Gonsalves was divorced, had two children still at home, and had just finished building (much of the labor her own) a house for her family. She was working full time as a case manager for an alcohol counseling program in Massachusetts and was formerly a clinic supervisor in a women's health agency. Two years ago she completed a master's degree in management in a special college program which bypassed the bachelor's and gave course credit for extensive work experience as well as for her detailed documentation of years of workshops and community or junior college courses of study. She described that process:

> The director of the program [where I worked] told me not to go for my B.A., there was a master's program that I could go to and that I had the ability. I'm saying no and she's saying yes. So

> I applied. . . .
>
> I felt there was a gap. I have loads of work experience, but I didn't have the educational background and I recognized more and more that that was missing. Realizing that things would come up, and that was not an area that I had, you know. I had a high school education. More and more, people wanted degrees. . .
>
> To get into the school I had to document all that I had. Then I had to show how all this training was related and how I could apply it for credit. What I had done was take every [course] I possibly could because I didn't have education. That was my way of learning. I would take one here, take one there. Workshops in contraceptive technology, adolescent sexuality, secretarial workshops. They had to be work related or education related. I had pages of them when I was through. I took courses at the community college in accounting and English, and in psychology. What my goals were I didn't know then. I was convinced I needed more education.

How did it happen, then, that Gonsalves, after getting her master's degree, was back at the community college taking a single course in real estate as a part-time student? In spite of the degree and her promotion in the agency she works for, she was "always hustling second jobs--always one step before the threaten notices come." And now she had the loan to pay back for the cost of the master's degree. This new course, then, would help Gonsalves, she believed, to make money in part-time work which would be more palatable than the waiting on table she did then on weekends, and would lead eventually to a new career: "I would be able to sell real estate. I can make some decent money. Once I finish this course and pass the State exam (knock wood) I will be a licensed real-estate salesperson. . . . Then I have to work for a broker; you cannot just work for yourself."

Clearly the motive for this class at the community college was a desire for less-demanding work and more money and status. Gonsalves

saw yet one more course as a possible solution for the stability of her family and an end to her constant struggles. At fifty, she said, "I should be slowing down."

Liberal Arts Programs: Transfer

Three participants were liberal arts transfer students who were committed to finishing the B.A. or B.F.A. Their chosen fields were Fine Arts, Italian, English Literature (or Social Work).

Frances Fox

Frances Fox, thirty-six, was enrolled in a liberal arts transfer program at a community college in California. She was interviewed three times at the home of a mutual friend in the early spring of 1984.

When Fox took her first course at the California community college, she was not thinking in terms of going back to school:

> When I first went to the guitar class, in my mind I was sitting around the campfires strumming the guitar with everybody singing along. But it got me on the mailing list that comes out that they mail to their continuing students, and I went, "Oh, I might take this art class. And I've wanted to take photography so long. They're on the same day and the schedules will work." At that time I didn't have any goal to get a degree. I wasn't thinking in terms of going back to college. Because school--school was this thing that I really hated when I was a kid. I was the fat kid in the corner of the schoolyard, and I never got invited over to other kids' parties.

Fox did take the art class and the photography class and later made the decision to get the A.A. degree and to transfer to an Art

Institute for her B.F.A.:

> And it was the result of those two classes, how they complemented each other [that] gave me the courage to say, "This is something I want in my life. I'll go for an Associate of Arts, one step at a time." After I went through those two summer classes, I recognized that I had some potential. It wasn't college to me until I made the decision to go back to school. In my mind I'm back in college when I make a commitment to myself to go for a degree and take a full load, go as a full-time student. A lot of it was building up my self-esteem and my confidence that I was able to be a student. One or two courses--that's dabbling. The first full load I took was sixteen units. But I would have been incapable of doing that without having first had some experience.

After graduation from high school Fox had gone to a school for medical technologists for one year. Later she went to the University of Utah for one semester. She did not consider any of her previous school experiences successful. She was divorced and had one child.

Fox was unique among the eighteen participants in the study in at least one respect: her family of origin was upper class by any definition of the term and she herself had an independent income, a trust established by her grandmother. A consequence of this situation was that the problem of money was not one which confounded her choices. She had her share of all other problems.

Evelyn Greene

Evelyn Greene, forty-three, was enrolled in a liberal arts transfer program in a New York State community college. She was interviewed three times at the community college in the fall of 1984.

Greene had been a registered nurse for seventeen years. She was the oldest of five children ("a lot of home responsibility was dropped

on me") and had no children of her own. She had worked as a typist for the Army and as a flight nurse for the Air Force Reserve. She had traveled extensively in Europe and South America, Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines. Recently divorced from a husband who "couldn't tell people that [she] was a nurse or that [her] father was a carpenter" and who insisted that she not work (even at home she had to have a "live-in" maid) because it was not appropriate for her to do so as the wife of a wealthy Brazilian business man, she "came home very resentful and very bitter. . . . It was like marrying Jack Kennedy--it just didn't work."

At the time of her interviews Greene was in her fifth full semester of being a full-time student at a New York State urban community college. The community college is "about five minutes from home," and there is public transportation. She said:

> The first semester when I started . . . I guess I was a little, you know, anxious about returning to school and whether I could do the studying and the exams. I was a very poor student in high school. I was very enthusiastic and I took two gym classes, tennis and swimming. Now I'm going full time.

At first she thought that computers would be the best thing to do, as a complete change. "I hate nursing. . . . I was in an intensive care unit, people were dying every night. . . . It was physically hard. . . . I left the job." But, on the other hand, "I'm not really good at machines," she said. "I like working with people, I like the interaction, this is not really for me."

> So I came down here and spoke to an adviser and . . . I decided I don't want data processing. Here I am, forty years old, why am I

> going to do something I really don't want? Now is the time to take advantage and study . . . what I've always wanted: liberal arts. Because in a hospital program we lacked the liberal arts education. When you took nursing it was all nursing, all sciences. . . . I've always wanted to study Italian and learn it correctly, the grammar. I still have a profession that I can work to get by on . . . part time. I manage and I'm in school. I'm taking things that I find interesting.

Her plans were to transfer to a state college for the last two years, and after that, to teach. She thought of teaching as "physically easier" work than nursing. And besides, "teaching is learning." Initially concerned about her age, she said that now she is "one of the guys." And there were "not too many pressures."

Diane Fleury

Diane Fleury, forty-six, was interviewed three times in the spring of 1984 in the library of the college to which she would be transferring the following year. She was enrolled in a liberal arts program at a Massachusetts community college.

Fleury was coming to the end of her community college career at the time of the interviews. She was married, a mother of five, and a grandmother, and proudly acclaimed her status as the daughter of a mill-worker and wife of a union president: "I feel I am a working-class woman."

After high school her mother had suggested going to Beneficial Finance for money to go to college. Fleury did not want to cause financial worries for her family (the cost of the S.A.T. and an application was already prohibitive), so she insisted on going to

work in sales and refused to consider college at all (even though she had been an excellent student in high school). Before her decision to enroll in the community college, she had been caring for her first grandchild so that her daughter could work. She said,

> In the '50s and '60s, married women did not go to college. Certainly I don't know anyone who did it. It was usually the husband who was going back to school after World War II. . . .
>
> The reason I went to the community college [last year] was I had every intention of becoming a social worker. My father had quit school at fifteen and my mother came from the wrong side of the tracks. I have been very sympathetic with those on welfare, and the blacks, the Puerto Ricans--any kind of prejudice and bigotry.
>
> If I really wanted to do something, I was going to need a degree to do it. Money was a problem. My husband said to me, "The kids are getting Pell grants. Why don't you see if you're eligible for financial aid?" We originally thought it was going to mean a loan. It's different, taking out student loans when you're forty-six [from] when you're twenty-two. I probably wouldn't have gone back to school if it had not been for that Pell grant.

Liberal Arts Programs: Part-time

Three part-time students (two classes at the most in one semester) have here been classified as "liberal arts" because their interests were more general than vocational.

Paula Moore

Paula Moore was probably in her fifties at the time of the interviews. (She preferred not to give her age.) She was enrolled as a part-time liberal arts student in a California community college. She was interviewed three times at the college in the spring of 1982.

This is how Moore described her introduction to a community college in California:

> One day I picked up the paper and saw a notice for orientation to the community college for re-entry students. I didn't even know where the college was. I decided to come to the orientation and after I was here I listened to the speeches and heard the other women talk about their re-entry experience. Re-entry students talked about how they came back to school and how successful they had been and how good it made them feel. So I was sitting there listening and I thought, now this would be something for me to do. So I went over to talk to the woman in the career center and told her that I might be interested, and she was just so enthusiastic about it--she reached out her hand and drew me in. It would have been impossible to say, "No, I don't want to do it today."

Paula Moore had, she said, been out of school for thirty years--except for PTA meetings. (She had three children and two grandchildren.) Her husband could not believe at first that she had really signed up for two classes--"math anxiety" and "small business management." She continued:

> I had not thought of going to school, because I didn't particularly want to. It wasn't that I sat around the house and was dissatisfied or unhappy. It wasn't anything that I worried about or I had planned. I just saw an ad in the paper and thought I'd check it out. I got in my car and drove up there. No big decision, or brooding. And it wasn't too far from my house.

Later Moore mused further on the subject of why the community college at this time:

> There's a need, you know, and I just felt that it was different from all my experiences as a housewife and cook. I wanted nothing that related to any of that, something totally different. I've done enough nursing and all of that--that's for somebody else, it's not for me. I was more drawn to the business and community type things. . . . I wanted to use my time constructively and I planned possibly to take some enrichment courses--art and things like that, and just have some more fun in

my life.

Moore had not, according to her story, felt deprived of a full life in being a homemaker and not working outside of the house since her marriage. She was, as she put it, "queen of the house," and she felt free to go and come and do as she liked--as long as the house was clean and meals were served. Yet she admitted to some small concern with the state of her life: "Raising a family you kind of lose your identity, get involved in everybody else's life and you really forget about yourself. [Going to school] is a way to go out and be yourself, see what you're all about."

Moore made clear also the limits of what she intended to do as she began this adventure at the community college:

> I'm allowing myself the luxury of indulging myself, and if it's a strain I don't do it. . . . I'm trying to select things that are beneficial to me but I don't want to overtax my brain so that I get discouraged and I drop out. I was a long time getting back into school so I have to coast slowly.

At other times in her interview she referred to the matter of "stress" or "pressures." Just so much, and no more. The theme is heard more frequently in the stories of older women than in those in their twenties or thirties.

Louise Warner

Louise Warner, fifty-four, was enrolled part time in primarily liberal arts courses in a California community college. She was interviewed three times at her home in the spring of 1982.

The first twenty years of Louise Warner's life were spent in

Canada, where she was the "oldest grandchild and the oldest great-grandchild" in a family who lived "in a little house on a farm." The family was active in the United Farmers of Alberta and they had "elegant dinners with beautiful silver and china and crystal." It was "always in my mind," she said, "that I would go to university and that I would go into medicine." She did eventually have three years at the University of Alberta, but "switched to a fine arts major . . . . there was no hope of ever getting into medicine. . . My science background was not that strong." At that time, the veterans were coming back and they were

> just so much more capable. . . . I just knew there was no chance of getting into medical school. . . . The rumors were that the girls wouldn't be accepted anyway. . . . I didn't think it was worth the battle. I remember worrying, staying awake at night, and decided that I probably couldn't get through the chemistry that was required.

Before her fourth year of college began, Louise Warner married, moved to California, and finished her B.A. program at the University where her husband was a professor. Then came four children and thirty years of waiting and deciding.

> I thought when the kids got older I finally could go back to school. For a mother to go back to school is maybe frivolous or not crucial to the family development. I always thought of myself as going on to graduate school--I think I would have been happier if I had done it. [But] the university didn't want to fool around with women who were raising kids and that were more or less dabbling. You had to have permission to take a minimum load and you had to convince them that you were a serious full-time student.

During this time she became involved in the ferment surrounding the women's movement in California. She said, "Not only was I feeling

that I wanted to make a change, but all my friends wanted to, and everybody was asking everybody, 'Where do we go from here?' I was at that point just anxious to get kind of back into some class work." Since the university did not appear to be an option, the community college, she decided, was "perfect."

> You could go in, you could take what you wanted to, there were all levels available. . . . An ideal place, either as an end in itself or as a transition to a four-year school. There are opportunities for everybody. . . . The community college was nonthreatening, to start back and get some skills and see where I was, and get back in touch with the academic life. The community college offered a flexibility, and, of course, the other thing is, you didn't have to pay tuition. . . . I feel that low-cost education is terribly important for housewives who never feel that they can somehow spend money on themselves . . . . The community college was a good place to start. I didn't think that I really would have been able to go to graduate school at that point. The youngsters were all in school and there was no reason I couldn't at least take part of a day.

Registration, she said, was hard for her and for other older women. "Just going through the routines, it's so threatening. It doesn't take very long, maybe a few hours, but I've seen people give up so easily. They're anxious to begin with, put too much store in it. Even at the community college that doesn't have standards for entrance, except being eighteen and a California resident--a lot of anxiety was fear of failure." She told the story of her own experince when the decision finally came:

> I read something about the deadlines for registration and you had to have some kind of transcript and I called and the deadline was four o'clock that day. I rushed up to the attic and started going through things--I had no idea where a transcript was--feeling that if I couldn't make that deadline everything would be lost. . . . I rushed out there and just made it and I was so breathless and so tense. Come to find out later that you didn't

> really have to have a transcript and you could go anytime for the next month or so. . . . And then, of course, to choose what classes. . . . It had been a long, long time and you build up a lot of anxiety over those years about wanting to do things right.

Choosing classes was not easy, Warner said, because the new students had the last chance to choose, so "just by accident" she settled on sociology, which "sounded like an interesting area." Warner very soon became heavily involved in her classes and in the Women's Center activities in her community college, where she became interested in counseling as the focus of her graduate work to come.

Lena Milano

Lena Milano, seventy, was enrolled as a part-time liberal arts student in a Massachusetts community college. She was interviewed twice at the college and once at her home in the fall of 1981.

Milano described herself as a "business woman: beautician and salon owner for forty-five years." She was then seventy years old, an active participant in a number of community, state, and national organizations. To work toward a degree or to take more than two classes at a time would be more "pressures" than she was willing to subscribe to. Her goal, as she described it, was personal fulfillment and enjoyment.

> Going to college has always been a dream of mine, an unfulfilled dream. I came from a family that thought college was only for boys. A friend of mine said, "You can go to beauty school and in six months you can get out and you'll have a job." I got a scholarship, I graduated and I started working. And then I got married.

Milano explained that in Italy where she was born, "the man is

always the man of the house," but that she never conformed to this idea. Her salon business grew and prospered over the years, through four children and eleven grandchildren. Her husband and some members of the family worked with her, but she was the manager throughout. "We were able to go to the same conventions, we had the same friends, and if I was late for dinner, he was late for dinner." Now comfortably retired, she was turning her considerable organizational talents to such activities as the White House Conference on Aging, the "Silver-Haired Legislature" in Massachusetts, and volunteer work in hospitals and organizations for older people. About her interest in schooling, she said:

> I was always a good student and I loved school. Dad never encouraged me and was always threatening to take me out of school after I was sixteen. He didn't go to my graduation, and he wouldn't let my mother go either. I worked on the school paper--I always liked to write--and I was on the Honor Roll. I had a general course--domestic science, typing, shorhand, English. I didn't have sciences or math. [To earn money] I went to work at two o'clock every day and worked until eleven.
>
> That's why I'm in college today. I think I am a frustrated college student. I never had the opportunity, I've always been hungry for knowledge, always have.

How did Milano make her decision to come to the community college?

> Somebody took me by the hand and brought me here three years ago. One of the earliest enrollees was a senior--she enjoyed it so much herself. She is eighty years old. She had always wanted more education so she was thrilled about coming. When I do my little talks in front of the senior citizens I tell them about it.
>
> I'm trying to encourage others to go. I was able to bring two girl friends [sic] in this fall and they both thanked me very much many times. I sort of took them by the hand. . . . One night I was campaigning a month or so ago and a woman got a little belligerent. She said, "I don't think seniors should go up there and take the place of needy students." I straightened

her out: "We're not taking anybody's place. They only let us come in if there is a spare chair and nobody will be sitting in it anyway."

Milano was not always so confident about that "spare chair." Part of her reluctance to become more involved in her studies was related to her struggle with whether it was really all right for her to take faculty and class time away from younger students.

Participant Characteristics

Lena Milano was not alone in her concern about her age. All but one of these eighteen women expressed some anxiety or concern over the fact of their being older than the traditional college age. Almost all were especially pleased to find, after beginning, that they were more, not less, able academically than in their previous schooling.

For some women, going back to school was a last resort, a desperate move to prepare for finding a job to support themselves and their children. Other women who had been financially supported by husbands and who had been full-time housekeepers did not feel quite right about changing their status within the family. Women who have waited a long time to return to school are sometimes especially cautious about committing themselves to a full-time degree-oriented course of study.

Reading the words of the participants as they describe the steps that led to their enrolling in the community college, and noting their family, work, and school experiences previous to those steps, we find

no consistently repeated pattern in the choice of program or course of study that applies to all or most returning women students. Though they tend to choose "women's work," the fields of engineering, drafting, accounting, and hotel-restaurant work which were chosen by four women are largely male dominated. Seven women were the first in their families to go to college and only a few had more than one college graduate in the family. (See Appendices A and B for more information on participant characteristics.)

First Steps and Helping Hands

A large billboard next to a Massachusetts highway had this message in 1984: "Take the First Step--come to X Community College." The implications of this invitation are several: a "first step" most often signifies that an infant is unable until that moment to be ambulatory on her own; steps cannot have been taken previously, or this step would not be the first. A helping person, or adult, must be there for the child to effect the first step safely. The words also imply a hierarchy of steps like a hill or a ladder: if the community college, then, is the first step, what is the next, and the next? How precarious is the ladder? What is at the top?

As revealed in the stories of the participants in this study, the steps taken to gain a foothold on higher education are indeed often fraught with uncertainties, reservations, reversals, and contradictions. Some steps may appear bold and forthright, without

hesitation. Or carefully reasoned, planned, and justified. But underlying even those seemingly straightforward choices, if we look more closely, we see patterns which lead back into ambivalence in family histories and in the society that surrounds and guides.

Being afraid to take bold and risky steps and to plunge in completely to the college enterprise is, then, one of the deterrents for most returning women students. But the adult helping hand which the community college offers makes it easier to take the first step and to be guided over the initial hurdles. As their stories show, women frequently allude to the importance of the helpers, the concerned and friendly persons without whom some of them would not have persisted. Paula Moore said, of the career center counselor at her orientation, "She put out her hand and drew me in." Elena Zamora succeeded on her second try at college because a "bridge program" director was "like a mother to me." Kathleen Bresnahan also found someone "like a mother" in her program. Diane Fleury gave advice from her (mother and grandmother) experience to entering community college students. You don't have to worry, she said, because "they'll take you by the hand and lead you right along." Mary Beth Nash had a counselor who guided her closely in class choices, her part-time work-study, and her living arrangements as well. Roberta Stephens, like the other beginning students in her college, was required to take an orientation course which brushed away her fears and uncertainties. Helen Krug found a sympathetic ear in a coordinator of a special

program who smoothed the way for her to make use of all her previous work and course experience toward her A.A. degree. She, like Nash, found a work-study haven in a staff member's office. Evelyn Greene was close to one of the counselors in her college who was especially interested in older women students. All except one of these helping hands belonged to a woman.

What is it that reduces grown women to the condition of children as they approach the doors of educational institutions? Warner's anxiety "about wanting to do things right" has roots in memories of early schooling, as it does for many women (and some men). Women did things "right," usually, in school--learned how to be agreeable, good students, but when it came to medical school, as Louise Warner said, gave up because "the girls wouldn't be accepted anyway." Later, being a student past the time when one is supposed to be in school can recreate that feeling of being second rate. The indignities of accusations of "dabbling" when, years after she obtained her B.A., Warner finally dared to approach the university to take a graduate course, are comparable for her to the slap on the wrist that Stephens received for coming late to class as a child. There is something about <u>school</u> that seems to bring back the worst memories of one's childhood--Frances Fox, for example, remembering herself as "the fat kid in the corner of the playground who never was invited to parties."

Perhaps the billboard advertisement was realistic even as it was patronizing. Women have not always been welcomed as students or faculty at universities, and older women even less so. Our culture

still celebrates female caring and male cleverness. Systems of rules and styles of teaching have inescapably conveyed the idea of hierarchical structure--a ladder to be climbed--in college as well as in elementary school. Despite all we have learned about learning, most schools operate very much as they always have, and students come to school to listen obediently to lectures, hear the truth, take notes, take tests, and shiver over grades. This is the structure that returning students expect, find, and try to survive under. For most, a different arrangement is not even envisioned.

Taking a step, then, back into this world _is_ fearsome and it is not surprising that those who have managed without higher education are not always eager to jump in. Anxiety, a desire for sympathetic guidance, and the expectation of failure are reasonable responses to the first experiences of returning to schooling.

In spite of fears of failure, the "dream" of a college education persists and the community college presence has made it possible for more people to realize the dream, to at least sample and savor the college experience, to get an associate's degree, and sometimes to continue in a four-year college. For the returning women in this study, the "dream" is alive for nine women who had never before experienced any college. For the others, their dream has been revised: a change in life circumstances, usually a divorce, or a change in career interests has propelled them toward the community college.

The pictures sketched above of women's lives before and during their first days at the community college are tinged by the inequities of an oppressive social structure, first in the lowered expectations for accomplishment of females as students, second in the limited choices for work, and third in the assumptions of both the college staff and the returning women students themselves that women need a lot of individual personal help with this venture of going to college.

The helping hands are indeed important for most returning women students. Their words show that they may not have persisted without them. It is easy to see why the counseling and advising functions of both staff and faculty are crucial supports for women who have been indoctrinated with the idea of the childlike dependent nature of female students and the authoritarian and punitive nature of schools. As Louise Warner puts it, "It has been a long long time and you build up a lot of anxiety over those years about wanting to do things right."

This chapter has attempted to describe and discuss the first steps of the returning women students in this study which led them to their respective community colleges. The following chapter will explore in more depth the formal and informal counseling experiences which for some students were important influences in their continuing community college work.

CHAPTER IV

COUNSELING: ELUSIVE, OPPRESSIVE, OR COLLABORATIVE?

For the purposes of this chapter, counseling in the community college means any or all activities intended to guide, advise, or assist the student in her initial or ongoing work at the college and to facilitate moving to a job or another college. Counselors engage in a variety of activities intended to smooth a student's way through academic mazes. Helping the student to choose and schedule classes is only one of these. Counseling usually includes academic advising, personal counseling, testing, career counseling, and transfer counseling. Counselors may conduct orientations, direct career centers or women's centers, assist in recruiting, and teach classes.

In some community colleges, faculty are assigned a certain number of advisees who remain with them for a period of a year or more. In addition, some faculty informally advise their students and some are adopted as mentors by individual students. Students themselves often provide useful guidance for each other. In most colleges, an array of supportive services exists--women's centers, offices for the handicapped, student activities centers, learning centers--all of which take responsibility in differing degrees for guiding, directing, or assisting students. In this chapter I shall consider the links between the experience of returning women students whom I have

interviewed and the various counseling and advising persons and programs within the community colleges they attend, as well as the kinds of counseling individual students receive.

How do returning women students see their counselors, advisers, mentors, and support services? The stories of the participants are replete with expressions of gratitude, or, less often, of resentment. There are, it appears, as many different "counseling" experiences as there are students. Some women never saw a counselor nor received more than minimal guidance from faculty. To others, the counselor was their lifeline. Others reported that they had the wrong kind of counseling. In the stories of returning women students, some aspect of counseling is a winding thread--sometimes thick, sometimes thin, but always present.

Counseling for Full-Time Students

Sylvia Cobb was an only child whose interests leaned toward forestry, occupational therapy, and medical illustration, and who was carefully guided by mother and grandmother through a "good private school" and a college preparatory track. "Ivy League schools were just kind of expected." Later, with a B.A. in sociology, two children, and a divorce pending, she realized that

> money was the thing that would save the family. I was frightened because I was incompetent--I couldn't support myself. . . . I sat down and figured out what are the things that I like and can I put them together into something. . . . I talked to state employment offices. . . . Is drafting a good field and will I be

> able to make a living? I was assured that I could always find a job. . . . Before I decided to come here I had a long telephone call with the department chairman.

At forty-nine, Cobb made the choice to go into a full-time, two-year vocational program in a New York State community college. She took total charge of the decision; she called the college in advance to get detailed information, she asked questions about the program. But she never asked for further advice or help. No counselor worked with her on her schedule or suggested alternatives, or talked with her about her goals. This program was her own choice. In Cobb's case, she believed she knew very well, from her own experience, what, at this particular moment in her life, was required of her. She had no fears about returning to college, and sought no help.

> The first day wasn't shocking or uncomfortable. I have been in academia all my life. I was certainly aware of the fact that I was older than everybody. But the administrative ambiance here is the best of any school I've ever seen. I can remember once at the university sitting on the back staircase crying because I couldn't get my schedule straightened out and couldn't find people to sign course cards. Here it works very smoothly.

Sylvia Cobb was certainly not a "typical" returning woman, described in recent literature as anxious, seeking support, concerned about how she would fit in with eighteen-year-olds (Tittle and Denker 1980; Project on the Status and Education of Women 1981). With a B.A. behind her, even though it was more than twenty-five years ago, she did not have the concerns of the women with no college experience. Cobb is one of a growing group of "reverse transfer" students (Cohen 1982, p. 186).

In another New York community college, something of the same

independence and insistence on making her own choices is evident in the words of Leslie Porter:

> A lot of times you will talk to advisers or professors and they know what is right for the populace but they may not know what is right for you. They can just recommend things and that's fine, but sometimes, eventually, you are going to have to make the decision on your own [and] I find that talking to people, talking to advisers, can be a little hazy because they have to think about everybody and it's hard for them to look at you individually because they don't really know what your interests are. And if you can't make up your mind, they certainly can't do it for you.

Leslie Porter at twenty-seven thought out most of her program without counseling or advice. She proceeded by how she felt, what felt right, how things "fall into place." Her preliminary investigations were, however, lengthy and thorough. She consulted catalogues, family, teachers, friends, all with great care.

At first glance, Porter's decision-making style, her thoughtfulness and careful consideration of all the issues, seem to be admirable--and productive for her. But look for a moment at her situation two years earlier. After high school Leslie Porter went to an agricultural and technical college, to "get away from home." Here she became the first woman in her college to enroll in a two-year mechanics course. From there she began training at a large company as an apprentice "trouble-shooter" repairing all kinds of sophisticated machines. Four years later she decided this was not how she wanted to spend the rest of her life.

> So I applied to a bunch of four-year colleges. . . . After talking to a few people at each college, I couldn't decide what to do. I talked to an adviser at [a four-year engineering]

> college and he recommended that I go to this community college. He said that for two years you can go there, it's a lot cheaper, you can find out if you like the program, find out if I was good enough in math and science before I jumped into an engineering program. The other colleges really didn't tell me anything that I needed to know. He looked at my background and he said, "Well, look, you can either come right to this school, it's expensive, and not know whether you are going to make it, or you can go to the community college for a couple of years and then you know by your grades. . . ." This guy really helped me a lot. . . . He probably saved me $10,000, you know. I mean I was really considering going to a four-year school--that was really a big help.

At the time of the interviews Porter was nearing the end of her second year (at her second community college) and was doing especially well. She intended to transfer to a school of engineering. "It's a tough school to get into--a very expensive school. . . . I think I did the right thing. I hope I end up with my four-year degree." At another time she mentioned ruefully that her two two-year colleges "haven't added up to a four-year degree." In her words above, the point that seems to stand out most is that the one piece of advice that she thought of as "a big help" was a kind of counseling that said, in essence, "Take the safest way. You may indeed fail. Why spend all that money when you might not make it? Be cautious. Our four-year engineering school is really tough." Perhaps also: "Especially for a woman."

To the credit of the community college which she chose, there was never a hint that she would not make it. An occasional office visit with faculty members to ask a question about course material was the most advising she felt she needed. Her success seemed to substantiate the four-year college counselor's advice. But would she have done as

well or better going directly to the engineering school? Could she have received financial aid? Every evidence in her story points to a "yes" to both questions. She had already had two years of college and four years of work experience after high school. She was on her own.

Althea Williams, a black woman in a Virginia community college, chose a two-year program in gerontology. Like Cobb, she looked for answers to her questions and was clear about what she wanted to learn and how long she expected to be in school. Like Porter, she considered a four-year school, but because of her age, discarded the idea.

> I came for one thing, and I had a specific idea in coming. Younger students--they're taking their basics, but as far as a career, they're not quite sure about what they want. See, I did--I knew what I wanted. I'm taking gerontology. . . . Until I found out about this [program at the community college] I had thought about the state college--they have it as a four-year program. I said, that's four years, and if something happened, it might be six years. I don't want to be almost fifty getting out of school! Forty-four, that's okay.

Though "leery of asking for help," she was nevertheless enterprising about finding out what she wanted to know and attempting to bend the system to fit her convictions. Her biggest complaint was that she saw no connection between some of her classwork and what she was planning to do in future work with old people:

> I'm taking <u>gerontology</u>--give me things dealing with the elderly. The history of Western civilization? But like my counselor says, it's a required class--they can't tell me why, but I wonder why. "You don't see it now, but you'll need it." I wanted to get credits for work [she was working as a nurse's aide in a hospital]. I went to the Co-op Office--they have co-ops for everything but gerontology. I spoke to the counselor--she said she was going to call the other campus and see if she could find

> out some more information. How come they don't have it in the curriculum? The counselors--they're okay. They'll talk to you. If they don't know something they'll ask somebody else.

But Williams never did get her question about Western civilization or the co-op answered. In routine matters as well, Williams sometimes found satisfaction and sometimes found confusion. One English teacher, she said, started to collect the textbooks the students had just bought. "He said, 'Now I haven't proofread this book--there are some mistakes,' and he went to scratch out this in your book and that in your book. When I came out of his class, I went straight to the counselor. I said, 'I don't want him!' So they gave me Miss Fallon--really nice." No difficulty there. The only problem was that the office could never find her records to make the schedule change official. "They had lost me. When I went to Financial Aid, they had lost me. They couldn't find my cards and things. So each time I came I had to fill out things again. They lost me about three or four times in the library. . . . What it was," she said, without rancor, "they would add letters to my name."

Williams, Cobb, and Porter were all in full-time, highly circumscribed programs (little or no choice of courses), though Porter's was intended for transfer and Cobb's and Williams' were terminal. As Cobb explained, "The program is the program," there were few substitutions or alterations. Many returning women prefer not to plunge into such a major commitment but rather to test the waters a toe at a time. Counseling for these part-time students is even more elusive than it is in the rigidly scheduled occupational programs of

Cobb and Williams.

Counseling for Part-Time Students

The word "part-time" most frequently means "one course" for women who decide to go back to school while they are still tethered to obligations of child care, housework, or husband's dinner--sometimes all of these plus part- or full-time work. For these women, counseling may be nonexistent. That is, a part-time student registering for one course is not usually required to go through the counseling office. Many colleges do not offer support services to part-time students, believing that adults require fewer services than traditional students (Zwerling 1980, p. 98). Of the six part-time students who were participants in this study, three were especially poorly served in ways which, while not immediately damaging, were wasteful of students' energies and disrespectful of the learning search in which they were engaged. Here is how Frances Fox, thirty-six, from California described her discovery that 50 percent of her community college credits were not transferable to a four-year college:

> When I first went in I was taking the guitar class, two units. So I wasn't required to see a counselor. When I went back, I was a full-time returning student. So I wasn't required to see a counselor. And consequently, I never saw a counselor. I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to take and where I wanted to go with it. And was totally unaware that 50 percent of my credits were not transferable. I found out when I applied to the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. If I had known that, I

> would have put a lot more stress in simply clearing the liberal arts--and I would have taken just enough fine arts to keep me interested.
>
> In my case, it probably is working out okay. But for somebody else who was limited financially or who was limited in time, had to be back to work six months from now or whatever, that kind of information, I think, should be made a little more public. And at the beginning of the re-entry experience--rather than as you're getting ready to graduate. I may have designed my study program differently if I'd had that knowledge in the beginning. I think that everyone should be required to see a counselor at some point when they first go back to school.

Fox quickly moved out of the one-course category and became a full-time student. Some students never were able to attend college full time. Antonia Gonsalves continued to take one course at a time, always at night. She was forty-nine, divorced, had two school-aged children at home, and worked full-time in an agency for alcohol counseling. She had taken one or two classes a year for the last fourteen years in several two-year colleges. She worried about money: "I don't really make enough to cover my expenses--I'm talking just maintenance. I'm always hustling second jobs." Selling real estate on weekends seemed more promising than the waitress job she had then. She decided this time to be practical (other courses had included English composition, sociology, psychology--"I always felt I needed more education"--and aerobic exercise--"if I were born twenty years later I would have been an athlete"), so she signed up for a real estate class. "Before I took the course, I checked it out. It's a <u>real</u> real estate course and a private real estate agency runs [it]." She added:

> It's a totally different feeling than any other time I've been in school. I feel almost as if I'm in a vacuum. I am in a class

> with approximately fifty students, and there isn't a student I know. That is a weird feeling. All the other students are white. I don't know, I just--it's different. There's no support, no type of support system or anything.

Gonsalves went on to say how inhospitable the general atmosphere was. When there was a break in the three-hour class, people wandered off in groups, but she didn't know anyone or where anything was. On the first day of the class, she said,

> the people kept coming in and coming in and coming in. They were standing up against the wall. So there were two real estate classes--we had to switch out of that room. There were a lot of last-minute registrations so that boosted the attendance up. I don't know how many people are in the other one, but there are approximately fifty in mine. We're in the science building, and it's very uncomfortable--I'd call it a sterile environment. It's always cold--I'm trying to keep my coat over my shoulders and it falls to the floor. The desk part [of the seats] slants back so your books never stay on the desk unless you are holding them--and trying to take notes! And the lighting is crazy. I don't know anyone in the class, I have not learned anyone's name. There are young people who look like maybe late teens and people probably in their sixties. It's not something you say, oh boy, this is school, I can't wait.

How does this story relate to counseling? Chiefly by the fact of its absence. First, there were about one hundred students there--a sizeable number registered for a class in which they, like Gonsalves, expected to learn enough to pass a state test and go on to earn money as real estate brokers. They decided to take the class at the community college probably because, as Gonsalves says, it was cheaper there. The main goal was vocational, to become licensed by the state, to sell houses, to get a commission. The community college chose to offer this class because there was a "need" in the community for real estate broker education (that is, real estate is a prominent business

of the area). An experienced business person could be hired as a part-time instructor. The students could come for a single course which would help them earn money-- good money, dependent only on their knowledge and industriousness in this one course. There they were, one hundred eager men and women, nineteen to sixty, who put up with cold, discomfort, sliding books, poor light, believing they would have at the end not only three credits, but the ability to pass a test to get a license to make money. Perhaps none of the others felt the isolation that Gonsalves did because she was the only nonwhite person. Perhaps most students believed that paying for and receiving three college credits and doing the work were all that a course should mean. The license was the reward. Certainly there was no encouragement to explore other college opportunities or to do otherwise than Gonsalves had done for fourteen years--sample a course at a time, never seeking other consultation beyond the registration desk. The "vision and vitality" of the community college as "a community resource in cooperation with other community agencies" (Gleazer 1980) are conspicuously missing in this one example. Money was the ruling consideration for student, college, local business, and state. There is no indication that students were dissatisfied with the course, or with a lack of advisement. Gonsalves herself expressed concern only with the physical discomfort and sense of isolation. Was the offering of such a course, with its large attendance, an example of missed educational opportunity? Could some of these students have benefited by concomitant counseling services--or at the very minimum, some

opportunity to connect with each other as part of the class process?

Another part-time student, in a Virginia community college, told a similar but happier tale. Sherry Kaufman, forty-two, had taken thirty courses over the last seven years. She was finally beginning to think about getting her A.A. degree. Not as indignant as Frances Fox nor as unhappy as Antonia Gonsalves, Kaufman had been perhaps luckier in the way in which her succession of single courses evolved into a satisfying whole for her. Like Gonsalves and Fox, Kaufman started her community college career with a single course in something she had always wanted to know: for her it was First Aid. Next was Personal Finance. Gradually her sampling of things she wanted to know led her to the field in which she had now made a solid success professionally, but which she knew nothing about at the first community college class: photography. Looking back, she said:

> I had been taking photos for years and years--what is called stand-and-grin-at-me and I would snap the shutter. . . . I just wanted to learn how to take better pictures. . . . For many years I had just kind of made my own way. And then I went to see a counselor a few years ago. But she was not really able to guide me too well. It is almost like a specialty--you need to be with someone who knows photography or something.

Later she spoke about completing her degree, but just "taking courses" had more appeal:

> I would like to continue taking courses at the community college. I have not finished my degree yet and I would like to really get it. And there are definitely more courses that I would like to take. So much to learn--it is endless.

Among the courses which Kaufman took was one given by a counselor:

> I took a "portfolio development" course this winter--I took it

> because I thought it would develop a resume and a portfolio of my photos! I didn't realize until I was in the course that the idea was to evaluate your life experiences and decide what you had learned all these years. You might be able to get college credit by writing a paper. Wonderful! For women especially who are searching for things to do. . . . I don't think they had a portfolio development course when I first started. You could have gone to counselors, for career, you know, or scholastic counseling, but they did not have any networking and encouraging returning women and that type of thing. . . . Now they have a women's network, meeting twice a month--I was happy to see it--there is so much more encouragement there. They are making it easier.

It was apparently too late for Kaufman to be a part of the new "networking and encouraging" programs on the campus, and her interest in and benefits from support services were slight. This did not mean that she had no guidance at all. Like some other returning students, Kaufman found strong faculty advisers, the artist-teachers of her photography classes.

Lena Milano, a seventy-year-old part-time student in a Massachusetts community college, also had not had much contact with counselors. She had been taking two courses each semester for two years, and had no intention of changing this pattern.

> I haven't any goal that I have to reach. Only a personal one and I can direct that whichever way I want it. . . . I don't know if I've even used my counselor. I know what I want and I just get his permission and that's about what it has amounted to.

Milano was convinced she had no need for counseling because she did not have plans for a degree or a job. Gonsalves had taken a course at a time for fourteen years because she thought that was the only way she could do it. Kaufman followed the same procedure for seven years. Although their interests and circumstances were widely

divergent, it is clear that the opportunity to consult with a counselor along the way should have been provided as part of an educational process for returning students. The "portfolio development" course and the "women's network" were two encouraging recent developments, according to Kaufman, and faculty were often influential advisers. But even these opportunities were not known to her for the first few years.

Faculty as Advisers and Mentors

For some permanently part-time older women students, and for some students in two-year programs as well, appropriate counseling appears to be infrequent and elusive. But what is "being counseled" like for the student who comes to the community college with a definite plan to complete two years of liberal arts study and then to go on to a prestigious four-year college? Diane Fleury had such a plan. She had never gone to college because she knew her working-class family could not afford even the cost of college applications. At forty-six she was at the end of her second year, had a 4.0 average, and had been accepted by a four-year women's college. She said:

> The only meeting I had with a counselor was the one which was required when I signed up and that I requested with the transfer counselor, when I was trying to decide how many colleges to apply to. [Courses] are basically laid out for your first two years--every course that you have to take, I had to fulfill <u>this</u> for the community college and <u>this</u> for [the four-year college]. It was my dear English professor, first semester, who took me aside and said, "I think you should shoot for _____ College." She had me look into it and encouraged me and wrote me recommendations.

> I did start out taking five courses that first semester. I have done it in two years which it's very rare to do at a community college, to do the two years in two years. My first semester, I'd ask somebody, "Are you a freshman or a sophomore?" And they'd look at me, because they don't think of it that way. One of the scholarships that I got they had decided to award to somebody who fulfilled the program in two years.

Fleury's story emphasizes an important aspect of counseling--the faculty adviser or mentor. Her English professor was the chief guiding figure in Fleury's first year. Later other professors joined in a chorus of approval and Fleury was launched in a way she never expected. She was one of the community college elite, the "non-traditional students who follow an unconventional path to the independent senior institutions" (Neumann & Reisman 1980). Her guidance came from the professor in her first-year English class.

There may be reason to believe that faculty advising is the strongest encouragement for the community college student. Kathleen Bresnahan, a thirty-year-old transfer student in a vocational program, had the experience of being in a program where all faculty members took a special interest in being close to students. In addition faculty members were the advisers; in her college each student was assigned a professor who became her permanent counselor:

> That adviser is a professor in [the program] as well, and that adviser helps you decide what you're going to do with your career, they give you a lot of other possibilities, they help you with your courses for the future, they let you know about things in the community that are happening. They take an interest in you as a person, outside the classroom as well as inside. You're friends with them. It might be because of my age--it's not as if I don't know anything. Barbara is still my adviser--you get one and they stay with you. Barbara filled me in a lot on what to do. . . . I would have quit--the main thing is financial, you know. I had no idea there was anything like a BEOG. She showed

> me where to go for grants, even helped me fill out a couple of them. . . . If you go for help there shouldn't be any stigma on you, and that's the way the atmosphere is up here.

Her faculty adviser, Bresnahan said, was "more like my mother than my teacher." She certainly filled a number of roles and was essential to Bresnahan's staying in school--"I would have quit." (For a discussion of the question of confusing of teachers with mothers in a college classroom see Culley [1985], pp. 18-28.) The fine lines between mothering, teaching, and advising are sometimes difficult to draw for both teachers and students in such an arrangement. (For a faculty view of student expectations of faculty, see selected profiles in Seidman, Sullivan, & Schatzkamer 1983.)

Sometimes a student found her best adviser in the teacher of one of her classes, a teacher who created the magic that no one else could, sparking a student's interest in a direction which then became a consuming interest and led to unexpected achievement. Both Frances Fox and Sherry Kaufman had stories to tell about such experiences. Fox was in a drawing class which she found difficult and boring but which she thought she should persist in.

> It drove me crazy trying to figure out this guy until I saw some of his work. Now he is a fantastic artist. This is not one of those "if you can't do, teach." He can do it. I saw some of his work--[whispering] this incredibly sensitive guy. I'm thinking, god, this doesn't match this man, you know? It does not mesh. And suddenly I realized he takes art so seriously, and a lot of kids are in that class because [they need it] for graduation. I was in class because it was something I wanted to learn. And it offends this man's sensibility, the fact that someone takes it as a requirement. And to avoid being hurt he keeps everybody [tight voice] like this.
>
> I made an attempt to communicate to him that I was as passionate about art as he was, that I wanted to be there, and

> that I was willing to work, and I was willing to take seriously everything he had to say. And he and I get along just fine. He's not at all like he seems to first-year students. He's a wonderful man. . . . That alone was worth everything I went back to school for. To look past that initial veneer, to what was underneath. I would consider him my mentor. He has guided my studies and given me invaluable suggestions. He is the person who steererd me toward the Institute--the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. If I hadn't been able to see that, I would have missed a real enriching in my life.

Because they were part-time students who began their college experience with a single course, neither Fox nor Kaufman was encouraged to see a counselor. Fortunately, as they progressed, faculty members became unofficial advisers. Sherry Kaufman's experience in a succession of photography classes has given her excitement and insight similar to that of Fox:

> You have to go through certain stages. You have to build on things and you have to learn to see. I got to a point where I felt that I could.
>
> All this led from going to the community college to improve my photographic skills as a hobby. It really just came by a sort of smorgasbord, just kind of evolved as I took courses. I did not realize I had this creativity in me. It has been a very exciting seven years.
>
> One photography instructor had an MFA in painting. He could not make a living at it. He was the one who taught me to see the abstract and I liked his course so much I took it twice. He showed us his slides and some other people's works and just seeing those things and having him talk about them and how he did them I just learned. I went into advanced photography with him--he was a self-taught man--very smart man and very well read. And I just kind of blossomed. The more I did, the more I could do.

There is something to be said for the smorgasbord that permitted Kaufman to eventually find a mentor who brought out her best talents. A good liberal arts program can be such a feast. But because of their previous technical education (Fox as a medical technologist and Kaufman as a dental technician), it is doubtful that early counseling

would have been successful before they began the art and photography classes.

The Stretchable Two Years

How does it happen that the "two-year college" is, in fact, a misnomer? According to Diane Fleury it was the exception rather than the rule for students to finish a program in two years. Other participants attested to this fact as they talked about their community college experience. As Kaufman said, "You have to go through certain stages. You have to build on things." Looking at Kaufman and Fox after the fact, we cannot say with assurance, "You should not have stretched out those two years." But the evidence is not so persuasive for other students.

Mary Beth Nash, forty-two, enrolled in Computer Information Systems in her Massachusetts community college "knowing that computers are a coming thing" and because she had "always been interested in how things work."

> Midway I decided to change my course of direction, because I don't want to be a programmer. I changed my program to accounting. I will probably take another two years after doing a year and a half. But I figured, well, if I waited twenty-five years to get to it, what's one more year? Might as well do it right. The adviser I had said, "After all, isn't that part of education, being able to make a decision, and being able to change it?" And I thought, gee, it really is. It was real hard to get used to--the idea that you can do your own choosing. It's so different from high school.

Nash had an especially close relationship with the director of

counseling--her work-study station was in the counseling office. During one hectic summer she was working forty hours a week at the college and weekends at a gas station and taking an algebra course on the campus. She said:

> I enjoy the atmosphere of the campus--getting to the point where I don't ever want to leave it. . . . I kept saying, "I can't do algebra," and [my math teacher] said, "You're not going to be saying that soon, you're going to do it." I started on that Finite Math course and I [told him] that I was changing to Accounting. "Well," he says, "if you're doing that, then drop this course. Don't work yourself into an ulcer--it's not worth it." The counselor had said, "You'd better stick with it--if you ever want to transfer to another college, the business math won't transfer." I said, "I don't care. My immediate objective is to get my degree here. If I need math courses to transfer at a later date, I'll do that."

Conflicting advice? On the one hand, Nash is trying to reach her "immediate objective," the degree, quickly, and on the other, she may stretch out her original two-year plan even longer with additional math in order to transfer. The counselor's advice--to stick with the regular math--meshed with Nash's real desire: to transfer to the four-year accounting school, but her fear of algebra and the lure of an immediate job were more powerful determinants. The professor's advice seemed to be based on the assumption that Nash would probably not continue after completing the two-year accounting program. She had learned "that you can do your own choosing." At forty-two she was torn between the wish to start well-paid work soon and the wish to get that B.A. Later in her story she did indeed start to talk about becoming a CPA: "You have to have at least a bachelor's," she said.

Kathleen Bresnahan's feeling of self-confidence grew, she

explained, as she was gradually introduced to the different parts of her early childhood program in Massachusetts. It was important to her to be able to start with a trial of one class and to move to a heavier load semester by semester:

> They advise you in the early childhood program--it's a two-year program but don't do it in two years, you're a fool if you do and I agree. Because your fourth semester you're in field work four days a week, plus you keep a journal every day. They really advise you to stretch it out to two and a half years or three, just so you can move at your own pace. They're finding out that it's just too much.

In Roberta Stephens' New York State community college, the problem faced by Frances Fox in California would be an extremely unlikely occurrence--finding out as you plan for graduation that 50 percent of your credits were not transferable. Stephens, who was thirty-five, described her "Freshman Seminar":

> Freshman Seminar is counseling. For everybody--it's a required course, you get no credit for it. You go to counseling one hour a week. They tell you how to evaluate, how to add your grades, they tell you what you have to do to graduate, how many credits you have to have, what to do in case you want to drop out. And they take you to the career planning center that determines whether you should major in that--like in secretarial science--they tell you where you can write for materials to tell you all about your job, to see if you really want to do that. They have books on secretarial science--executive secretary--tells you what you have to do, how many hours you have to sit, how many words you are expected to type, how to talk to your boss and his clients. It's better to know now than to start all over again.

Taking Freshman Seminar could presumably cut down on the longer-than-two-year community college term by providing solid information about credits toward the degree.

But there is another possibility for extension--at the beginning,

rather than the end. The entrance test determines whether a student can go immediately into "college-level" courses or whether she will spend time on what Roberta Stephens' college calls "basics" but which are known in the colleges of other study participants as "0-level," "developmental," or "Bridge Program" courses. As Stephens described it,

> If you make a score high enough on the test, you don't have to take basics, they assume you don't need them. <u>If you have two quarters of basics then you're just here two quarters longer, it really depends on you, on how long you want to stay here</u>. Some students don't have to take basics at all--if you do good [on the test] you can go right into English 101. I thought I did pretty good--I had been out of school twenty years! I went into Reading and Writing 3--that means I only had to have it for one quarter. And algebra--if I had done good I wouldn't have had to take that. I went into Math 1. They call it first grade, second or third grade. (Emphasis added)

Since the "basics," if one had to take them, are in addition to the other required courses in a program, the course of study may be proportionately lengthened.

Stephens told what it was like to go to her counselor--"my counselor is James Dunham--he's always encouraging you. He is the one who teaches Freshman Seminar, he'll be my counselor until the day I graduate"--and what it was like to go to the "advisement counselor" (a different person)--"she suggests that you don't overload yourself, give yourself time even if you have to stay another six months cause it's better to go slower and make good grades than to whiz through and make bad grades."

The Freshman Seminar (or something like it) was required in two of the colleges in this study. It was important to both Nash and

Stephens to have this requirement which answered questions and allayed anxieties. Both Stephens and Nash were advised to stretch the two years and were not unhappy with the decision.

The theme of "take more time" appears in most of the stories of the women in this study. To put blame on counseling staff and teacher-advisers would be an error. The frequent willing participation--even initiation--by returning women students suggests that the problem is not so simple. The successful outcomes of Kaufman's smorgasbord and Fox's extra credits indicate that lack of official counseling or a push toward early graduation is not necessarily detrimental. Strict adherence to two years--or to four years--of college is much less often the norm in all institutions than it used to be. But unnecessary spinning out of time is unfair to the work of both students and faculty.

Students as Counselors

Returning women students frequently spoke about their interaction with other students in their programs, study groups, or support groups. The handicapped students' office in a California community college was one place on the campus where Frances Fox spent a lot of time. She had an orthopedic handicap and made tapes of reading assignments for blind students.

> I was there a lot because I had to go and pick up my assignments, drop off completed tapes, pick up new tapes. Even though my

> handicap is not as visible, unless I'm using my cane or something, there's a camaraderie, there's a kind of a "we-stick-together," a kind of acceptance of people at face value. There's this one really sweet guy, he has this little thing that ties around his head with this pointer and he spells out words with his head. Other places on campus people might look at him as weird. It causes us to look at our own mortality--who wants to, you know? But in the handicapped student office we've all got something that's not kosher. So that makes it a real comfortable place to sit down and say, well, hey, what's going on, and God, isn't this a bitch for studying--this book, this teacher, you know. Where you might not be as comfortable sitting down in the cafeteria striking up a conversation--I mean, what have I got in common with this person? In the handicapped student office you know you've got something in common--you're there.

The handicapped students' office was staffed part time by a counselor, but the major service it offered was the opportunity to be with other handicapped persons. The "camaraderie" and the acceptance were as important as the practical services.

Then there are the handicaps that don't show as much. Although students with all kinds of personal problems are often seen in the community college by counselors, probably just as many find other students to whom they can talk freely. Older returning women students frequently fill the role of sympathetic listener. Diane Fleury often found herself being a confidante for an upset younger student, sitting in a corner of a hallway after class:

> She ended up telling me something that she had never found it possible to talk about that had happened to her when she was twelve years old. And I did sit there talking with her until a couple of other friends came looking, realizing that something was wrong. It seemed like the talking did help and I recommended she go and see Muriel Hess, the counselor, and talk.

Another student, a young Hispanic man, became a close friend. Fleury described the relationship:

> We became our own encourage-each-other group--because we met in class and talked an awful lot. Lent books. I'd have trouble in Spanish--Luiz would help me. He'd have trouble in Philosophy, I'd help him. And other people, too, the same way. We became our own rah-rah cheering squad. . . . I have a 4.0 for two semesters. So I looked around and I realized, I'm going to help everyone--I never failed to lend a book--I had people tell me I was crazy. I have lent notes, studied with people, given them ideas, sat down and reworked papers with them. I have done anything I could.

Sylvia Cobb was also an informal counselor for her young friends: "It isn't quite a peer relationship," she said. Often they had lunch together, studied together, had conversations in the Campus Center.

> I wouldn't burden them with any of my personal problems and I find myself very easy about being burdened with theirs. It's an "auntie" kind of thing. They are exploring what somebody their parents' age would think if the person were not their parent. There is a huge safety in it.

Cobb's story of working with her lab partner in the "concrete" class carried the concept of cooperative effort to another level, a step beyond the cheering squad of Diane Fleury and Luiz:

> He was somewhat older than the general routine of students, in his thirties, I think. He wasn't English-speaking and he may have come from a culture where indeed it was truly shocking for a woman to be doing what I was doing. He was not speaking to me on a field trip nor would he speak to me in the Campus Center. Finally, by the end of the semester we wound up the star team. He spoke Spanish and Italian and I think he must have been raised on concrete. Although all the technology was new to him, he knew it as an art and a skill--and I went whirling through the formulas like an ace. We finally developed a mutual respect--he was doing the labor and I was working up the figures and we were swapping notes to study. We wound up the pair of us getting A's, I'm sure because of our teamwork.

Lena Milano from Massachusetts became an active recruiter and adviser for other older women in her neighborhood. A friend had introduced Milano to classes at the community college.

> She said, "I'll take you up and I'll show you what to do and where to go." And I thought, "Well, I can do that for somebody else." So when these two people decided they were interested, I said, "I'll help you." And they are so grateful. One of them has a physical problem and she just doesn't want to stay home and think about it. She comes two mornings a week like I do, gives her something to get up for, and something to talk about. The other girl [sic] has just been retired from a dress shop--she had not finished high school. Got her equivalency diploma. Yes, I brought them here. I think there is a certain fear if you don't know just where you're going and what it's all about. I knew that these girls <u>really wanted</u> to come back to school. . . . I showed them where the registration was and how to choose their courses. And then they were given advisers. They make wonderful students--they are even taking the tests when I don't. They <u>want</u> to test themselves.

These women students in their seventies were given advisers on their first visit (the rule of that particular community college)--a faculty person who will be available to them as long as they stay in school. They were not required to take the tests, but even though they were not in a full-time program, they were immediately given the sense of a personal tie to the institution. "They are always great about having you come to them," Milano said about faculty advisers. Then, as if to make sure she was not taking more than her share of this good fortune, "They are very busy people and they have papers to correct and daily plans to make. I try not to overburden them with my questions."

The oldest older students thus had a kind of subnetwork of their own which served as an effective advisory system. Counselors and faculty advisers were a secondary source of assistance. Oldest older students were ambivalent about using college services that they see as mainly for young people.

Counseling in Special Programs

Individual Studies

When Helen Krug first came to her New York State community college, she was forty-eight and newly divorced. "I was sort of shopping around at the time. I didn't know which way I wanted to go." Her background was all in business, but what she wanted to do was recreational music with elderly people. How to combine these two fields?

> "Individual studies"--it's a mixture, but it's actually considered liberal arts. [The counselor] wanted to know what my objective was. It will be called an associate's in liberal arts. It was a big relief to hear the adviser say that she saw no reason why my business courses couldn't be accepted for credit. Including my "university without walls" course which really is a little written evaluation. That was at the four-year college. My goal isn't really acquiring a two-year degree--that is the minor part of the goal. The major part is having the background to go into a retirement center and be able to use music in a therapeutic way.

Helen Krug's community college plans were idiosyncratic. As an "Individual Studies" program member she put together the required number of units for an A.A. degree in Liberal Arts with her counselor:

> She [the counselor] wanted to know what my objective was as far as going on to further education or just finishing with a two-year degree. And I said that the way I was thinking at the moment was to go with the two-year degree, because I wanted to get out in the work force and apply what I had learned. It will be a liberal arts degree. . . . I never thought they would approve my business courses. So that meant I had almost half my credits right there.

The requirements for Individual Studies were much less stringent than for a two-year degree that will be accepted as the first two

years of a four-year degree (liberal arts, transfer). For Helen Krug, who was clear about her goal, any kind of A.A. degree was enough. One thing that emerged in Krug's story is that, according to her account of her preparation and background for carrying out her major goal--the use of music as therapy in a retirement home or social center for old people--Helen Krug would not be adequately prepared to do this work. With her meager knowledge of music--by her own explicit account--and small training in psychology, she could do little more than be a good-hearted amateur volunteer. Her more than adequate business training, however, along with the good heart, should fit her well for the role she assigns to herself for the future--assistant director of a home or center. As for her music-as-therapy goal, the connection I see here is one that Sherry Kaufman alludes to: "I went to see a counselor a few years ago but she was not able to guide me too well. It is almost like a specialty--you need to be with someone who knows photography." Kaufman, like Frances Fox, found her direction through classes with artist-teachers where she "learned to see," and through long practice, to do. Krug expected to learn enough music in two years of class work on the ukelele and the harmonica. Krug and her counselor colluded in composing a two-year program which would give her the A.A. degree but which could not really prepare her for the music therapy role she envisioned.

It was not always clear, from the reports of the participants in the study, whether all the options were presented to students by counselors, or whether certain options were presented to certain

persons, or whether counselors and programs differed widely from school to school and from state to state. The decision about whether to accept at face value a student's view of herself and to build a program schedule based on "the way I was thinking at the moment" (Krug's words, above) must often be very difficult for an adviser. Accounts of the heavy demands of students in the community college versus the limited time and energy of counselors and faculty (Seidman et al. 1983; Tittle & Denker 1980) attest to the struggle. And from the student's point of view, the problem is especially serious for the older woman who often has made the decision to return to school after a divorce, while her children are still at home. Even more than others, she cannot afford to make wasteful mistakes on the way to achieving her goals. The stories of Marta Melendez-Wilson and Elena Zamora, from California and Massachusetts, give an idea of how significant counseling can be in the lives of returning women and their families.

Nursing

Marta Melendez-Wilson "was always planning to go to the community college" but she said she "was not going to go back till the kids are in school." At thirty-four she decided that she would enter the nursing program and become a midwife. Her plans were "to serve non-white people."

That really appealed to me, the practice of midwifery, because I

had good experiences with my births. . . . I plan to work at a county hospital that serves mainly non-white people. . . . I had to become a nurse first, and the community college did have a nursing program. . . . The whole process was new and really threatening. And I was so much older . . . I didn't even know what the prerequisites were for the nursing.

Later in that semester I did go and see the counselor. . . . Then I got into classes with other women who were also going to be nurses. The advice that we were getting was not consistent. There was only one nursing counselor and something was not right. I could tell from talking to a whole lot of other people. English 1A and B are transferable to a four-year college and he recommended that I take 21A and B, knowing that I was going into the nursing field, but that kept me from using that class [for transfer]. He never even suggested to that I might try going on to a four-year college. He didn't tell me what my options were. I was going right ahead to the community college two-year nursing program which would give me a license and no degree. There were just so many discrepancies. I really started to feel angry that this was going on. We were being given information that was causing us to take classes that we really didn't need.

On her own, Melendez-Wilson started to look into the prospects for a four-year college. A few of her friends were applying to the state colleges.

I heard more and more talk about how the requirements were going to change. I knew that in the state of New York by 1985 all nurses are going to be required to have a Bachelor of Science degree. What I was hearing was, you might as well go get that Bachelor of Science in Nursing because sooner or later things are going to start to change. I met a couple of women who were already R.N.'s who were coming back to get their additional education for their B.S. degree and it was taking them a long time to do it that way. Hearing these things I started to feel that I wanted to do something about what was going on with the counselors. Another woman was really upset with the information she had gotten. We said, "We can't just let this happen."

The rest of the story can be summed up as a story of political action: a difficult process of effecting change while finding resistance at every turn. Melendez-Wilson and three friends went to the head of counseling, the deans, the president. They got involved

in student government. They were written up in the school paper. Finally the administration "assigned more people to work on this articulation to four-year colleges. They re-arranged things so that the counselor could work full time. So we did get results." Because of her "experience in getting involved," Melendez-Wilson later turned to the Women's Center in the college and used her new skills to inform and help other women.

Bridge Program

Elena Zamora, in a Massachusetts community college, felt as strongly about becoming a lawyer as Melendez-Wilson did about becoming a midwife. She was twenty-nine and in the two-year "legal secretary" program at her community college. Zamora was at first unhappy with her counselor:

> The first semester I was here they gave me an adviser, and I was afraid to talk to him. He would look at me so weird. I told him I wanted to take the accounting over--I said, "I don't know why I got a C." He said, "You are passing, so you must be doing something right." It was like he was forcing me into something that I didn't want to do. I was afraid to tell him anything else. He would tell me, "You have to take this and this." I would never pick out my classes. He wouldn't really help me.

After this first beginning at the college, Zamora dropped out for a while (her fourth pregnancy) and when she came back she decided to do something about her discomfort with the counselor. She had heard about a special "bridge program."

> I decided to be easy on myself. I asked if it would be possible for me to join the Bridge Program because I had been out of high school for a while. And I came in and I just dove in at once. I mean, it was like A's were hitting me all over and I felt so

> good. In English I was doing real well, and I felt like oh my God, they put you back in high school and you are doing great! . . . I guess the classes were simple--they were just building you up. They teach you how to take notes and how to do outlines and things. This adviser that I have now, she is great. She is like a friend--I can talk to her better than to my mother--she is always there and she listens. I was supposed to take Biology this semester and I didn't want to take it. She told me, "I don't want you to take it with this teacher or that teacher because they are really tough," and she gave me a teacher [but] his class was all booked up. So I told her, "Can I wait another semester?" and she said, "If you want to."

The most important part of the Bridge Program for Zamora was the confidence it gave her. Though she had done well in high school and had passed the entrance test at the community college, she talked about her initial semester as "my first ordeal." Requesting the Bridge Program (which was primarily for students who had not finished high school) turned out to be a morale-raiser for her and to have continuing consequences for her academic growth.

> I have learned to speak out. Before I was afraid to even ask for tutors--you have to ask for tutors if you want to pass, and I have learned. You just go into the Learning Assistance Center and say, "I need a tutor for such-and-such" and they fix it so you can get a tutor.

Her adviser--who is also her English teacher in the Bridge Program--helps with other problems that Zamora has never been able to mention before.

> We were in the Registrar's Office and there were a bunch of us and we were talking. This lady that worked in the next office says, "Is there any reason why you are speaking Spanish?" I didn't know what to do--I felt so, ah, out of place. She said that it is rude. And I said we were not talking about anybody. I told my adviser and she said that she was going to bring it up at one of the board meetings. She said, "Don't be afraid--don't ever be afraid to speak your own language." I said, "I don't want to get into trouble." And she said, "You won't get into trouble and if you do, come and see me and I will stick up for

you."

Perhaps some "tough-minded" educators might believe that this kind of treatment will do nothing to help a student face the "real world," or, as some have believed about counselors in the community college, they are "guilty of spoon-feeding students" (Monroe 1972). The other possibility is that without a compassionate and knowledgeable adviser to turn to, Elena Zamora might not have tried so hard to surmount the multiple problems she had to deal with in her life, or to come back for a second try in the community college after a first unsuccessful experience.

Women's Centers

Because of their activities as women, most of the participants in this study made at least some reference to special women's programs. A few, however, made the "women's center" a prominent part of their work. These programs are, as a rule, administered by counselors with a corps of student volunteers as assistant advisers, registrars, tutors, newsletter editors, recruiters, and organizers. In two cases women were active participants in a returning students' group which has included a few men. Mary Beth Nash, for instance, described her experience in a Massachusetts community college:

> I was very active with the re-entry group--largely women. We could discuss the problems we were having, like test-taking or adjusting to coming back to school. We found we were basically having the same kind of problem: if you have a family, at first they tend to support you real well and then they kinda get

> jealous of the time you're putting into school work. . . . Everyone is saying, "Gee, you feel that way too?" It was just really, really helpful. Many sessions on stress and assertiveness training, how to read a textbook, how to study, how to take tests. It was a group like a club. The placement director is in charge.

Later she said, about the men in the group,

> There were only three that came regularly. . . . There was one group . . . on women's roles and there were two guys that stayed and wanted to participate. These guys stuck through thick and thin and boy, did we give 'em a hard time. They said it was a real eye-opener to realize some of these issues, particularly looking back to their mothers. We hit 'em with both barrels.

Evelyn Greene, a liberal arts student in a New York City community college, became involved for a short time with organizing the "25-Plus Club" which her counselor, Mona, was promoting.

> Jane and I volunteered. I became president, she became vice-president, and Louise secretary. We arranged for some people to speak. Every Wednesday we would be there. In the beginning we had about thirty people. We would just have a rap session, maybe just discussing who was a good professor or a bad professor. We would have a consciousness-raising session, at my house. We finally arranged a very nice talk from Sara Perrier, a dynamic person. Nobody showed up! Jane and I were breaking our necks--for what? Nobody's that interested. So I got disgusted. People were graduating. Many of the women have children, other responsibilities. I said, "Mona, I'm working two full days [at the clinic], I'm carrying fifteen credits, I just don't have the time."

Greene, in her fifth semester at the community college, had been asked by the counselor to try to shore up the older women students' club (though it was called the "25-Plus Club" there were only women who came), which had faltered more than once in previous years. Other student groups on campus had thrived and grown, but a club for older students could not seem to take root. Greene, who was divorced and childless, did not have much sympathy with the women's excuses, and

she finally realized that her efforts were promoting a lost cause. About the final dinner, a big affair in honor of all student club officers, she observed:

> I got invited to the dinner because Mona asked me--it was a dinner for students who do things. It was a beautiful dinner--I took my mother. I found out that most of the student government are black. There are a lot of black students on the campus. They're very active.

Greene did not describe the racial composition of the "25-Plus Club," but from what she stated elsewhere about the women who attended, it is unlikely that any were black. (She pointed out that one woman was "Indian or Pakistani.") What does this mean in terms of the lack of success of the "25-Plus Club"? It may be, as Greene, says, that there was never enough time to do a proper job of publicizing and organizing. Or it may be for various complex reasons, including a subtle racism in the promoters of the club. It was clearly not because there were no older black students on campus. This urban community college was a large, bustling, multilingual, and multicultural institution, with a noticeably heavy black population. Greene was a well-traveled, conservative, sophisticated white woman. Mona, Jane, and Louise were also white. Although re-entry groups and women's centers have flourished in other colleges, perhaps in this one a "25-Plus Club" was not in demand. Black students were active in more politically oriented groups.

The experience of an older black woman student in a women's center of a suburban California community college is in striking

contrast to the discouraging attempts of Evelyn Greene and her counselor. (The student population of this college was approximately one fourth minorities--black, Asian, Hispanic.) Paula Moore was in her fifties and happy with her husband, three children, and three grandchildren, content to live the rest of her life as "queen of the house." One day she saw a "notice in the paper for orientation at the community college for re-entry students." She drove down "on the spur of the moment." She went through the computer career test, "was impressed with the amount of knowledge" that she had, and registered for two classes the same day.

After Moore's first positive experience at the orientation, and after her two classes--Math Anxiety and Small Business Management--had begun, she investigated the other possibilities on the campus:

> In the women's center they had what they call a re-entry group that met every Wednesday, and I went over. It was just a rap session and everybody would go in and there were five or six women in there about my age that had the same problems I had--just insecure about school--and I found out that I was no different than anyone else. We talked about anything we wanted to, from shoelaces to husbands, teachers, jobs, children, you know, the good things that happened, whatever. A lady that worked in the women's center always had some guidelines for us. If we didn't have anything to talk about, she'd have a subject--she threw it out and we'd tear it to pieces. Spending money, physical fitness, or how to relieve stress. After I'd been coming for about six weeks, she asked me one day, she said, "Paula, we would like you to work in the women's center." I said, "Who, me? I've never had a job!" . . . She said they needed somebody in the center to talk to the students and to encourage them and to show them that life is not the pits. I said, "I might be interested." I thought it was volunteer. "We would love to have you here." she said. "The pay--" I said, "You pay? Somebody's going to pay me?" I went home and told my husband, "Guess what! I've got a job!" He said, "I'm not ready for all of this--a job and school!"

Moore was apparently (from her own report) a great success in the job. She was paid minimum wage for three days a week. Her job was to be available to women of any age who came to the women's center or the career center for help. She advised about scholarships, child care, finding homes; she showed people how to use the computer in the career center. "We have resources on campus," she would tell them. "We have a file--all kinds of things that are available that students don't know--you can get so-and-so, you qualify for so-and-so. Like opening a door for them."

Moore liked this work, she was in her element. A few of her comments:

> There are a lot of re-entry students; some of them are older, some are younger. The lady I was talking to today said that she was forty-five and she's scared to death. And I said, "Honey, I was scared--I've been right where you are going--now you go on down there and register." I said, "Have no fear, Paula's here." And she said, "Oh, you've helped me so much."
>
> I don't know whether I would want to be a, quote, expert counselor, but I wouldn't mind having a permanent job here doing exactly what I'm doing--it's not a big strain on your nervous system. I need a little challenge in my life to keep me interested. . . . At Christmas time I got a lot of nice cards from women that had come to me in September. Really it was just a matter of sitting down and helping them over the hump.

Moore's full story includes of course more than just the work in the women's center, but this work was her greatest pleasure. For a while, this was true for Louise Warner, also in California, a college graduate and wife of a university professor, who at the time of her interviews had just left five years of study and work in a community college to go to graduate school. The initial excitement at being in at the start of a peer counseling program in her community college

changed to disappointment and chagrin when she began to sense an unfairness in the minimum-pay-no-advancement situation.

> I went to the community college because the university didn't want to fool around with women who were raising kids and really had no direction and were more or less dabbling. You had to have individual permission to take a minimum load, you had to convince them that you were serious. The community college I thought was perfect, an ideal place. It fits into re-entry women's needs.
>
> The first year that I took one course at the college I took sociology. I don't think that I ever felt out of place. And then I got a note from one of the instructors, saying they were going to hire some peer counselors and I should apply, so I did. I think I was the token older woman in the peer counselors, but that was fine. [L.W. was fifty-two at the time of the interview.] I hadn't any expertise in women's programs and women's philosophy. We were paid minimum pay, fifteen hours a week. We had hours of availability for helping students, talking with them, calling students and asking them if they'd like to come in. I wrote letters and they were xeroxed and sent to certain categories of students. They felt it was a worthwhile program. Then after that I spent my advising time setting up a women's center.

Warner described the different phases of the women's center. Before she arrived, the "women's room" had "radical speakers and rallying issues." Warner was more interested in counseling and in programs that would appeal to many different women from the community:

> We soon had so many women we didn't know what to do with them. We set up a table in the hall, but soon we had the hall full of women. I feel I was instrumental in this whole thing. I found myself as really the director. But I didn't have a title.

Warner herself was taking courses at the community college, trying to gather the "courage to go to graduate school." She said:

> One of the counselors I talked to said that I should have gone on to graduate school years before. Then I looked at myself and said, you have been paid minimum wage [in the women's center], and there's no opportunity for advancement, and this is a dead end. I should not stay here forever. They are giving preference [in the college] to black men who are tenured. They aren't going

to make opportunities for women.

Louise Warner and Paula Moore were indeed very different people whose experience in the community college had one thing in common: they were enthusiastic about their peer counseling role. The fact that Moore was sure she would continue to like her job as it was for the rest of her life did not, however, mean that she should continue in it; and encouraging Warner to remain in this educationally stagnant situation (for her) for five years was understandable, given her talents and energy, but nevertheless irresponsible. But who was responsible? The regular staff person in charge of Warner's women's center had many other duties as career counselor in a different part of the building. The fact was that the center was not well supported financially by the college. As the activities mushroomed what support there was began to decrease. The location was changed to a less desirable area and the phone was removed. A center for women only was not a priority for this college. Nor for most community colleges, as the research of Mezirow and Rose has demonstrated (1978).

What is the value of counseling, then, for returning women students who are both giving and receiving it? There are as many answers to this question as there are colleges and individuals, but beneath the surface there are visible connecting threads. In being counseled, women have received certain kinds of help: Elusive counseling--sparse, hard to find, not there when you need it, not there for the undecided, not there for many part-time students (who are mainly women). Oppressive counseling--there for testing, for

sorting people into courses which are nontransferable, for separating sheep from goats and for "cooling-out" (Clark, 1960, 1980), for steering students toward (or permitting them to enroll in) occupational programs without consultation, for encouraging women to take easier lighter loads and to stay away from challenging or difficult courses of study. Because women themselves sometimes collude in these processes does not mean that they should be continued. It is evident from some of the reports of women in this study that there is good counseling and advising in community colleges. When the work of counselors is considered on a par with that of teachers and when faculty are rewarded for the extra time that they take in advising students by a reduction in their (customary) five-class teaching load, improved counseling and advising may become more widely available. When all entering students (even those who take one course) are given important information that might significantly affect their educational prospects, students in community colleges will be more knowledgeable about their options. With the active encouragement of counselors, administration, and faculty, older women students will see themselves as capable and intelligent, and will follow the lead of women like Marta Melendez Wilson--asking questions, listening to each other, working together for solutions, and continuing to press for equity in the education they choose. An advisory network might include the best aspects of Roberta Stephens' "Freshman Seminar," Elena Zamora's "Bridge Program,"

the various career, transfer, and personal counseling staff, the Handicapped Office, the Women's Center, the Older Students' Center, and would make certain that no entering or continuing student falls between the cracks. Such a network could be a truly collaborative counseling venture with faculty, staff, and students sharing the power and the problems.

The major part of counseling work is concerned with bringing students and their studies, teachers, and classmates together in a synergistic process. The results of that process, as returning women students experience it, will be examined in chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

THE ACADEMIC LIFE: DOING THE WORK

What is it like for the returning woman student as she goes about the studying and learning for which she came to the community college? What is her experience of classes, teachers, other students, campus life? In this chapter the concrete details of the everyday academic work in both liberal arts and career courses will be discussed and in chapter 6 the activities which compete with that work will be examined.

The Older Student in the Classroom

Most of the older students, as we have seen, were apprehensive and uncertain as they began their return to schooling. But as soon as classes began most were relieved that they not only could keep up, they tended to do especially well. Frances Fox said,

> [We're] more serious, willing to work harder . . . invest the time that's necessary. . . . I remember one particular essay I wrote. It was so far and above the best essay in the class, it made the others seem not quite--you know--it threw the curve off. It made other people look bad. . . . You know, I want--perfect! And I take my studies very seriously, I don't want to turn in papers late. I don't want to miss classes. I want to turn in my best and I'm very conscientious.

The refrain of being the best, getting A's, working hard, appeared regularly throughout the interviews:

> The older students, we get along very well with the instructors. They don't worry about if we're going to be interested in the course because it's 150 percent all the time. I gotta get my money's worth. (M. B. Nash)

> I have a better idea of concepts and analysis of plays than the younger students. They are afraid to participate and they also don't understand the depth. (E. Greene)

> About 30 percent of [the students in] my classes are my age or older. They're serious, they're dedicated. It's no messing around at all. They are here for one reason and this is to do. (A. Williams)

> I drive myself very hard. I feel at times that I must be successful because if I'm not successful I'm not anything. (M. O'Donnell)

That older students were in the community college because both the decision making and the responsibility were now their own seemed to make a difference:

> [We're] not in college because of some duty to our parents. We're here because we want to be here. (F. Fox)

> The first two years I went to college I was just out of high school. And it was, well, two more years of school . . . . But the second time I was putting myself through, and I'd already gotten a taste of what it was like out there in the career world. And I'm paying my way with grants. I want this education now, it means something to me. (M. O'Donnell)

> There's a lot of eighteen-year-olds here, their parents are paying for it. I can't see getting a C and the kids think nothing of it. (A. Williams)

As well as actually doing better work the older students had a different classroom attitude from most younger students. Krug had to ask questions even if she were "the only voice speaking out." Sometimes, she said, "I want to show people how easy it is and come on, kids, loosen up. I get the impression sometimes that they put themselves back in high school and they have to act a certain way and

they are not grown people."

From the point of view of a younger returning student, the spread of ages was an important part of her learning. Margaret O'Donnell, twenty-seven, said:

> Everyone was on an equal level whether you were twenty-seven or seventeen or sixty. Somebody sixty years old asking the same question that you wanted to ask--it's refreshing. I used to think, well, they're older so they must know more than me, they're smarter than me. And to realize they're still learning--that broke down that generation gap. I could sit and talk with someone sixty years old and not feel like I have to be careful what I say. . . . I had an older person in my study group. They have more patience than I do about learning. We taught each other a lot of things.

One different note in the refrain: Lena Milano said, "I'm too old to get too serious about anything." (She had just turned seventy.) "I want to get enjoyment out of my classes." For her, that enjoyment would be reduced if she had tests and grades, so she audited all classes. She commented on an older classmate who hoped to "go on to the university after she gets through here. And I think that's great. But I don't have any such plans." Milano felt accepted in her classes by both students and teachers, but she was careful not to overstay her welcome. "I never try to push myself ahead of any of the students--their ideas should come first." By not taking courses for credit she avoided one "stress" but took on another: having to watch and be alert to taking time away from her professors and her classmates. "I always hold back," she said.

Paula Moore, another student who spoke about not wanting "pressures," felt free to take up class time with her questions. The

difference may lie in a question of money. Moore, like all students in California community colleges, paid no tuition. Milano in Massachusetts paid no tuition--but only because of a special dispensation for senior citizens. She was then set apart as a kind of welfare case with fewer rights than a full-paying member of the college community. In her outside life she was a forceful and impressive woman leader. Within the college, she was often humble and unassertive.

Certain classes had more older students than others. "My science class," Bresnahan, thirty, said, "a lot of women in there are my age or older. Most of them are nurses." Williams had the same experience in her gerontology program. Others felt different and special, even though not much older than traditional-age students. Porter was twenty-five but "just being seven years older" made a lot of difference, she said, in her motivation and study habits. Cobb thought being older gave her "a somewhat favored position . . . . people remember you." There were other advantages to having lived longer and experienced more. Cobb felt confident doing much of her design work, having built doll houses and repaired washing machines.

And were older students, once accepted, able to be more adventurous, humorous, and unconventional than the typical eighteen-year-old? Cobb's story at least indicates this possibility. She described one of her assignments in her drafting program:

> My "concrete" course had some things that were sort of like papers. We had to write an imaginary proposal letter. We would suggest concrete of such-and-such a mix and we had to make up

> what company we were and what company they were. I can remember having a high old time with it. I named myself "the Sorrowful Pit Gravel and Grit Company" and everyone else was very sober and serious.

From the evidence that we have about returning students, men and women alike tend to work harder and be more conscientious than younger students. Men, however, to a greater extent than women, tend to continue full-time work, go to school at night, and take work-related courses that will lead to upgrading or to new skills (Tittle and Denker 1980). The intense desire to be best is not always apparent among older men students. In her discussion of her college's re-entry group, Nash said:

> You feel like you've got to push yourself to do the very best you can, particularly with women. I don't think it does bother men quite as much. At least they don't talk about it as much if they don't get an A. There were only three [men] that came regularly.

Fleury's friend Luiz, however, seemed to fit the pattern of the returning women: getting A's, getting deeply involved in the work. As often happens, the woman and the minority male have something in common: a history of being a "lesser" person in school and a personal knowledge of oppression. Because he did not speak English, Luiz repeated a grade in elementary school and thought of himself thenceforth as stupid. The stories of most of the women in this study attest to the systematic discrimination they encountered in high school "tracking" and guidance into "lesser status" occupations. Perhaps the need to excel in college is a function of having been made to feel second-rate in high school.

Kaufman expressed the impatience which older students often felt

when things did not go as they thought they should:

> In the beginning of the course you got the outline and basically what your assignments were and what you will be learning and I found that in a few of the courses I did not learn what was stated on the course outline. And I guess I am not eighteen years old so I was very frustrated.

The impatience of older students with time being wasted in their classes was often expressed in the interviews; impatience, in fact, with anything that was not "taking care of business." Talking about one instructor who had "been here for years," Williams says:

> To me, if you're going to instruct, instruct me in whatever I'm taking--math, English, science, whatever--deal with the subject at hand. I don't want to hear about your car broke down or your dog had diarrhea.

And Nash wanted the other students as well to stick to serious work:

> In the classroom I sit in the front row, right in the middle, right in front of wherever the instructor is. I don't want to be distracted by the ones that don't care, and I don't want to miss anything. The instructors don't forget you--they're constantly looking at you.

The older woman student can be characterized, then, as a hard-working, conscientious, serious student in the classroom, one who keeps the instructor on task, who speaks out when younger students do not. The oldest students may sometimes "hold back," however, in deference to younger students, believing that "their ideas should come first." Older women students use their past experience to advantage in their college work and are sometimes more playful, humorous, and inventive than students just out of high school.

Classes

What were their daily classes like for the women in this study? Some talked about the details of their everyday work in secretarial science or drafting, others about their math and English and science. They talked about faculty they liked and didn't like, about teaching styles, other students, and about what it was like to study, take tests, be graded. Before they committed themselves to a degree course of study, participants often tried an elective or two, something "for fun":

Fox had a scuba diving class in California:

> The community college has a really good pool. You have your own mask and snorkel. And you go in the pool with your tanks and everything, and you learn all the safety procedures. And all of a sudden they throw you in the ocean. I was always fascinated with underwater photography. I'm a certified scuba diver! You've got to pay for your boat trip, but I think it totalled maybe a hundred dollars.

Paula Moore, also in California, was getting ready to embark on some required courses:

> I took jewelry for fun. I've learned enough about welding and soldering and casting silver. This coming semester I'm going to take a course in black history. . . . You have to have an ethnic history course . . . it is a requirement to get an associate degree. If I should go in that direction, you know.
>
> We have to take one social science every semester, that . . . means psychology, sociology, economics. . . . People . . . were talking about psychology and saying how easy it was because all you had to do was read the chapter and memorize the terms. And the next semester when I had a choice. . . I took psychology.

Other students plunged in from the beginning to courses that were required for their vocational programs or for transfer. In Sylvia

Cobb's class in "concrete," part of her drafting program, she found her previous academic work unexpectedly useful:

> My lab partner and I . . . found somehow a line of intersection and we would up the star team. . . . Although the technology was new to him, he knew it as an art and a skill . . . and I went whirling through the formulas like an ace . . . and we finally developed a mutual respect.

In her transfer program Diane Fleury in Massachusetts was required to take a science course, a social science elective, and history. She found unorthodox ways to match her interests to the requirements:

> Botany--I was terrified. The reason that I chose Botany and Intro Soc. was that my daughter had taken Botany and had the book and my son had taken that Soc. course and had that book. . . . One of the things that I do is I take History 212 without having 101 and 102. . . . You pick up a course book and you see all these lovely courses and . . . there are time conflicts. . . . So I would decide, well, I can't take 101, but I can take 102. I just signed up and walked in.

Leslie Porter in New York was preparing to transfer to an engineering college. She described some of the less demanding courses in her technology-oriented, highly prescribed day:

> The math teacher is easygoing. Nice guy, a funny guy. We sit there and take notes and he lectures. People ask questions, everybody is relaxed. Mechanics--you have to be prepared when you walk in there. . . . He doesn't have time to fool around so he just starts at one end and goes to the other end. You really have to concentrate.
>
> The only teacher that is female is my psychology teacher. She is lecturing but she asks a lot of questions and you give her a lot of input, that is what she wants . . . it is more of a discussion. . . . I don't spend a lot of time on it. . . . I cram for the tests.

Sylvia Cobb (who already had a B.A. in sociology) had difficulty finding an elective in her college. "Everything that they offer I

have already had, or something like it." But for others, the problem was what to choose out of all the possibilities. Mary Beth Nash in Massachusetts elected to study Music History and Psychology:

> He's a very hard marker, his tests are very difficult. I took Chorus with him and he had temper tantrums. He has standards and he's not going to back down. Psych--I've lived through a lot of what he was talking about.

Sherry Kaufman discovered photography and art after sampling a course at a time for five years; until that discovery her choices were widely varied.

> The design classes I took more to improve my being able to see better, to compose photos better. The photography courses were a combination of learning to see things in a different way than what you were used to looking at them. He said, "Do a still life of two apples and three pears." So I would go, Ha ha, what can you do with two apples and three pears? (laughs). The different ways to light it or whether you stand them up or . . . if you lay them down on their side or how you group them or if you cut them or you put water droplets on them.

Participants also described specific experiences in certain classes and what they did and did not like about faculty, textbooks, and class procedures. Williams was not satisfied with her history course. "Put the old people in there!" she protested, complaining that the subject in which she was interested (gerontology) was never addressed in her "preparatory" courses. They gave her plenty of "young people and babies." And why did she have to take History of Western Civilization when there was nothing there that applied to her subject of interest? Only one of her textbooks, she said, concerned itself with the elderly and that was about the elite old families of Virginia.

Kathleen Bresnahan was similarly concerned about her history course: "I would like to know about the everyday common people of the past. It's all those famous people, or wars."

The requests of Bresnahan and Williams seem eminently reasonable. Bresnahan did not say whether she spoke up in class about this question, but Williams certainly did. The response, unfortunately, was not a thoughtful one. After Williams had several times asked for an explanation of what seemed to her the illogical requirements for History and Sociology, she finally said, "Well, suppose I just don't do it?" The answer from the sociology professor was, "Then you'll get an F." "I don't understand it, but I wish I did," Williams said.

The content of classwork for Bresnahan and Williams and for others in their classes might have been considerably more meaningful if their reactions had become the subject of discussion and if material to address their concerns could have been found both in reports of student experience in the classroom and a search for applicable historical and other literature. To reduce a student's exasperation solely to a matter of grades ("Then you'll get an F") seems an equally exasperated response. It is possible that Williams's question was heard as an attempt to push the teacher into making broad subject-matter fit into a narrow space which happens to be the student's primary interest. But in any case, an opportunity for appropriate and significant class discussion was passed by.

Roberta Stephens's favorite class was Introduction to Philosophy.

(This course was one of the three courses "about human nature" from which every student was required to choose.) She devoted a good half of the discussion of her courses to the Philosophy class.

> You have a book and you have chapters, he tells you what to read. Then he'll ask you, "What did you think about this, what did you get out of it?" If you don't fully understand, he breaks it down. He explains the material in a way that you remember. He asked us a question on our test: what would Hobbes and Sartre and Koestler say about Britain attacking the Falkland Islands? You can only be absent from his class four times without a legitimate excuse, to pass. You have to take a lot of notes cause he does a lot of writing on the board while he is talking. . . . You could listen to him talk for five hours. He is funny, he is witty. I can remember what he is talking about because he is that interesting. The tests are a lot of writing cause you do a lot of comparing and contrasting. He might ask you, do you agree or disagree?

Stephens's enthusiasm for the philosophy class consumed a large part of her second interview. (To check out her perceptions I attended one of the philosophy classes and found that indeed the class was everything she had reported: absorbing, entertaining, replete with down-to-earth "translations" of the texts they had been reading. Students were highly involved in the discussion and were required to write on a topic for fifteen minutes during this class--not a test.) It was quite true that the students in this urban community college (a high percentage were black and female) were "interested in fundamental questions as much as anybody else. . . . The problem is how do you meet them at a certain point where they are," as Samuel Berger said in discussing his teaching experience in another urban community college (Seidman 1985, p. 160). Stephens's philosophy professor had unleashed the curiosity of his students. Their reading, discussion, and essay-

writing involved them individually and as a group in thinking deeply about universal questions.

Diane Fleury in Massachusetts and Frances Fox in California each took a Spanish course for practical reasons--Fleury because of the large Puerto Rican group in her town and her desire to be a social worker, and Fox because she "loved visiting Mexico." Fox said, "I couldn't believe it--I actually got an A. I spent two hours a night going over the vocabulary. You need to memorize--I mean it's over and over and over. Studying, turning on the Mexican TV station." Fleury was equally conscientious:

> I bought an extra Spanish book, stuck it in the car, and I don't drive so when I was a passenger I would bore everybody to tears reciting vocabulary words.

The Speech class--or Oral Communications--appeared in all the interviews. (Apparently this was a required course in most degree programs in community colleges. "I was required to take Fundamentals of Speech just to graduate" [E. Greene].) Approached with nervousness and apprehension, the speeches turned out to be successes for all participants. Kathleen Bresnahan said, "Each person has to give three speeches. . . . I didn't want to take the class to begin with, but it was a requirement. . . . I'm learning how to talk in front of people that I don't know and get my idea across. . . . The last one is videotaped." Lena Milano said: "I took [the American Politics course] to be a better Silver-Haired Legislator. Also I felt that I would have to learn to stand on my feet and talk and not be frightened so I took Oral Communications and both of my instructors were very

helpful and very interested."

Helen Krug's class in "Music and Recreation" is a far cry from her years of business and secretarial training:

> I now have a ukelele. We have instruction sheets on it. We have already learned a few songs and the teacher tapes us. The basics--other than myself and a few students I don't think anyone had known about whole notes and so the course had to start out with teaching the basics, how to make a G clef. There is a very skinny little book about how you can apply music and recreation [in] prisons and in senior centers and military installations. Or if you were a camp leader. So some of our tests were on the facts within those chapters. Our class is Monday at eight o'clock so you know people are not too wide awake.

Her courses all come under the umbrella of "Individual Studies," an A.A. degree program; certain courses were recommended:

> Graphics--it's relaxing--doing hand lettering . . . Research and Bibliography for one credit--learning how to use the library . . . Personnel Administration, from 6:00 to 9:00 on Tuesdays, taught by a man who has his own insurance agency. Psychology of Personal Adjustment and Music and Recreation. (H. Krug)

The variety of programs and of courses within those programs in the community college have been only lightly hinted at by these examples above. Reasons for choice stretch from "always wanted to know about it," to "the only class I could take at that hour," or "required for the degree." Satisfaction is much more frequent than dissatisfaction, but the voices of older students were not always raised in hymns of praise. In describing one of her days, Evelyn Greene said that her classes were sometimes disappointing:

> Then I ran over to English--a drama class. We're reading Chekhov's <u>The Cherry Orchard</u>. None of us can say the names. We have to write papers--I don't like writing papers. Then I have a psychology class that I don't like. We have a few kids, sort of punky. I'm angry at the professor for not telling the kids to

> shut up. He doesn't control the class. I feel as if I'm in a group therapy session. It's probably the worst class I've had since I've been here.

And Helen Krug voiced another complaint:

> In business law we had a quiz every time we came in. It was a real problem for the teacher to get our corrected tests back to us. We never knew what we were getting. Someone did turn him in, reported him to the dean. He apologized to everyone and he promised by a certain date he would have them all back.

Complaints about class work and faculty teaching styles were certainly much less frequent than approval. These women students were pleased on the whole with their community college work. The few voices raised in dissatisfaction expressed concern with important issues; as a part of their serious-student attitude, these women want prompt feedback and well-run classes. They are also concerned with content--"the old people" that Williams sees missing from her sociology course, and the "everyday common people" Breshanan wishes were included in her history course.

Courses in Career Programs

Students who have chosen two-year career--or vocational--programs look at their coursework in pragmatic terms. But they are often torn by the conflict between the immediate purpose of a course and their own long-term goals.

Sylvia Cobb's story is a kind of tug-of-war: her serious art and her practical drafting--she does not want them to cross over and get

mixed together. "Practical matters are for work and ideas of the heart for play"--she tries over and over to rationalize the separateness of the two. It is the same dichotomizing that the community college has attempted, with only moderate success. Because eventually the boundaries are blurred--the two are only different aspects of learning and work; they feed each other and are both essential. Faculty as well as students are caught in this artificial separation (Cohen and Brawer 1982; Seidman 1985).

Cobb's description of her second semester courses gives the flavor of her work in drafting. (See Profiles, chapter 8.) There was no choice here. The program was laid out for all and the same group stayed together for the two years. (This fact may have provided a certain liberalizing for students. The benefits of team work form a strong thread in Cobb's story.)

Margaret O'Donnell, whose high school math teacher told her she was too smart to go to a two-year college, was starting her second two-year occupational course.

> It's a better opportunity to get a job. I can show my certificate and say I'm a certified cook. It may be required in the future to have these certificates [by] the Board of Health. You can pass the course if you pass all the tests but when it comes to the national test if you don't pass that you don't get your certificate.

O'Donnell, like Cobb, accepted the requirements of her Hotel-Restaurant Program without question because of the job opportunity that it promised. She studied Hospitality Law, Property Management, and Sanitation. She was a member of the Innkeepers' Club

("it's like a glee club only it deals with hotel stuff"). She said that "the guys found Property Management very interesting and they found Sanitation boring. And all the girls--all the women did very well in that." She studied also Nutrition, Basic Foods, Merchandizing, Marketing. "I had already had most of my liberal arts the first time."

"Knowing that computers are a coming thing I wanted to know more about it," Mary Beth Nash decided at the beginning of her college career. But in a very short time she changed to accounting. Programming was "not a direction I want to go in." Paula Moore was at first curious, then quickly disillusioned. Her computer teacher never could explain anything to her satisfactorily. "It was the pits as far as I was concerned," she said. Frances Fox, on the other hand, had her own computer and she planned to use it for computer-generated art--"it's where it's at in fine arts today. . . . Oh, for hours I could sit and play with that thing."

Elena Zamora hoped to tie together her temporary vocational program (legal secretary) with her long-range plans to study law:

> I figured out that I would try legal secretary, that is the closest thing to law. Maybe after that when my kids are all in school and I don't have that much trouble I can probably go and take paralegal studies and be a lawyer's apprentice. (E. Zamora)

The tug-of-war that Sylvia Cobb experienced in her fine arts work versus the drafting did not seem to be characteristic of the choices of Zamora or O'Donnell. They both saw their vocational programs (legal secretary, hotel-restaurant) as flowing eventually into another

stage of study--a B.A. leading to law school and a B.A. in business. Their plans were to get the two-year degree first, which would qualify them for jobs--secretary or restaurant manager. Then gradually, said Zamora, she would take her next courses (for the B.A. and in law school) while earning money. "It may take me ten years," she said. O'Donnell had a comparable plan.

These optimistic scenarios are full of unforeseen hurdles. But Zamora cannot really see any other way to combine her responsibilities to four children with study. O'Donnell is single, she has succeeded in her community college, she has no barrier in sight, yet making the commitment to two more years now seems an impossible one for her. Money seems to be the ever-present problem. They are both afraid to take chances, to take the plunge. Like Porter and Williams, they are paralyzed at the thought of taking more than two-year bites of their schooling at one time. The advantages of being "on your own" also have a dark side.

English

Stories about English classes and studying English form a substantial part of each student's talk about the community college. Enthusiasm for writing and reading experiences was frequently expressed.

> They gave me a good English teacher and he was really encouraging. The first day he wanted to see where we were so he had us write. I was always afraid of writing, feeling really

inadequate. When I got the paper back I felt great because he had really nice things to say. It just kept me going. I remember my husband picking me up that day. I remember running to the car, showing him how good, how proud I felt with this paper. I remember the final paper was the big paper for the final exam. I wrote about myself, why I feel equal to men. It was about me and my family. It was just so neat to get that paper back because he said, "This is the best paper I've read in a long time." (M. Melendez Wilson)

My English teacher--he has patience with me. He takes time, he tries to help me out. I don't like to write--I like to read. We have basics--you know, your verbs, nouns, and pronouns, and the rest of the time it's writing. You write about your job, what you want, what you hope for--everyday things. He marks them and we correct them. He rechecks them. (A. Williams)

There is no comparison whatsoever [with high school]. It's at a higher level, I mean--how can I put this--it's more extensive, you go more into the material, they really teach you to understand what you are reading. . . . In [English] class now we are doing satirical essays. We had to read "I want a wife" and now we are writing an essay. That's a hard essay to write. It has to be 600 words. Then we have to write a research paper by the end of this term. . . . Even in basics you write essays--you come to class, you have an hour to write an essay. . . . It's hard to write a whole essay and not have any errors. But they do try to help, they give you a chance, they don't just close the door and say, hey, that's it. . . . If you fail the mid-term they give you a chance to make it up. (R. Stephens)

For English I'm taking American Folklore--that's about everyday people. He tells us stories of people he's run into in the Appalachian mountains and he's taken videotapes of people who look like something out of the past. They live in the hills . . .my relatives are in those mountains, that's where my mother is from. (K. Bresnahan)

Not only did we have to write a 500-word essay every week, typed and all that, but we also at the end of the semester had to turn in a ten-page fully annotated research paper. It's done wonders for my self-esteem. . . . It gave me a real feeling of accomplishment and competency. (F. Fox)

Roberta Stephens and Frances Fox were equally pleased with the "organization" they learned from English classes:

My reading teacher--it took me a while to catch on to his

> teaching. He gave us a manual and everything you needed to know was in the manual. You had to buy the Times every day. You would have to look up the words and tell him what the article meant. And he had a test every week. You knew if you were passing--he had this little book--he was very well organized. He would give you a list of books and you had to have a book report. He told you a week before, "Next time I'll be collecting the title of your book and the first sentence." I mean, you knew exactly what was going to happen every week. (R. Stephens)

Frances Fox said that she had never known how to write a paper before. In high school she used to write the paper first and then make the outline. Having to hand in the different steps in the process week by week taught her for the first time, as it did Stephens, how to put together a paper or a book report. Knowing how you were doing every step of the way and how you were being graded was a kind of reassurance that was essential for confidence building. Rather than being offended by such a process, students were pleased that nothing was taken for granted.

Math and Science

Courses in "math anxiety," or at least courses in which math is taught with some sensitivity to the genuine fears and concerns many women have about learning math, are appearing often in community college catalogues. Although much recent literature has made clear that there is no innate difference in the scientific ability of boys and girls, subtle conditioning still goes on in families and in schools (Frazier and Sadker 1973). Women are discriminated against as a class, in promotions, salaries, and hirings, according to a recent

analysis by the National Academy of Sciences, and women are made to feel out of place in science where "macho mores" hold sway (Cole 1981).

The participants told about their math courses:

> I think you have to be a good professor to teach math. Sometimes we are all so shocked that it's easy--we keep thinking that math is hard, and, you know, you just don't do well. A lot of the women were terrified of math. I was frightened too. I had to take the remedial course over--I failed one out of four parts. . . . [Now] it's so simple, it can't be that way in math! She happens to be very patient and has a very nice way of presenting it. The time just flies. (E. Greene)

> You had to take a little test, and out of five different areas I didn't know what two of them even were, much less how to do them. Factoring. Never heard of it. . . . I had to take a very fundamental class, a go-at-your-own-speed class. It was spring semester, ends in June. I was through with the class by April 2nd. They expected you to do one chapter a night; I was doing three. And then I went this semester into an Algebra I class--I don't understand what's not to get. It makes absolute sense to me. It's really beautiful language. (F. Fox)

> The math class I had was terrific. I mean, he was just so sensitive to me and how I was feeling. He could teach anyone math. (M. Melendez Wilson)

> I didn't think that I was good at [math] in high school. Not at all. . . . I knew that I had to go through Calculus IV. . . . Am I going to be able to handle this? And then you get into it and you realize it's okay. (L. Porter)

> The teacher first semester was a very enlightening experience to me because when she came into class and did problems on the board she made mistakes. It cured me of math anxieties. She'd make a mistake and she would say, "Hey, that answer doesn't look right." And then she'd giggle and she'd calmly go back and investigate her work. The second semester was a man, an engineer, retired from the army or the navy. He had a certain lecture that he gave every day and I think he disliked it when somebody interrupted him and said, "Can you explain?" And he'd say, "Just do it the way I told you." (S. Cobb)

> I had a good math teacher, she was patient, would break it down

> for you. But that first day--I didn't know nine times nine. I said, "I don't know the times table." She said, "You're just nervous, that's all." My mind just went blank, wouldn't think at all. (A. Williams)

> I'm taking algebra and geometry. . . . The second to the lowest form, because it's been ten years since I've had any math. . . . I find it a very good class. . . . The teacher . . . she's great. She, as a high school student, had trouble with math, really didn't understand it, so . . . she understands the frustration and how you can't understand it sometimes. She makes it very easy to learn. She breaks things down into everyday language. . . . This is . . . a lot easier than I thought it would be. (K. Bresnahan)

It is clear that math <u>can</u> be taught in a way that women--whose earlier experiences were often a result of sexist assumptions and overt or subtle tracking--can learn. (A small number of men are victims of the "math anxiety" as well, as the stories show.) There are still some of the old school math teachers around (see Cobb's retired engineer). But the majority of the math professors in the stories of these participants are women, and one, as Bresnahan says, "had trouble with math" as a high school student. It appears that a concerted effort with the problem of math teaching has been made in at least some community colleges.

Marta Melendez Wilson needed science for her nursing degree but she had "this fear" about her ability: "I'm in a physics class now. Oh, I'm going to need help on this. It's chemistry and things like that I just really am afraid of." She continued:

> I had to take organic chemistry and that was a mystery to me. . . . That was my first C. It didn't devastate me. I thought it would. I was in the prenursing classes so there were more women closer to my age and we were going through a lot of the same things. (M. Melendez Wilson)

Other women described their experiences with science courses:

> When I took physics we started out with a huge class, a whole lecture hall was filled. By the end of the course we had maybe twenty people. (L. Porter)

> The lecture hall was jammed full. She projected all of her written diagrams. But she had so much material that you really had to write quickly. The European measurements, we are supposed to know them. The meter and all of that--we really don't know them, at least I don't. . . . When I withdrew, the teacher asked if I would be taking it again. I said it was too many formulas, too much memorizing. (H. Krug)

> I needed a science so I took horticulture--it's fun and I learned a lot. Different type plants, how to care for them. Each of us built a terrarium--went out to the woods and gathered moss and flowers. (K. Bresnahan)

Science, along with math, has been part of the sacred turf on which women have been cautious about treading. The rarefied atmosphere of the science classroom is still mysterious for many women. Most of the women in this study were minimally prepared for science courses, having been tracked out of them in high school. But as with math, some of the mists are being cleared. Change in teaching methods, as well as abandonment of long-accepted notions about women and science, are responsible for some evidence of gradual change. Among others, the arguments of Bleier (1984) and Keller (1985) demonstrate convincingly that science and mathematics are not more "natural" to the male than to the female.

Tests and Grades

The themes of tests and grades are persistent threads in the stories of returning women. Their concern over grades has already been alluded to. They did not question the use of tests and grades as legitimate parts of the educational experience, but they often expressed both their anxiety and determination. Placement tests were a feature for almost everyone. (For the single-course-taker, the placement test is not always required.) Here is Mary Beth Nash's reaction at the beginning of her first community college year:

> Right off they talked about the placement tests. Well, you mention the word "test" and off I go--anxiety plus. It had been almost twenty-five years that I had been out of high school, and you start talking about tests it makes it seem awfully real. Can I really do this? English and Math are required courses. And you cannot enroll in a class--there are no exceptions--without taking the placement tests. It was a very anxious time, but it was very exciting to me to think that I'm finally doing something that I didn't think I ever would do.

But tests for courses were not always anxiety producing. Kathleen Bresnahan's idea of a great test was the final for her American Folklore class:

> There were two books that we had to read before the exam. He gave us twenty definitions--we had to pick ten. We did that part in class. We had three essay questions--we had to choose one and hand that in by four o'clock. He wasn't out to trick us. He wanted to find out what we did know.

Essay tests were comparatively rare in the reports of women in this study. Older women preferred them, but even multiple-choice tests were an accepted part of school for most of the participants--a way to show competence, to have a stamp of their worth. But worries

about being tested and found wanting, about not doing well on papers or exams or in public (speech classes) were ever-present. Women tend to be more concerned, to press for A's more than men, to keep a sharp eye on their "cum's." The study sample includes the extremes of a student with no grades (audit) to one who received the 4.0 top award. For both, the grades are meaningful. Lena Milano will not take a chance and feels safer without "pressures." Diane Fleury must test herself; after her first uncertainties she gains confidence and takes chances. Other voices among the eighteen speak about grades and tests:

> Other than that first B, I've never gotten a grade less than an A.
>
> I have to make an A on the next exam and I think I will cause now I know what he wants.
>
> If I drop out, if I have an emergency, next quarter that doesn't go on my records. It has no effect on my grades, nothing goes on the record.
>
> I didn't like Economics--I'm not making the Dean's List because of that one class.
>
> The A's were extra added little gifts and I appreciated them.
>
> My grade point average was 3.88 last year but this year things are tougher. Maybe two of my courses I'm hoping for B's. If I got 85 on a test last year I was all upset.
>
> In biology--that was my first A since high school. I mean I felt so proud.
>
> I didn't do well on my first test and I was devastated and I thought, I'll never do good. I got a D--and 90 percent of the other people got an F!
>
> I got a B in art. I went to the teacher and I said, "Would you mind showing me how you arrived at this? And he sat down and he

said, now this is worth this much and you add them all together and you divide them, and, oh dear, that's an A! And he changed it.

You drive yourself to drink, almost, to maintain all A's.

[In one class] part of the grade was on attendance. I was there every day, but he only figured 85 on attendance. It brought my grade to 89. But he said it wasn't important. He yelled at me right in front of the whole office, that he was not about to discuss it any further. I went to the Dean of Academic Affairs. The dean heard my story and he said, "What do you want me to do? I would never tell an instructor to change a grade, but I could ask him to review it. And to think over the matter." I got a call from the professor, and he said that he'd been thinking about my grade and would like to reconsider. He was willing to change it. It was a good feeling. I took four courses and with a B changed to an A, that gave me all A's.

Our midsemester was a true/false but the wording was so ambiguous you could slit your throat on the test. [It] was crazy wording. I mean, it's not the way he talked to us. He used quite formal language--the average person would not have known what he was talking about--maybe a third of the statements were that way. The rest was just plain old English. So I assume that he did it to trick us, he wanted to make some difficulty in the test.

Grades are clearly very important to these returning women students. A's are collected like treasures. If a test had ambiguous wording, one student's response was "you could slit your throat." And teachers could not grade carelessly--any possibility of an unfair grade meant being called to account by students who watched and checked the grading system like hawks. A's meant "a good feeling," "I felt so proud." A lower grade--"I was all upset," "I was devastated." Even the children of these women students are concerned about their mother's grades--Cobb's daughter helps her with homework, and so does Stephens' son. Williams' daughter says, "Don't bring me B's, I want A's." Fleury is in competition with her daughter who was a star

student in the Botany course that her mother is now taking.

Most of the younger students, Porter and Bresnahan say, don't work hard and "the kids with C's think nothing of it." Porter wonders about this, feels like shaking them, but then decides that it's those few extra years that have made her more serious in her studies. Fleury believes that the younger students have problems because of the attachments they form and lose; they are too preoccupied with other interests to concentrate on their studies. Older students are not so likely to have these conflicts. But older women students have other conflicts: demands on their time from families and worries about money. There may be other reasons for their conscientious school work than freedom to give it undivided attention. What are some of the underlying reasons for the driven quality of their college work?

The Academic Life and Achievement

Putting together the things women say about the importance to them of returning to school--"It's just exciting," "I feel as though I were set free," "I am finally following my dream," "It is easier than staying home taking care of kids," "I'm not just regular people anymore,"--one begins to feel a kind of infectious enthusiasm as each woman finds out what she is really "all about." One admires each woman's solid determination to accomplish something on her own. "To achieve something," Williams says, "to complete something started years ago. . . . You're competent--this is what it is." "I am

aiming high," Zamora says, "Aiming to be a lawyer. I guess it will take me my whole life." The short period of the day when they are "set free" becomes for some of these women students a time to find out what they "really want to do," or to do what they have not felt able to do for many years.

Even those women who never thought of themselves as "real students" (Bresnahan, for example) have, because of catastrophic events in their lives or a period of concentrated caring about and for others, a new desire to explore their own capabilities. Can we say that there is therefore real value in waiting, rather than continuing with one's education in a traditional sense, early in life? Is it better for women to be getting their advanced schooling at forty than at eighteen? Or is it possible to have the best of both worlds? Rather than marrying at eighteen and immediately having children, returning to school when children are grown and independent, a woman who knew what she wanted to do and had the means to do it could--at least as a kind of insurance policy--go to college for a bachelor's degree and also get advanced education or training in a field which would prepare her for "a good job" (laying the groundwork much as Sylvia Cobb did about drafting)--and <u>then</u> marry, have children, and return to work or further education some years later. This approach is very much like what Leslie Porter has arranged for her life. As a graduate of an engineering school, she will never be without an opportunity to work. At twenty-five, she has time to complete her

bachelor's and go to graduate school before time runs out on her chances of being a mother.

The scenario is possible only when a woman knows, as Porter does, what she really wants to do and when she has the financial backing or know-how. For most of the women in this study, certainty about their careers came much later. We do not really know, but we can speculate, about the causes for such uncertainty, some of which are related to sexist conditions in American society: lower expectations for women as "career women," limited approved categories of "women's work," sexism in school practices which encourage boys in physics and discourage girls in math. These practices have been officially banned from public schools, but old habits die hard.

Margaret O'Donnell sums up the difference between being an "older student" (though she is only twenty-seven) in the community college and being a "regular," traditional-age student as she looks at herself in her first and second two-year programs in two different community colleges:

> The first two years I went to college I was just out of high school. I didn't have to work very hard. It was--well, two more years of school and I'd been going to school forever, it seems.
>
> But the second time I went I was putting myself through and I had already gotten a taste of what it's like out there in the career world. . . . This time it was so much more important to me because I knew how necessary it was. I <u>wanted</u> this education--[it] means something to me.
>
> The first time I didn't have an understanding of why I had to take English or Algebra--now I know why. Being in the classroom, sitting up front, listening, watching, taking notes, learning from this and enjoying it--not "Oh gee, I have homework tonight." It's nothing like that.
>
> I am so <u>on</u>. The first time I was in college there were a few older students in class and they were so serious and I

> thought, why didn't they lighten up? The second time, the kids were looking at me and saying, why don't you lighten up? And I'd look at them and say, "You don't know! You wait till you get out there, you'll know how important it is then. This person's not up in front of the room lecturing for their own health! There's a reason. . . .
>
> I'd be sitting home doing my papers, you know, a very disciplined student, cause I wanted this education. The first time it was kind of handed to me, the second time I went looking for it. And that's a big big difference.

Listening to lectures, taking notes, tests, and grades--these are the standard accoutrements of traditional college courses. O'Donnell, like the other returning women, relishes the feel of a real college classroom. A few criticisms of a few teachers' styles have been expressed by the participants in the study, but generally the older woman student is not rebellious. She is even a little old-fashioned in her desire for things to be done "right." On the whole she is satisfied with the academic part of her life at the community college. She has chosen to do what she is now doing. "After all," Mary Beth Nash said, "isn't that part of an education, being able to make a decision and being able to change it?" For the first time, "the idea that you can do your own choosing" has given some women a feeling of power, in the sense of greater autonomy. Some women, like Marta Melendez Wilson, are beginning to see the cracks in the structure that surrounds them. They have become more conscious, in other words, of how the inequities of the system continue when oppressed persons do not act in their own behalf. But most of the participants in this study see themselves only as "set free." They are beginning to do what they want to do.

CHAPTER VI

COMPETING ALLEGIANCES: SCHOOL, WORK, AND FAMILY

Women who go to college in the 1980s sometimes lead the equivalent of at least three lives at once: the student, the mother, the employee. Of the eighteen returning women students in this study, fifteen are mothers, two-thirds of them divorced or widowed; four are grandmothers and four have at least one child under twelve. Ten of the mothers have a youngest child in high school, three have children six years old or younger. One has three children six and younger. For the divorced women, doing their college work--going to classes, writing papers, studying--is complicated by their total child care responsibilities, that "excruciating dailiness" (Hamill 1986) of the things that parents must do. The women with husbands have more money and security but also have one more concern: the care of husbands. Those without husbands have for the most part found it necessary to add a third ingredient to the mix of school and parenthood: a job. Ten participants are carrying this triple load, three of them with full-time jobs. In addition, all of the women do the housekeeping. It is hard to believe that all of the allegiances in this mix can receive full due.

Some participants have an additional problem which takes their time and energies: a serious health or handicapping condition affects

six women. Some with school, children, a job, and a severe medical problem have very limited funds, as is also true of half the women in the study. The idyllic picture of the carefree college student who is able to devote as much time as she wishes to studies, dorm life, and restorative vacations, is not even a mirage for the typical older woman student.

How do these complexities interact with her educational experience? In this chapter the experience of women with one or several competing allegiances will be explored.

Children and School

The single most telling complication in the life of a woman student is having one or more children, particularly if the student is without resources--husband, other family, money--to assist in caring for children. (It is important to note that one would not say "assist" if the father were the student.) Even the arrangements that can be made for care of children during class hours do not make a difference in the single parent's need for study and rest time, or in the married parent's need for relief from household responsibilities for the same purpose. Among the married or formerly married participants (only two had never been married) three had households which could be described as voluntarily cooperative. All others were recognized by everyone in the family as preserves of the woman; that

is, the activities that centered around home and family were the responsibility of the mother and wife and accepted as such during the period of the marriage. After divorce most women concurred strongly that there was something fundamentally askew in their being the main financial and emotional support of their families, yet they were unable to earn a reasonable living without further education or training. The older women students spoke about the difficulties in just going through one school day:

> When I first get up in the morning, I get a cup of coffee, wash up, and I get dressed while my youngest daughter--she's seventeen--is getting dressed and eating breakfast. I warm up the car and then I take her to catch her bus, I come back, and sometimes I'll have clothes to iron. I get my baby up about 7:30, and feed him, and I take him on to school. I take the time from when I drop him off at school to come to the library to study. All of my classes are ten o'clock, so I study from nine until my ten o'clock class. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, I have a break in between classes and I come back to the library and I study again. Then I go back to class. But Tuesdays and Thursdays, whenever the teacher lets us out I go home. And I go to sleep. Then I get up about 1:30 and pick my baby up, and I'll put out what I want for dinner, and my oldest daughter, she will finish for me. She works part time. She dropped out of school to help me. I don't have to worry about a baby-sitter. [Then I] wash, clean the hall, little things like that. I change clothes and go to work. (A. Williams)

> I got up about 5:30 or 5:00, and my first class was at 8:00. College is a half hour from my house--even with handicapped stickers, you gotta allow . . . five or ten minutes to park and get to class. I'd give my daughter a lift down to the bus--her bus took off at 7:33. . . . I'd have a cup of coffee and she'd have a bowl of cereal. . . . I would get home and fix Susan and me dinner. And do homework--we would both do homework. There were periods of two or three weeks when the television never got turned on. I usually wouldn't go to bed until 12:00 or 1:00. For me it required a lot of study. (F. Fox)

> Monday is the day I don't work. But I have to get Danny up early so he can catch the bus. There's a conflict because he's in the tub and Tom has to go and Danny's screaming at him. [Tom is ten,

Danny is sixteen.] After they're both settled and out the door I do lovely housekeeping chores, run the vacuum, pick everything up, do dishes, laundry. And then I have to do my homework. I have trouble doing homework at night because I fall asleep while I'm reading. Tom gets home quarter to three. At 3:00 . . . Cub Scouts, I get his uniform and his shoes, and out the door. While he's gone, Danny comes home. I have to start getting supper prepared. I have to go to Cub Scouts and pick Tom up and two other kids. Then I go and pick up Danny [who is at John's house]. I have to leave [for school] at quarter to six. We sit down and eat, I stop any arguments, remind Tom his bedtime is 8:30, brush my teeth, grab my books, and leave. The morning part is easy and then it gets kinda crazy toward the end. (Antonia Gonsalves)

I usually get up at 6:00. . . . I wake my sons up, the two oldest, so they can get set for school. My [oldest] son goes in at 8:00; usually he will take his own breakfast. . . . The other one catches the bus at 8:30 and he usually goes with me to take the baby over to my sister's. So I get them ready and I get my daughter's clothes and I dress her in bed cause she won't get up. This is the three-year-old. . . . Then I get the baby dressed and then they start fighting, those two. . . . I start getting myself ready about 7:30, which I never finish cause there is something that comes up. I take a shower and I dress and I have to fight to get my son's coat on. I put my daughter's coat on. Usually when she has everything on she wants to go to the bathroom and that puts me back. . . . I have to try to get my daughter in school by 8:15 . . . . I am always missing my bus. So after I get my son ready I take him out and I have to walk three blocks, and my sister lives on the fifth floor, so I go up the stairs and people everyday look at me like, oh, you poor thing, why are you doing this to yourself? . . . I take my son upstairs--my daughter waits for me--and I puff all the way upstairs and I puff all the way down, and then I start walking her to school. She is in day care about three blocks away. (E. Zamora)

Zamora's story and the others may not seem unusual to most parents. The significance here lies in the fact that each one of these women bore the total brunt of the wearing, tiring details of concern with growing children's everyday lives. (Though it is common enough for women with husbands to <u>do</u> most of the actual child-rearing, it is the total <u>responsibility</u> that is especially burdensome.) For

the one student without money worries and only one child (Fox) the day was the easiest. For the one on welfare with four children (Zamora) the day was so hard that she sometimes collapsed at the end of it:

> I have to study, study, study, and it is hard a lot of times. . . . And they go to sleep, my oldest like around 9:00, and the little girl is up until I go to sleep, my son [the baby] he does not go to sleep at all. If I really want to study I have to wait until one o'clock in the morning. . . .

Children and School and Job

For Roberta Stephens and Althea Williams the question of combining school, children, and a necessary job was "solved" by night work. At least one child was old enough to be at home while the mother went out to work--Stephens to a "cocktail waitress" job and Williams to a hospital as "scrub nurse." How they viewed the costs of these triple obligations is described by both women:

> Some nights I have to work until 4:00 in the morning, sometimes even 4:30. I find that four to five hours of sleep is enough for me. On Wednesdays I get a chance to sleep--it depends on how much homework I have. But it's rough cause I don't have time to think about anything really but work and school and the kids. . . . sometimes I wake up at 7:00--my son might wake me up to tell me that the water is dripping in the kitchen--he is just one of those kids. Yesterday [Sunday] I spent the whole day reading and writing trying to get things together and trying to do some things in the house. . . . It won't be like this forever--only be two more years and then I can get back to normal. (R. Stephens)

> I get home maybe about 12:30. And I study some. And it's about two o'clock when I go to bed. My daughter gets up at 5:30; she'll come in and tap me and wake me up.
>
> When I started school, the hospital took me off the day shift and gave me permanent evenings, so this way I could go to

> school in the day and come to work at night. I average about four hours of sleep a night. But hopefully when I finish school I'll be able to work in gerontology like I want to. But I've thought sometimes about quitting. You know, I get tired. I say, it's not worth it, and I say, yes it is. I've come this far, only another year to go--I can make it. (A. Williams)

Like Stephens and Williams, Antonia Gonsalves had a full-time job, but not night work. She had never tried the full-time school route; her master's degree was accomplished through part-time study. But her full-time work never covered her expenses for three children, house, and car, so she worked part time on one of her days off. Of her community college real estate course which she was taking at the time of her interview she said:

> I'm going to stick it out. There's no way that I shouldn't be able to learn. It may take me a little longer because it is new. But there are a lot of people out there who know it and if they can do it, I can do it. I think I'll like that work. There's a lot of people contact. I need to have a lot of [that]. . . . I'm tired of working--I would really like to <u>not</u> work. And I have all these people telling me that I would be bored. I would like the chance to be bored because boredom is a luxury. I don't have the time for that.

Gonsalves combined full-time work with part-time study. Williams and Stephens chose full-time school and full-time night work. Combining full-time study and part-time work is another option that is more satisfactory for some returning women with children if they have some additional other source of income. Some of the part-time work was found in the community college itself. Elena Zamora, who had a tuition grant and some small support from her ex-husband which was supplemented by welfare, had also a work-study job in the college library:

> This summer I was working a half a day here [in the library] and a half a day there, in the Registrar's office. They both wanted me. I was told by the head librarian, "I have been getting a lot of good reports about you. Everybody that wants a job done, they want you to do it." For a minute I thought she was going to tell me something's wrong. . . . Yesterday I worked from 12:00 to 3:00. . . . I did technical processing . . . I do the stamping and I do the labels and . . . jackets . . . and after that I got out for my break and for my research paper I looked up some stuff. . . . Next week we have two days off and the library is going to be open and they asked me if I wanted to work and I said, "Yes, of course." I didn't really want to but I should because of the Christmas holidays. . . . I am going to need the money. (E. Zamora)

Frances Fox did not need the money but she wanted to have some experience in teaching:

> Second semester I got a job as a photography assistant which is similar to a T.A. in a four-year college. You assist the teacher in all facets--you do the work. . . . I think I would like to teach. I got such a charge out of it. . . . One of my instructors asked me if I would be at all interested, and I said, "God, I'd love to." I think he recognized that I had some talent and a certain kind of patience and maturity and ability with people.

Paula Moore had a part-time job that she could fit into her own hours. Hers, like that of Zamora and Fox, was at the community college:

> I can work whenever I want to, and leave when I want to. I couldn't go outside and get a job and be home by three o'clock. . . . I can't spend the whole day because I still have my son at home. He goes to school--then I'm there when he gets there. I go to school Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and I work on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It works out great--that's the only way to fly.

Moore had not looked for this job as a peer counselor in the community women's center. It was offered to her by a counselor who had observed her easy interactions with women in the center. The fact that she was black was certainly important also in her being offered

the job. The community college had recently enlarged its numbers of black students and administrators.

Mary Beth Nash worked part time throughout the year as a work-study student in the counseling office. When summer came, she was offered more work.

> The summer was wild. I worked full time at the college on work study. As close to forty hours as I could get. I worked weekends at a gas station. I took Intermediate Algebra. I passed it but I didn't feel I had a good working knowledge of it. . . . The summer is tough, it moves so quickly. [For the work study] I answer the phone, I cover during lunch time, if there's a stencil to type, I type that. I enjoy the atmosphere of the campus--getting to the point where I don't ever want to leave it. (M. B. Nash)

Nash's daughter was working in the supermarket and planning to be married soon, so some of the home pressures were relieved for her. Even so, she found that it was very difficult keeping up full-time school with a heavy work-study schedule and extra gas-station work. Her solution was to cut down on the full-time class schedule and plan to stay another semester or two at the college. She became then a "part-full-time" student like Zamora: nine credits instead of twelve.

Sherry Kaufman did not have a "job" in the sense of being employed or hired. Instead, she opened her own photography studio as the culmination of her years of part-time study at the community college:

> I have taken a big step of going into business. . . . Oh, I feel like home responsibilities at times take priority, which I am going to have to stop doing. I feel like if you are in business you are going to have to put the home front on the back burner during business hours. As far as being a woman, I think now is a very good time for a woman to go into business. I feel like the

time is right. (S. Kaufman)

For Kaufman there was no emergency in the sense of needing to earn money--her children were in college and her husband was an established dentist. Her needs were of a different kind: as much as Gonsalves was tired of work and anxious to stop, Kaufman was anxious to begin. She had discovered her metier and felt that "the time was right" for her to develop her own powers. Her full story (see Profiles, chapter 8) shows the tensions between her developing interests and the constraints of the "stay-at-home mother" model.

Work and School

Among the participants in this study were three single women without children--two who had never married and one divorced woman. Leslie Porter was twenty-five and was putting herself through college with the money she had formerly earned and the addition of a small off-campus job:

> I'm a receptionist at a veterinary hospital. Thursdays I work from 1:00 to 9:00 and then Saturday another six hours. Over the summer, after I completed the physics course, I knew that I wanted to make some money and I got into this. I like the work, it's relaxing, I can leave school and my mind is all worked up about math or physics and then for the next couple of hours I can just deal with people in a place where these pets are like their children, pets that have heart problems and pets that are taking chemotherapy. (L. Porter)

Porter worked two days a week for a total of about thirteen hours. For her this small job provided more than just the extra money that she needed to get by. With the constant strenuous work in her

pre-engineering program it was a relief and a total change. In that sense, her part-time work was not a competing allegiance.

At the other extreme, Margaret O'Donnell tried to combine two full-time jobs with her community college hotel-restaurant program:

> Getting my A.A. and working on the side--that is very trying on me. This summer I will work two full-time jobs--I'll be working reservations at the hotel in the daytime and waitressing at night. And that helps me get through the winter. I don't know how much longer I'll be doing this. I would love to have a job where I could just live on one paycheck that would pay enough, you know. Two full-time jobs and finishing up school--stretching myself too thin. (M. O'Donnell)

In contrast to O'Donnell, Evelyn Greene found the right mix for work and study combination. A registered nurse, Greene was finding that working full time as a nurse in a hospital was physically very demanding. Her solution was to work in a clinic on weekends. She earned good money and was able to concentrate on her studies during the week.

It would be unfair to the concept of work to omit the volunteer activities that for two women in the study competed with their school commitment to the same extent that paid work did for both the full-time and the part-time workers discussed in this chapter. Lena Milano certainly did the equivalent of full-time work in her many volunteer jobs. She described some of them:

> AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) meets this Thursday at two o'clock so I have to make sure I'm out in time to get my secretary's book. . . . And Tuesday I'm having a legislative meeting and I have to get home and pick up my books and my notes. Tonight there is another meeting, the Hospital Guild, which I'm a past president of, and I'm legislative chairman too. Tomorrow night is my Catholic Women's Council and

> we are having a potluck supper and I have to bring a dish and tell about the next program, which I'm in charge of. I'm not one to join a club to wash dishes. . . . I want to be the secretary or the vice-president or something. I'm in an organization a short time and they ask me if I want to be president. Well, sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. (L. Milano)

Milano also spent considerable time with the special group elected by senior citizens called the "Silver-Haired Legislature." She made periodic trips to the State House and suggested bills for the approval of regular elected legislators. And with older women friends she went on trips to art shows in other cities and to selected Elderhostels programs, where she could add to her store of learning (no tests, no grades). Her volunteer work and educational trips were supplemented by visits to children and grandchildren, and until last year, care for her mother. Her husband, she said, was happy to "putter around the house and garden." He says to her proudly, "Your name is in the paper again."

Diane Fleury, who was the opposite of Milano in her interest in scholastic achievement and desire for top grades, was like her in one way--her interest in doing unpaid work in something she liked. "One of the things that I really learned at the community college," she said, "is that for a lot of young people in this world what they seem to want more than anything else is somebody to listen to them. . . . Most of the past two years I have spent listening to other people. I'm a great listener." Fleury often took the role of counselor to younger college students (see chapter 4). She spent many hours transcribing her notes for anyone who asked. She volunteered as

secretary for her husband's union meeting. Although she considered changing her goal from social worker to college professor, the meaning behind her plan was that of helping others. The origins of some of these strong feelings about giving of herself she tried to explain in her story:

> My biggest achievement in this world was having five children, because it was difficult. I mean, five caesarean sections. . . . I consider that an achievement. . . . Well, life doesn't stop. There's a world around you. You want to contribute. (D. Fleury)

"With luck," she added, talking of her community college studies, "I didn't have any horrendous family emergency." One sample of her helping style was her work for Nancy, a student who had had a stroke and a paralyzed hand:

> She could not take notes. We would go to the library. She would copy my notes on the copy machine. And then we would arrange study sessions because we had more exams and quizzes in that class than almost any other. She's forty-nine. (D. Fleury)

Health and School

Fleury herself had a serious impairment--her eyes. Talking of science, and why she felt unable to study more lab science in college, she explained:

> I had as good a background in chemistry and biology as high schools in 1954 or '55 had to give. But I would probably feel uncomfortable in a classroom right now with the advances that keep happening. Plus my eyes. 200/20 in my left eye and 20/70 in my right eye. And I figured science more than anything else I think is visual, especially with the lab part. You have to really be able to see details and remember details. I guess I've learned to read blurred. That was my major concern, my eyes, and would they last. And the lab--I'm not very good with my hands.

> Typing and sewing were my nemesis and I thought all that cutting up and dissecting, I'm not even a terrific cook. . . . I sit in the front seat. . . . I really cannot see the blackboard. Sometimes I have to get up and leave my seat, and walk up and write down whatever was written on the board. (D. Fleury)

Frances Fox combined school with a teaching assistant job and work in the handicapped students' office making tapes for blind students. Her handicap was at times severe:

> Because of my back, I couldn't walk in the mornings. The humidity and the dampness, you know, a lot of where the spine is fused, there is a certain amount of arthritis, and you know, it's like anybody who has arthritis, you get a cold damp morning, it hurts. But if you get a cold damp morning and the arthritis is in your spine, and I also have spinal osteoporosis, which is a disintegration of the bone, and you go into spasm; you can't walk. And I was having a real tough time, you know, existing from day to day. (F. Fox)

And Mary Beth Nash had had major surgery which often made it difficult for her to do her school work and her work-study:

> I don't very often admit the times that I don't feel good because of the surgery. I keep thinking that, if I felt good all day, what could I accomplish? My typical day--I'm up at 7:00 and I don't quit before midnight, and I'm usually going full tilt. I won't ever admit defeat, that I can't do something. I won't quit just because I don't feel good. I'd like to live to be about nine hundred years old to do everything I want to. (M. B. Nash)

Roberta Stephens sometimes had to stay in bed for a day:

> cause I have a problem with blood pressure--once my fingers start swelling I'm overdoing something so I slow down. . . . It's easier now than when the kids were small. Now I don't have to do things except go to school and go to work and clean, like on weekends.

Elena Zamora's first return to school at the community college did not last very long. She said:

> I didn't know what was wrong with me. . . . I used to fall asleep on top of my books . . . and I think the last straw was when I was feeding . . . my daughter . . . and I fell asleep. . . .

> Then my house was always such a mess and I would get home and I would fall on the floor and pass out cause I was so tired. (E. Zamora)

It turned out that she was pregnant again. It took a while for her to get back to school with new determination. (See Profile, chapter 8.) Her health was still not good and she hemorrhaged easily. She said, cheerfully, "In May I am supposed to go and get a hysterectomy."

School and Housework

"My house was always such a mess," Zamora said. It is the refrain of the mother with small children. But even for the older women, with and without husbands, taking care of the house takes time away from homework and from any possible leisure time. At one time Gonsalves dropped her community college course-taking and just concentrated on the job and home:

> The month of January I did absolutely nothing. Well, I went to work. I came home and I sat down. We opened cans of stew. Danny said, "Aren't we ever going to have a real meal again?" I would get into my bathrobe, because I was just exhausted, exhausted. That's when I took a break from school and said, "I can't do this. I can't still have time for school while I'm working a full-time job and I still have kids. Well, I finished whatever course I was in. It was two years before I started again. Things were a lot calmer, but it seemed like a big gap. (A. Gonsalves)

Roberta Stephens taught her seventeen-year-old daughter to do the housework, because if she "didn't spend Saturday cleaning the house she would have to do it Sunday" and then she was tired for the rest of

the week. Now, she said,

> My daughter does a lot, she does the washing and most of the cleaning. If I leave she should be able to take care of things until I get back. In fact, if I hadn't taught her to do that, I couldn't do anything. . . . Tonight when I go home I'll probably cook for her--she has to go to the laundromat so she won't have time. (R. Stephens)

References to housework are threaded through the stories of all the participants. Sometimes they are connected with references to husbands.

Husbands

Reported often by married women students are the responses of husbands to activities outside of home and children. In previous studies of women students, the negative attitudes of husbands are frequently cited as a barrier to continued study (Project on the Education and Status of Women 1981; Tittle and Denker 1981). The experience of some of the married participants in this study is similar. Sherry Kaufman said that the problem still arose around the dinner hour, even though her children were now out of the house.

> I say to myself, "You don't have to rush home--it is all right. There are no children that you have to feed. . . . And so instead of eating at 6:30 we will eat at 7:00, or 7:15--what difference does it make? . . . I think he will get used to it. I think he won't get used to it without a battle--not easily. . . . My husband would like for me to be home all the time. He is not one of those liberated men who like to see their wives working. He would like to see me in the house. It was all right when I did things during the day. As long as I was home to cook dinner and have it on the table at a certain hour he could accept that, but now that I don't always have dinner on the table . . .

Louise Warner at fifty-four was just beginning to see herself in some other role than housewife and mother. Her earlier ambition had been to study medicine, but four children became her work. She had become restless:

> I've been thinking, what are the options--what do other women do? Not all women have full-time careers. A lot of women seem to be fairly satisfied. Women that I know are filling their lives with a little bit of this and that and the other thing. And that's what I've been doing. . . . I think there's something about this traditional housewife-mother role that takes away a lot of your strength.

A faculty wife, a volunteer in university activities, and a mother of four now-college-age children, Warner was coming to the place where she wanted something for herself. The community college provided an entree for her and a career idea. But it remained a problem for her to think seriously of full-time paid work:

> My husband has been quite supportive of it [going to community college]. Although I always kept up this end of it too. I planned my school at times so that I was gone during the day when the kids were in school. I always had dinner organized when my husband was going to be home. I never was one to be able to let everything go. One of my main problems always is feeling a very strong responsibility to keeping up everything at home. (L. Warner)

Home at night and dinner on the table--it seemed to be the bottom line for a successful combination of school and marriage. (It was at the point for Marta Melendez Wilson when she was hurrying her family through dinner so that she could attend the Women's Health Center meeting that her marriage began to disintegrate.) Paula Moore's husband, however, was very enthusiastic about her decision to attend the community college and also about her new job as peer counselor in

the Women's Center. But she did not intend to do anything very differently from the way it had always been at home:

> My husband has been very agreeable and cooperative about it. It doesn't interfere with his life. . . . I hear women talking and they say that their husbands are upset about them going to school--they don't like it because they can't wait on the family the way they did. With the re-entry students, you know, many of them are divorced and many of them have come back to school because they have families to support. Sometimes I feel that I'm cheating because my husband makes it easy for me. I kind of feel that I've earned the right to do some of the things that I want to. I made sacrifices for my family. If I don't take my turn now, when am I going to get it? (P. Moore)

Even the question of dinner was not an important one for Moore. "If the bed's not made, he doesn't say anything. If the dinner isn't cooked, he doesn't say anything." But in former days, Moore said,

> He liked to eat on time. I figured that's the least I could do, to have his dinner ready. He didn't demand it but he appreciated it. He likes to cook and I hate to cook. He cooks when he has time. He travels a great deal--he's a scientist. (P. Moore)

Moore appeared to be fortunate in her choice of husband. Other women students whose husbands were supportive were Diane Fleury and Lena Milano. Fleury's husband even initiated the idea of the community college: "The children were getting Pell grants and he said, 'Why don't you try for one?'" Milano's husband enjoyed doing the cooking and taking care of the house and also took pleasure in the fact that her activities had a certain notoriety.

Even in the best of circumstances, women have been socialized to believe that taking care of the children and the house are their responsibilities. Fleury put off her own college-going to take care of a grandchild so that her daughter could work. Milano still spent

many hours on the organizing of her household and visits with her children and grandchildren. Moore would not go to school or take any job if it would keep her from being at home to meet her son after school. This situation has been called the "double day" for women, and for those who worked at full-time jobs outside of the house in addition, the "triple day." The costs, as we have seen, are high. But these women as a rule did not examine or think deeply about causes for the conditions which hampered their mobility or limited their choices. Yes, they complained. They were tired, exhausted. They sometimes were "ready to quit." But, except for one, those who were divorced did not wish for a return to the "security" that a husband offered; in fact, more often they said they liked it this way, that life had improved, that new worlds had opened up for them.

Diane Fleury came the closest to thinking seriously about the complexities of women's lives through her studies in women's literature. At least on an intellectual level she began to explore critically the work of women writers and to take note of the male domination of disciplines like philosophy. She was torn, however, between a strong devotion to her husband and the children who were born under such difficult and painful circumstances, and the pull toward fulfillment of her own equally strong intellectual drive. There seems to be every evidence that this member of the "community college elite" (Neumann and Riesman 1980) will go on to further triumphs in her four-year college and will continue in graduate work. The evidence is equally clear in her story, however, that should some

family emergency intervene, she would not nesitate to return to her former position in the household.

Alternatives

For those women whose short-term motive was money, their work-study positions had other benefits. For Zamora and Nash, for example, the warm admiration from their supervisors was a boost to their spirits even though the daily grind of the office or library work added to their store of exhaustion. How much more valuable it might have been to have been paid for their study time in the library, not to have had to snatch those moments to work on the research paper before catching the bus back to home and children (Zamora) or back to the care of two adolescents (another paying job for Nash). The quality of their work and their determination and persistence certainly merited for many of these women a grant or scholarship that would replace the work-study chores, allow for time to study at the college, and perhaps prevent the stretching out of the two-year tenure.

Zamora's greatest need was for child-care, as it was for many community college women students with small children. Yet her community college child-care program was "too expensive" and inadequate for her purposes (two children under three). This problem is an old one in colleges and universities and elsewhere in the United

States and little progress has been made since the defeat of the national day-care proposal of the Nixon era. Though many colleges and universities have established some kind of child-care centers on their campuses, they are inadequate for the demand: long waiting lists, too expensive, limited to certain ages, and limited to certain times of day.

Besides the care of children, the other time-consuming and energy-consuming activity often mentioned by the participants in this study is housework. According to Angela Davis, the "countless chores collectively known as 'housework'--cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, making beds, sweeping, shopping, etc.--apparently consume some three to four thousand hours of the average housewife's year" (Davis 1981). And that is in addition to care of children. Davis goes on to say that the sharing of these chores between men and women (as proposed by Margaret O'Donnell in this study and by numerous enthusiasts in the last two decades) or the "desexualization of domestic labor," would not alter the oppressive nature of the work itself. The solution Davis recommends is a radical transformation of housework. As the care of children can become a true community concern (and institutionalized by widespread child-care centers as in Sweden, France, Italy, and elsewhere), so can housework be transformed by the socializing of housework as a public service with government subsidy, and carried out by teams of workers. "Neither women nor men," Davis says, "should waste precious hours of their lives in work that is neither stimulating, creative, nor productive." Unlikely as

this solution seems in the United States, the actual mechanics of such a process are in place for many organizations, including schools. The significance of Davis's proposal lies in the fact that it is working women--and mostly working-class women--who are most severely penalized by the lack of concern with the questions of child care and house care.

From a feminist point of view, the double or triple day is inequitable, sexist, oppressive. Men may have double days also, may choose to moonlight, may believe they have to moonlight. But this condition is not imposed on them by the simple fact of their sex and the child-bearing function. Divorce--though sometimes welcomed by the women in this study--is never a step up economically for women as it sometimes is for men. Left with care of children, women inevitably find their finances stretched beyond the limit. Hence the return to school and the concomitant jobs for many.

Women are surviving--often with joy--the multiple activities which their competing allegiances necessitate. But there is no question that their schooling suffers. No wonder that women talk in such extended terms: "It will take me ten years"--"it will take my whole life." Rarely do they think in terms of two years, or four years; that is, they think of these boundaries but frequently consider them inappropriate for their own circumstances.

The community college, which is the institution of choice for the largest percentage of returning women, has the opportunity to make

some important changes. The two heaviest competitors for women students' allegiance are children and jobs. Women want, and have been requesting for many years, appropriate child-care facilities in educational institutions and in the work-place. Women would benefit from financial aid that does not require in return many hours of routine, monotonous work which adds to that debilitating total already spent in housework. More flexibility in terms of both scheduling and style for academic work would make women's double and triple days more manageable. Although most colleges have made serious attempts to schedule some classes for the convenience of people who work during the day and some for mothers who must be at home early in the afternoon, many programs in which older women are interested have inflexible hours.

In addition to scheduling, flexibility in ways of attaining the degree or of completing requirements for particular classes would be especially useful to women: for example, "examining out" of particular courses, or providing an experience portfolio. From the stories of the students in this study, such alternative methods of learning, or of accomplishing course objectives, are seldom presented. The availability of supportive, specialized counseling, particularly as implemented by knowledgeable adult peers in women's centers, would provide both information and encouragement.

CHAPTER VII

GENDER, RACE, CLASS, AND AGE

This chapter is concerned with the impact of gender, race, class, and age on the experience of returning women students in community colleges. The fact of being female, of being daughter, wife, or mother, has had particular consequences in the lives of the women in this study. Some of these consequences--economic insecurity and a sense of multiple responsibility--have been explored in chapter 6. More difficulties become apparent when complexities of race, class, and age are added to the mix. Most of the women in the study are aware to some degree of how their educational progress has been affected by one or more of these "differences."

Sexism

Community colleges, though their stated mission proclaims egalitarianism, are unavoidably infected by the same diseases that run through other institutions in our society. In spite of valiant efforts of community college leaders and of individual faculty (see Seidman 1985), there has been little real progress in the reorganization of priorities to match the realities of "new student" characteristics and needs. In her discussion of "Race and Class:

Patriarchal Politics and Women's Experience," Aptheker has pinpointed the problem:

> The dynamic of privilege . . . operates within institutions which are class-conscious, racist, and sexually exclusive--institutions like universities, for example. . . . Our presence [as women] is tolerated rather than celebrated. We have trespassed on an exclusive turf . . . our privilege and status are derived from the men in power. (Aptheker 1982)

Aptheker continues to explore, from "a feminist historical standpoint . . . the sexual division of labor and the subordination of women to men"; she suggests one possible remedy for the pervasiveness of sexism:

> In historical terms [feminism] means to look at ages and movements of great social change in terms of their liberation or repression of women's potential, their import for the advancement of "her" humanity as well as "his." . . . The growth in feminist consciousness compels us to start with women's experience, in all of its class, cultural, and racial diversity, arranging our points of reference from that experience and not from previously designated structures. If this process can be achieved, it will allow for a different kind of philosophical space, for the ordering of women's experience-as-knowledge. (Aptheker 1982)

Women's experience in this study ranges through the earliest awareness of sex, race, and class differences to later consciousness of age as an additional category of difference when women return to college as older students. The nagging suspicion that "girls weren't college material," as Nash described it in her interview, was a part of the background of more than half of the students in this study. The fact of an assumed difference--in aptitude or ability or what they were supposed to do--was a pervasive part of their experience.

> I wanted to take a shop course cause the vocational school was right in the high school. "Sorry, girls can't do that." They just wouldn't let you. My mother wanted to work, but my father

wouldn't let her . . . . I want my daughter's world to be one of freedom, for her to feel free. (K. Bresnahan)

In most of the jobs I never did make coffee. But there were a few instances--small things. Once there was some big shot visiting and he said, get me such-and-such a number. And he rattled it off. And I just stood there and I wanted so much to say, "Did you break your dialing finger?" Or, "I'm sorry about your broken arm, but I'm busy." And I didn't. (A. Gonsalves)

The Spanish teacher had called a couple of us up to her desk and said that there was a job available through co-op--they were in need of somebody who spoke English and rudimentary Spanish, acting as kind of a liaison. She would recommend me.

The head of co-op said, "Well, what experience have you had?" And I said, "None. I've been at home taking care of kids for twenty-seven years." And he said, "Well, you know, you really don't have any experience and, you know, if you had some skills or typing or whatever. Really there isn't very much we can do." I said I loved to help out, I've tutored here at the school in Spanish. He said, "Well, I really don't need Spanish tutors. How about something else?" I said, "Fine. Math? English? Anything."

That was the last I heard of him. [One day] who comes walking along in the hall but Mr. Head of Co-op! "Diane, I'm so glad to see you! I think I have the perfect solution to your problem. The Girls' Club is looking for somebody to teach cooking and sewing to the little girls." I didn't say a word to him. I never went back. But he is instrumental in my deciding to go to a women's college because it would be taken as a given that I was serious and that I had a brain in my head and I wouldn't have to spend endless hours apologizing for the fact that I was a woman, that I was a wife, that I was a mother, and that I hadn't had any experience in the workforce. (D. Fleury)

Mary Beth Nash summed up her pre-college experience succinctly:

Education wasn't important for a woman as long as you could cook and clean and take care of children. I tried that channel of being the perfect model, go through high school, you graduate, you get a job, you get married, you raise a family. (M. B. Nash)

How did women begin to break out of this pattern? As Nash said, there were always "a few oddballs" who did something different. For the rest, it took a different time, a change in the air, the beginning of another "women's movement." Whether or not women were committed to

being a part of an overall "movement," they were no longer willing to spend their later years in the same old way. And for their children they envisioned yet more progress:

> I am aiming high, aiming to be a lawyer. I hope I can go all the way. . . . I hope my kids do the same. I hope my kids strive for the highest, aim for the sky. (E. Zamora)

> I really hope that my son will go to college, even if it's just for a year. I do encourage my daughter to go, at least to learn something that you can do. (R. Stephens)

> Before I get married, there would be a definite understanding that I have my career too. I do not think that as in the past women are solely responsible for the upkeep of the child. My husband would have just as much responsibility as me for bringing up that child. And if I'm working full-time I'm not going to go home and cook, clean, do housework, and all that stuff. (M. O'Donnell)

We begin to hear the refrain of opening possibilities for women's lives, and for the lives of their children. The theme of "something better for my children" has been sung for generations by working-class parents (see Sennett and Cobb 1972). But the promise that the community college holds out for these women is that they may learn and accomplish something they choose to do at any age and whatever their background. Their vision, however, is not totally unclouded. O'Donnell, for example, though she sounds bold and determined, has had enough experience in the hotel and restaurant business internships as part of her community college work to know that change will not come easily:

> As much as there is liberation, it's still a man's world. They've got a long way to go before women will be treated equally in jobs. I like it when somebody opens the car door for me, or when they're polite and courteous. But I don't want to be looked

> at like an empty-headed little fool that's going to run off and have babies after I start to establish a career. I was applying for a promotion and I was asked about that. It's an illegal question, but it was asked more in a personal way--kick-back-the-feet-and-let's-talk type of thing. If we're going to put all this money into training her and she's going to have babies and stay home--it's still looked at like this.
>
> And I know the feeling, working alongside a guy, and I'm working hard, and I know there's a better chance he'll get the promotion--and that's frustrating. And that's why I still feel it's a man's world out there.

Roberta Stephens in New York also had the feeling that it's a man's world, but this translated into what she saw ahead for her son and daughter:

> I hope my son, more so than my daughter, will go to college. A son is always head of the house. My daughter might go to college and never work again in her life, might never take a job. More than likely she will get married, she'll have a husband to help. Girls can make it in the world more so than boys, without education. (R. Stephens)

Seeing her own need for a college education and her struggles to keep going with work and school and family simultaneously, it is puzzling that Stephens did not think of her daughter's future needs differently. Perhaps she wished for her daughter what she herself did not have in the way of a permanent husband. Perhaps she recognized the futility of pushing against the stream and wanted the old dream for her daughter.

In many different ways, the participants in the study expressed their awareness of what it was like to be a woman in their community college programs and what that meant to them:

> [Men and women students] are evenly distributed. At home--in Brooklyn--the majority of students were women. And when I took classes at [the state college] here, you had a class of thirty, about twenty would be female. You don't see that many

women instructors. And that always exasperates me. The sciences, the shop programs--all of them are male. We talked about that in sociology: women now, you know, are breaking the barriers. (A. Williams)

At this point in my life, being a woman feels good because I know that I have rights and that I can speak up for them and I can fight for them. I feel that I can be proud of what I've done. I've come a long way, I've learned a lot. I think a lot of women need to learn that they don't need to have men all the time. You know, there was women's work and men's work. [I'm] telling my boys you'd better do the dishes cause your wife's not going to. I look at women my age that are in their late forties and fifties, and those that haven't really done anything as far as education. They still cater to their husbands. They're the ones who will not speak up. Hard work doesn't scare me and I just do it because it has to be done. I spent most of my life alone, struggling with the kids and doing everything else I had to do. (A. Gonsalves)

But what does it mean to be a woman? Are we letting men define it? Are our mothers defining it for us? I decided a long time ago I am not going to worry about my femininity. I take that as a given. I am female; I am a woman. If I decide to study physics, that's feminine. Because I'm a woman, I'm doing it. I'm female and proud of it. <u>We've got to work a little harder</u>, that's all. (D. Fleury) (Emphasis added--MBS)

Here [at the community college] there is no discrimination at all that I can see. . . . I don't see this campus as being a radical campus. I never hear arguments between males and females about equality. It is a nice atmosphere. . . .

I think I sort of ride the middle line. I work my way in and I work around all this women's lib stuff. I'll do it my own way. I'm not saying that people that are achievers are pushy, but they have to have something about them, there has to be a drive there, there has to be something. If I really decide on what I want, yes, I think I would fight for it. (L. Porter)

There aren't any women faculty--I don't think women have been in drafting long enough to have produced any women teachers. . . . In every class we are getting the best marks, the membership in the honor society is more than half women. (S. Cobb)

About the students in her drafting class, Cobb continued:

About six out of every thirty or forty are women, in every class except for Concrete. . . . The difference in attitudes towards me was more plain in the construction technology department.

> . . . I think I embarrassed the teacher at first and students were downright hostile. To say nothing of my lab partner. The only so-to-speak male chauvinist that I have run into was my partner in that lab. Maybe it was the second lab when he told me that I belonged in a kitchen. He was somewhat older than the general routine of students--he was in his thirties. He wasn't English speaking and he may have come from a culture where indeed it was truly shocking for a woman to be doing what I was doing. Frankly I found it a little bit shocking to be having to lug all this gravel around. (S. Cobb)

Frances Fox's story makes clear how important the influence of money and security is on a consciousness of oppression. The concerns of the women's movement were not her concerns:

> I feel sort of unique. . . . I feel real fortunate in having a certain sense of freedom financially. . . . And I know some returning women who have kids my age who cause them so much grief. I've got a great kid who was willing to really support me in my returning to school. It makes it a lot easier when you have that kind of rah-rah behind you. And I was always the breadwinner. I've always been independent. And I've cultivated that as a lifestyle, probably out of fear that I wasn't good enough or pretty enough to risk counting on a man.
>
> Hey, I know what's going on. It's not going on for me. I know that there are women out there who are not getting paid equally for the same jobs. I don't really feel any prejudice. If anything, everything is a little reversed: "Oh, isn't it wonderful. How great this is that you're returning and you're a woman and you've got a kid." I know a lot of kids who've got kids--they don't get any credit. They're just expected to do it.
>
> I just think it comes back to people as human beings, as individuals. I choose to interact with human beings as human beings, regardless of their sex. (F. Fox)

Sylvia Cobb described an example of mildly sexist instruction which the class modified by "discussion with the teachers":

> They say, "Draw such and such, it's just like the something or other on a carburetor," and the girls are all saying, "Oh my God, what is a carburetor?" We have lots of discussion with the teachers. They have shifted the gear problem (used to be done on a gear box or whatever it is of a car); now it's being given on a bicycle. We persuaded them that there was plenty of machinery that we were familiar with. So now they start to teach us about valves on a pump and they say, "In the back of your washing

> machine is_____." All the girls are sitting there smiling. (S. Cobb)

These excerpts show the emerging consciousness and the ambivalence of women beginning to feel their way as autonomous persons. They are not "feminist." But they are aware of some of the issues and are not aggressively anti-feminist. They are not angry that they "have to work a little harder," in spite of the patent sexism implicit in this comment.

In her photojournalism internship, Kaufman was aware of the way she was set aside as a woman and a "housewife," not to be taken seriously:

> Bob [the photographer] said to me, "Are you really serious about this? Some of the people think that maybe you are just a housewife and have this as an interest, as a hobby." I don't think I ever did think like that. I was not assertive--I felt like, oh, these people are so busy and I don't want to interrupt their work. But a photojournalist is aggressive, not assertive, and they could not understand why I was kind of--I could not be aggressive that way naturally. (S. Kaufman)

And Porter mused also on her unaggressive, noncompetitive stance:

> I'm not a real competitive person. I don't fight other people for my grades. I may fight myself but I don't fight other people. The men always seem to be more competitive in one way or another. In high school it's apparent with football and basketball, and girls are geared more towards track, things like that where you are working against yourself. I think that is one of the reasons why men are basically the achievers. I think that is the way it is right now, you know, but I think it is changing. (L. Porter)

Louise Warner had difficulty being taken seriously as a part-time student at the university to which she applied. She turned to the community college where she saw no such even implied criticism or discrimination. The problem women often find with being competitive

is that an aggressive stance is unacceptable to themselves and to the men they admire and depend on.

The participants in this study spoke freely of what it meant to them to be women in today's society and in their schools. They were aware of blatant sexism, but for most, their consciousness did not go much deeper. Language had not become an issue; only occasionally did a woman revise her use of "girl" for females of any age. None mentioned being interrupted by teachers more than male students, not being called on as often, noticing greater eye-contact with male students, sexist humor in the classroom--actions which have been found to indicate inadvertent sexism on the part of even the most well-meaning faculty in a recent study: "The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women" (Project on the Status and Education of Women 1983). Sexism is so common a part of our surroundings and our inheritance that it passes unnoticed--the fish does not know she is in the water.

Heterosexism

Closely allied to sexism, heterosexism may be defined as a belief that the human sexes have a distinctive heterosexual makeup that determines their respective lives, and that any deviation is marginal or abnormal; therefore the bias of "compulsory heterosexuality" is a generally accepted component of our society. According to Adrienne Rich (1983) it is the compulsory aspect of imposed heterosexuality which creates conditions for power wielded by men over women--which in

turn becomes a model for other forms of illegitimate control.

Through their work in women's centers in the community colleges some of the women in this study were introduced to lesbian women. Their reactions ranged from positive to ambivalent:

> I learned since I've been here about lesbians. . . . I had to make a mental adjustment for working with lesbians in the women's center. This was something I was not exposed to, and you know, they're just like everybody else. . . . Some of the women come in and they say, "I won't come in here if they're in here," and I said, "Well, if you're prejudiced against them you're prejudiced against me--everybody has got something, you know. You could say, I'm not coming in there if there are blacks in there. . . ." So I feel you have to broaden your scope and that's what I'm learning to do. (P. Moore)

> Some women on the staff were really afraid of becoming too closely identified with the women's program, that they would be dyed by the same stick of militants and radicals and lesbians. . . . For myself, I didn't think I had anything to lose--I was obviously heterosexual, I was obviously not a wild liberal. I didn't think anybody could tie me to an identity that was unsavory. . . . A lot of the women on campus were afraid of becoming too closely identified with that--didn't want to be put into a cubby-hole. . . . There was one student--she was a lesbian--she had a lot of knowledge about the women's movement and I helped her become a peer counselor. She knew all the angles for welfare mothers and collected a large group of women around her. (L. Warner)

Marta Melendez Wilson recalled the eye-opening experience of being with a group whom she had always regarded as being not connected with her (the lesbian women in the Health Collective) and beginning to think differently (very much like Paula Moore). She was never an out-and-out feminist, but became gradually more so from her first reaction of not wanting to be part of "that feminist thing" to saying that she "had some feelings. But women had their place--the wife and mother." She didn't want to "go overboard--after all, I am the mother of four

little ones."

Even these women whose interest in and work with women's centers set them a little apart from others who had no such experience were caged by the "tyranny of normalcy" (Snitow 1983, p. 174). Paula Moore, who was black, found it comparatively easy to "make a mental adjustment." She recognized the kinship of tyrannies--"if you're prejudiced against them you're prejudiced against me." Moore did not call herself a feminist but her words show that she found her attention drawn to "systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression" (Hooks 1985).

Racism

Black women in the United States have contended for some time that their experience differs from that of the middle class white American woman who is the predominant figure in the "women's liberation movement." Black women have almost always worked outside of their homes--a double day at least--so the image of the unhappy housewife is not a recognizable one for them. But they are also clear on the issues of sexism: they have borne for generations the burdens of being black and being women in this society in addition to the frequent status of poverty. Hispanic women are part of the newest "minority" in the United States and are feeling the additional separation that another language brings. Four participants in this

study are black and two are Hispanic. All are of working-class origin, but four could now be considered as leading middle-class lives. All but one are divorced and all have children at home.

Being a "minority" was not one of the topics that the participants themselves introduced into the interviews. (One of the participants alerted me to the careless use of the term "minority," preferring to say "persons of color." The term "minority" implies lesser, smaller, of lower status, as in "minor league." Using the term implies a noncaring thoughtlessness about how our language affects others. For this reason I have used quotation marks for "minorities" in this paper.) But in response to the interviewer's interest participants talked of their experiences before and during their community college years which were related to racial or language issues. Black women and Hispanic women were eloquent in their stories of racist behavior on the part of white persons, including faculty, staff, and students in the community college. They were angry; but, as Gonsalves said, "You just learn to live with it." Here are some of the excerpts from the interviews which describe incidents and feelings of black or Hispanic women students in the community college environment:

> There is a lot of things that I would like to change but things I know I can't change. Mostly what I would like to change . . . is a lot of discrimination against everybody. They say, "Why don't you go back to Puerto Rico or why don't you go back to Africa or wherever you belong." I wish I could stop it. People treat us like we don't belong here at all. I wish I could carry a sign that I am an American citizen and don't bother me. (E. Zamora)

> Many people say things or do things really out of ignorance. They aren't even aware that they are being discriminatory. Some of the statements are really offensive, and they will use certain terms. Until somebody points them out. A woman used the word "pickaninny" one day. I thought the two girls who were sitting there were going to kill her. What I've had to learn to do is to tell people. I had to explain to her that that was really a put-down, which she had not known, no one had told her. (A. Gonsalves)

> Black or white [students], they're equal [numbers] here, just about . . . . I haven't seen any black teachers. I don't have any. The majority of the faculty and staff are white. I heard a couple of the students talking about the "rebel teachers." Yesterday we were in the study room in the library. A couple of the black kids were truly upset about this particular teacher. They were saying that they just can't win. It's like they would try to discuss something in class and you're not right regardless of how you go about it. The race situation, it's there. But it's not discussed. It's just like something you put in a closet and let it lie there. It's not out in the open. (A. Williams)

> In the summer when I was working with the Registrar, one of the girls that was in my Spanish class started talking to me in Spanish. This guy from behind the counter says, "When you are in my room we only speak English." I told my adviser and she said, "They have no right to tell you where and when to speak your own language." Another time there were a bunch of us and this colored girl was asking us this word and we were telling her how to say it in Spanish. The lady that worked next to the Registrar's office, she says, "Is there any reason you are speaking Spanish?" And I felt so, ah, out of place. She said that it is rude. I told my adviser again and she said that she was going to bring it up at one of the board meetings. (E. Zamora)

People who are different from the "mainstream" white, and English-speaking students and faculty continue to suffer subtle and not-so-subtle indignities: Marta Melendez Wilson talked about being Mexican, which was "more acceptable than being black" in her area of California. "It was different, but not outcast different. We got a feeling that we had to watch our step. . . . It wasn't cool to be Mexican." Incidents abound in the community college:

> The boy in my math class, I think he just doesn't like the teacher cause he is African. . . . He made a remark to the teacher and the teacher had to call the guard. . . . On the way out he was talking to me and he says, "I don't know what it is with me and this teacher," and I said, "Because you are prejudiced." (R. Stephens)

> I think she [the teacher] has something against minorities. . . . There is a colored girl named Roberta and me. . . . She is real dark and she is always getting us confused. . . . There is no way that we look alike. . . . She gets everybody else's name except Roberta and myself. . . . One time I handed in my assignment . . . and I have not been late yet . . . and she said, "Roberta, you had better start getting your . . . assignments," and I said, "I am Elena." . . . She will say, "Roberta, is this done?" and I will say yeah. I don't even bother anymore. (E. Zamora)

> Somebody goes by and makes a racial remark or something. . . . You're angry! . . . It's like, who the hell are you? But you know, when you spend years doing that . . . sometimes you don't even hear it. . . . You can shut it off. (A. Gonsalves)

The amount of emotional energy and time and sheer grinding away at one's self-esteem that these incidents and attitudes consume must be added to the pressures of the double or the triple day which is a regular part of some of the same women's lives. As Fleury implied (see Profile, chapter 8) about her course in social problems, what was happening in the class itself could well have been an appropriate subject for study. People of different colors and nationalities were sitting in the room in positions far removed from each other. They managed, some of them, to talk about it outside of the class.

In Althea Williams's community college in Virginia, the numbers of black and white students were approximately equal, but there were no black teachers. All the financial aid staff were black, however. There is an inescapable meaning to this assignment of roles which

cannot fail to speak to both black and white students. (An even louder voice spoke to me as I left the parking lot. Two bumper stickers in blaring color gave the message: "If you ain't a rebel you ain't shit.") And how is it possible that in this egalitarian open-door college a faculty member remains whose partiality to the white students comes out loud and clear in the classroom?

As Moore recognized, all exclusion and discrimination inevitably affect all others. "Racism nourishes sexism, causing white women to be indirectly victimized by the special oppression aimed at their sisters of color" (Davis 1981). The rhetoric of the community college is antiracist and antisexist, but the realities are far from the promise. Steps have been taken by some colleges to address the issue directly. Stephens's community college requires everyone to participate in special black celebratory occasions and to write papers about them. The example of the white student who had trouble with the black professor was, Stephens said, the only incident she knew about. Zamora's adviser was indignant and supportive.

The Virginia community college of Althea Williams has the ethos of the area to contend with. But there are some steps which might be taken: one would be to pull the race issue out of "the closet" and make it a part of teaching and learning in the classroom; another, to recognize and support the efforts of students who struggle against racism in their classes and on the campus--as well as in their everyday lives apart from the college.

Classism

The issue of class remains more hidden, more unspoken than those of gender or race. Is it because race and gender are so quickly obvious and inescapable whereas class is more subtle, harder to define? Is it also more repugnant to most of us whose backgrounds are mixed and who don't believe that this kind of stratification really exists anyway? "Americans historically have had as a common belief a distinct distrust of anyone who preached class consciousness" (Cohen 1982, p. 347). In spite of our desire as Americans to be rid of all questions of class, this issue remains a persistent and underlying problem in the structure of educational institutions (see Wagschal 1982). Questions of racial and ethnic representation in lower socioeconomic groups have also made it more difficult to discuss class as a separate issue. Gender too has confounded traditional class assignments. In sociological research the custom of assigning women to the class of husband or father has recently been questioned (Roberts 1981). For the purposes of this paper, class will be understood in terms of the experience of the individual woman. Women have stated in one way or another their sense of themselves as persons of a certain class. Being born "on the wrong side of the tracks" was a common way that participants in this study designated themselves as working class--or at least, of a "lower" status in the eyes of the community. The wife of a mill-worker who was president of his union proudly declared herself a "working-class woman." Women who grew up

in small farm communities and who described their families as poor could also be designated as of working-class or "lower" class origin. One woman whose parents and relatives were farmers but who remembered eating from "beautiful china and silver" and being part of a large and prosperous farming community was here considered middle class. Some of the participants of working-class origins are now leading "middle-class" lives, in the customary understanding of that term. Only one can be labeled upper-class, as defined by such characteristics as distinguished forebears and life-style of family of origin ("The house had twenty-two rooms"); her father was a wealthy businessman and she attended private schools. (See Appendix A and B for Table and Summary of participant characteristics.)

The primary damage from "classism" is similar to that of sexism, but different in that it is not necessarily a permanent condition: the person who suffers from its effects is denied access to resources for one reason--the accident of her birth to a mother and father who are poor or uneducated or who work at menial jobs or any combination of these. The child who grows up under these "handicaps" (in the view of middle or upper-class persons) soon discovers the way in which she is viewed by the world, and learns either to accommodate to the situation or to fight it. Mary Beth Nash, for example, did both in turn:

> I was never encouraged [by my family] . . . . Education wasn't important for a woman as long as you could cook and clean and take care of children. . . . I thought college was out of reach for me. It was something I wished I had done right from high

> school, and I never had the courage, never had the confidence to do. . . . Coming to this college has given me the courage to follow a dream: the dream if you want to work at something you can do it.

Nash spent the first forty-two years of her life close to the same town where she helped her grandfather raise chickens and stopped by every day to see her father in his job as custodian of her elementary school. Later she worked in gas stations and laundromats. From her story it is quite clear that she would never have gone to college if it were not for the community college nearby and the financial aid she received. Her brother had said, "It's about time you did something for yourself."

> I got kinda excited about the idea. . . . When I found the tuition was $317, I said, "That'll be the end of that." But . . . I found out I was eligible for tuition waiver and the Pell grant.

Mary Beth Nash did well in school--"something that I didn't think I ever would do." (Her story is told in her own words in her Profile, chapter 8.) Significant here in this consideration of the effects of class differences is the narrow line between actually going or not going to college and the chasm of resignation that she had almost fallen into. The community college has not, some of its critics claim, really provided a channel for the upward rise of working-class students, and tends instead to sort them <u>after</u> admitting them through its open doors (Clark 1960, 1980; Vaughan 1980). But according to Cohen and Brawer, community colleges "can and do make it easier for people to move between social classes" (1982, p. 356).

Diane Fleury's story, as well as Nash's, confirms this

possibility of movement between classes. At forty-six Fleury made the decision to apply for financial aid and finally go to college. For money and transportation reasons, the community college was the only place she considered. And one more reason:

> The reason I went to the community college was I had every intention of becoming a social worker. My father had quit school at fifteen and my mother came from the wrong side of the tracks. I have always been very sympathetic with those on welfare, and the blacks, the Puerto Ricans--any kind of prejudice or bigotry.

"Money was a problem" for this mother of five, but she was able to get a Pell grant. Later, in describing the changes she feels that college has made in her life, she alluded to the kinds of feelings that a difference in class status sometimes brings forth:

> I don't feel any differently about myself. I think what's different is the way the world views me. . . . And some people are--I have been told--intimidated by me, which I find unusual considering the fact that I always thought I was the least intimidating person in the whole world. I'm not just regular people anymore. My relatives and my friends and my neighbors are mostly women who are non-college educated. And to them, that is rather intimidating. I, too, a couple of years ago, had a friend who was college educated. And sometimes just her vocabulary could be intimidating, like "prime" or "rites of passages" and things she would slip in. Terms that normal people don't use in everyday conversation. I hope I don't do that, cause I didn't want to say, "What does that mean?"

Speaking about her expected transfer to a four-year women's college, Fleury said, about her community college classmates:

> We are all in the same boat. We all commute. We don't have the innies and the outies because everybody is an outie. I imagine that with people living in dorms most of them, I imagine I will have that constant feeling of being an outsider.

And looking back to her origins, she commented on the contradictions that she sees for able persons who are locked into drab

working situations because of a lack of schooling:

> I saw my father's army records, just before he died. His I.Q. was 169. He quit school at fifteen. He was dealing with people in his whole working career, job after job, that obviously weren't one-tenth as bright as he was. And he had to back off because he didn't have the piece of paper. No diploma, no education. Worried about his English and his spelling.

Other women whose parents were clearly working class with no college background have "risen" in the world, due--at least partly--to their persistence in getting an education: Evelyn Greene, whose father was a carpenter, became dissatisfied with her limited nursing education; Antonia Gonsalves used her fourteen years of part-time community college courses to build a foundation for her eventual master's degree. And if Roberta Stephens and Elena Zamora reach their goals of executive secretary and lawyer, respectively, they will (like Greene and Gonsalves) be the first college graduates with middle-class occupations in their families.

The community college may not be able to provide a conduit out of poverty and powerlessness for every working class person, but for some returning women students in this study there is no question that their trip has begun auspiciously. (See Appendix A and B for further information on participant characteristics.)

Ageism

The word ageism, coined by Robert Butler to describe prejudice and discrimination against the elderly (Levin 1980) is an apt term for

making the oppression often felt by older people parallel to that levied against persons of color, non-English-speaking persons, or others who differ in some way from the white, Protestant, heterosexual majority in the United States. Ageism, like racism, sexism, and classism, is widespread and often carried on by its perpetrators in complete innocence and well-meaning good-heartedness. Discrimination against the elderly can deprive older persons of educational opportunities, work, and freedom to live in places of their own choosing. Well-meaning concern for older relatives can lead to the "bookend" phenomenon of Althea Williams, who wants to correct this injustice:

> I'd like to work in a home and hospital for the elderly. . . . They don't get much freedom. . . . They take them and they sit them there--they're little bookends or something.

Direct experience of ageism was rarely mentioned by the participants in the study. The experience of being on the receiving end of racism was frequent for the six women of color in this study who were angry or resigned in turn. Recognizing sexism was more problematic for most, though understanding was sometimes simmering just under the surface. And classism as an issue was recognized but not named. Most of the women were, however, conscious of, and concerned with, the fact of their being older than the "regular" college student. Melendez-Wilson was especially anxious:

> At first I wasn't going to mention my age to anyone. I remember talking to the math instructor after the final. He was impressed with the fact that I did every single problem. He knew of another woman that was doing the same thing [returning to school]

and he said to me, "An older woman like you." I was crushed.

Not exactly an excessively ageist statement--but what if he had said, "A Mexican women like you"? The prompt awareness of difference, the "different" person noticing also that her "difference" was the first thing noticed--presents an aspect of racism, or of ageism.

Generally speaking, however, returning women found no deprecatory ageism in their community college experience. If they had been poor students, no doubt one of the first thoughts might have been, "It's because of age." Perhaps that is one of the unexpressed reasons why most returning women have pushed so hard for success. Lena Milano, at seventy, is unwilling to take a chance on being graded. In addition to the classism which oppresses her psychologically because of her "other side of the tracks" origins, she may be aware of the possibility for ageism as well.

The internalizing of ageism--or ageism turned in upon oneself--can be a potent influence upon the progress of an older student. One theme, for example, appears in several stories: a concern with "pressures," "strains," or "stress" (Lena Milano, Paula Moore, Sherry Kaufman, Roberta Stephens, Louise Warner). This theme appears more often among the older participants. At first glance, it might seem that the fifty-plus woman is feeling physically less able to do full-time work and mentally less capable of sustaining it. There is at least one other interpretation. The older woman has arrived at a time in her life when she sees that the years ahead are limited and the years that have passed were not spent in a way that she chose freely.

Can she make up for some of those losses now? Can she return to the completion of earlier plans, to following "dreams?" Or, if she is becoming gradually aware, like Paula Moore, that she is losing her identity being "involved in everybody else's life," can she now take the time to see what she, herself, is "all about"? This is a venture with unknown outcome. Might she find out that college classes were beyond her, that she was "nothing but old dumb" (see E. Zamora, Profiles, chapter 8)? Or discover that keeping up would involve much effort, "overtaxing the brain," and with consequent "strains" and "pressures" because she was too old, it was too late? Better to stay at home and be "queen of the house" (P. Moore).

Milano prefers to keep her school involvements always at a low level so there will not be too much "stress." She would rather not take tests or be graded. Yet she travels to Boston and Washington for meetings and conferences, gives speeches, is an elected officer of several organizations, does extensive volunteer work, cares for her house, visits with grandchildren. It is not a matter of physical disability or of limited mental capacity. She chooses to do what she knows she can do well. The caution, the hesitancy about stepping out further into the higher education scene, may be a function of the thorough indoctrination received through early schooling, parental and societal influences, and compounded by the influences of sexism, racism, and now ageism. What if my father were right--I am not capable of learning like my brothers (Lena Milano)? What if those

people out there were right--I am black and a woman and I am just not able to do as much--why push too hard and get my family upset too? Besides, what's so good about an overprocessed brain (Paula Moore)? What if I go to the university to graduate school and they make it embarrassing for me with remarks about not being a serious student, or what if I have to do so much work that my family will suffer (Louise Warner)? What if I can't be home to put dinner on the table (Sherry Kaufman)? Questions like these are not openly asked by these women, but are suggested by their stories. The questions are part of the baggage they carry with them that makes the road to schooling unnecessarily rough, and the admonition to "coast slowly" a frequent one. In fact, the contradiction between the university's assumption that the only good student is a full-time student without family responsibilities (Louise Warner) and the community college's admonition to start with one or two courses and expect to take more than two years (Kathleen Bresnahan) has meanings that go beyond a simple elitism or a "cooling-out" (Clark 1960). The student these statements presuppose is more often a woman, a woman past traditional college age, and very often a black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American woman. She is more likely than the four-year college student to be of working class origin, to have close ties to recent immigrant forebears, to be non-Protestant, to be a single mother. The racism, sexism, and ageism that pervade our institutions are a constant undercurrent in the lives of women students returning to play out their "dream" of a college education. The racism that touches every

aspect of their campus and work life, and the classism that somewhat more subtly but just as persistently surrounds them are deterrents to the full practice of the intellectual search that is implicit in these women's words. Differences in culture are constant reminders of a separation from the "mainstream." Problems of money are for most a constant reminder of the precariousness of their search.

As one further illustration, consider Lena Milano in more detail. She was born in Italy. When she came here the family lived "on the other side of the tracks." Her father was a construction worker. Although he later went into business for himself, the awareness of his kind of work and his ethnicity remained for the family and for the children in school. Milano followed a nonacademic "track" in school. Her father tried to get her to leave school at sixteen, and would not attend her graduation. The "boys" he encouraged to continue, and supported them financially. Milano made her own money by working through high school, got herself a scholarship to beauty school, and after six months went into business. Because she was enterprising and determined, her business supported her own family for forty-five years. But the scars of her origins and early life remain. She will not take a test or risk going farther with serious class work. She will do what she enjoys and what will fit into two half-days a week. College was a "dream" for her, but she will not give it a bigger place in her life for fear that "pressures" will make the last part of her life less enjoyable. The implication is that serious and time-

consuming work which will be evaluated by someone other than herself, and in which she may not be successful without using up more of her week, and maybe not even then, promises an uncertain reward with a certainty of sacrifice of precious time and the possibility of conflict with her position as caretaker and volunteer. (The enormous success of the Elderhostel program among older persons may be partly based on the promise of schooling without external accountability [Maklan 1981].)

The problems that community colleges have faced in trying to serve the various constituencies that the open-door policy invites have been chronicled by observers since the first beginnings of broader access in the 1930s (Eells 1931, Clark 1960, Monroe 1972, Cohen 1982, Diener 1986, to name a few). Some of those problems are viewed here from the other side--the side of the served and the observed. As they describe their activities, interactions, and feelings, the latest "new student" group--older women--give a picture of a moderate interest in what is happening to them and to other women, as women. (Their interest and concern for their own lives as individuals is much more intense.) For the most part they "ride the middle line." Little mention is made of concerted efforts in the college to raise consciousness of women's issues, or issues of race and class. (Two notable exceptions have been discussed in chapter 4: the indefatigable work of Marta Melendez Wilson in exposing discriminatory counseling practices in her college, and the advising work of Warner, Moore, and other active Women's Center participants.)

If some are being "cooled-out" they are not aware of it. The stories of Zamora and Stephens indicate that such a subtle process may be taking place; if so, it is being softened with extra doses of loving care, and their ambitions are intact. Clark points out that "any system of higher education that has to reconcile such conflicting values as equity, competence, and individual choice . . . has to effect compromise procedures that allow for some of each" (Clark 1980). Should questions of equity that have been discussed in this chapter be included in "compromise procedures"? The stories of the experience of returning women students which expose continuing sexism, racism, and classism make it clear that such attitudes and practices seriously affect the quality of their educational experience. But it is also clear that real understanding and change will not come about easily. One feminist author suggests that women be encouraged "to develop an understanding of their political reality by repudiating the popular notion that the focus of the feminist movement should be social equality of the sexes." She advocates instead a recognition of "race and class oppression . . . as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism" (Hooks 1984).

CHAPTER VIII

PROFILES OF RETURNING WOMEN STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Introduction

This chapter presents profiles of eight returning women students. Each "profile," as described in chapter 2, is a story told in the words of the participant, constructed and composed by a process of omitting interviewer words as well as other material extraneous to the central focus of the student's work in the community college.

Interview material is presented in the form of profiles in the participants' own words because of the author's conviction that the words of participants in context and without additional interpretation convey most strongly and immediately how each woman sees her own experience. The potential for readers to make connections from their own experience to the experience of the story-tellers is greater than when someone else chooses short excerpts to illustrate the connections she has found.

The profiles have been grouped according to the kind of community college program in which the women were enrolled. The first group includes Diane Fleury from Massachusetts, Leslie Porter from New York, and Marta Melendez Wilson from California, three students who were in

transfer programs; each had taken, at the time of the interviews, concrete steps toward the continuation of her college program toward a B.A. or a B.S. in a four-year college. Although their fields of interest are very different--literature and women's studies, engineering, and midwifery--they have in common a sense of clear commitment to long-term goals.

The second group of profiles includes the stories of four full-time students whose focus at the time of the interviews was on the completion of a two-year vocational program: Sylvia Cobb from New York, in drafting; Althea Williams, from Virginia, in gerontology; Elena Zamora, from Massachusetts, in a legal secretary program; and Mary Beth Nash, from Massachusetts, in accounting. The first two in this group have spoken clearly about their intent to find a job in the field immediately upon the receipt of their A.A. degree. The second two have this intent as well, but are ambivalent about continuing with full-time college work. They may continue toward a B.A. while working at a full-time job as accountant or legal secretary.

The third section consists of one profile of a part-time student who took courses one or two at a time for seven years in her Virginia community college. Sherry Kaufman sampled classes in liberal arts and vocational programs without a specific goal until she found her consuming interest in the field of photography, which then became a vocation for her as well as a step into the world of fine arts. Shortly before her interviews, she had committed herself to completing

the A.A. degree in "Media Production."

Choice of these particular eight women for profiles has been explained in chapter 2. But this does not mean that the total story of each of the others was much less compelling. "Transfer student profiles" could also have been composed for Frances Fox in California and Evelyn Greene in New York. Helen Krug in New York was in a terminal two-year program to prepare her for her chosen vocation. Margaret O'Donnell and Kathleen Bresnahan in Massachusetts, as well as Roberta Stephens in New York, were committed to two-year vocational programs but were considering the possiblity of continuing for a bachelor's degree. Comparable to Sherry Kaufman's part-time connection with the community college were the ventures of four other students: Paula Moore and Louise Warner from California, and Lena Milano and Antonia Gonsalves from Massachusetts.

Choosing to group the students by program is using the institution's divisions to classify students. This imposes an artificial structure on the actual complexities of women's choices in this time in this society. Age, as we have seen, is no more authentic as a sorter or describer. Women are discrete individuals but they are drawn to ways of life that have been handed down, or handed out, to them. The kind of work they want to do and the way that colleges define that work is the basis for only one possible classification.

Each of the students whose profiles are presented below was briefly introduced in chapter 3. Early autobiographical material and the "first steps" toward their community colleges are therefore not

included here. Much important material that has not been discussed in previous chapters appears in the profiles. An occasional paragraph or sentence will have been quoted in the previous text. In either the profile or the excerpts, any language differences between them are due only to omissions or change in sequence, not to a revision of the actual words of the participant.

Transfer Program Student Profiles

Diane Fleury

Diane Fleury, forty-six, was enrolled in a liberal arts transfer program at a Massachusetts community college.

The reason I went to the community college was I had every intention of becoming a social worker. My father had quit school at fifteen and my mother came from the wrong side of the tracks. I have been very sympathetic with those on welfare, and the blacks, the Puerto Ricans--any kind of prejudice and bigotry.

If I really wanted to do something, I was going to need a degree to do it. Money was a problem. My husband said to me, "The kids are getting Pell grants. Why don't you see if you're eligible for financial aid?" We originally thought it was going to mean a loan. It's different, taking out student loans when you're forty-six [from] when you're twenty-two. I probably wouldn't have gone back to school

if it had not been for that Pell grant. I did start out taking five courses that first semester. It's very rare to do at a community college, to do the two years in two years. Because most of them are working or have families or have other responsibilities. They take three or four courses and usually take two and a half or three years, or even longer. My first semester I'd say, "Are you a freshman or a sophomore?" and they'd look at me, because they don't think of it that way. They're--like, I'm the three-year plan, the four-year plan. One of the scholarships that I got [later] they decided to award to somebody who had fulfilled the program as listed in two years. The catalog makes a big point of that, that there is no stigma attached to the fact that you don't fulfill this in two years.

I was perfectly comfortable here. [Being older] is not a problem at the community college, not from anyone I've ever talked to. Some felt that way before they got here, but never after they got here. No stigma that I can see attached whatsoever to being an older student here.

I took Twentieth Century American History because it was focusing on social problems. [My husband] thought that if I was going into social work with the idea of doing good for someone else that I was doomed to be disillusioned. I have met many women at the community college who are there as welfare mothers with small children and--they'd say, "What are you going to do?" And I'd say, "I'd like to be a social worker," and I have been told exactly what they think of

social workers. They're not loved.

We have such a large Puerto Rican community you can really use your Spanish. So I thought, I will take Spanish, remembering how easy I found foreign languages in high school. It's not the same in college. It just moved! That class was supposed to be limited to those with no prior knowledge of Spanish. We had people in there with two and three years of high school Spanish. I bought an extra Spanish book, stuck it in the car, and I don't drive so when I was a passenger I would bore everybody to tears reciting vocabulary words. I had one friend who was in her fifties. We decided that Botany was a lot like a foreign language--it was just sitting down and memorizing. She would make out file cards and use the time standing in line at the checkout counter in the supermarket--it's lost time. Another one made flash cards for Spanish, and she would use the red lights as she commuted to school. When I went to school, my husband dropped me off on his way to work. He would pick me up at 3:30 or he would drive me home on his lunch hour. So I had a lot of extra blocks of time in school which I thought--terrific! I'll get all my homework done. Plenty of activity going on all the time. That's because I got used to doing it at home, the kids watching video games, and I would be studying Spanish vocabulary or something you could do in bits and pieces.

My dear English professor, first semester freshman year, took me aside and said, "I think you should shoot for [the women's college]." And I thought before I get too excited about this I'd better figure out how realistic a goal this is. So I made an appointment to see the

transfer counselor. I had a 4.0 average. So she said yes, it definitely was a possibility. I had planned on going to the university. The transfer counselor told me that the community college would have "Information Night"and the representative from [the women's college] would be there. They were absolutely marvelous! Warm, wonderful people. Immediately from [the women's college] I got packets in the mail and an application.

The message that I've heard so often is that you have one chance in this life. Once you make a mistake, it is with you forever. The community college says to you, if you made a mistake and you didn't take college prep in high school, here's your second chance. The people that go to the community college are survivors. They may drop out, but they're either determined to come back again or they figure it's best at this particular time. You never hear anybody say, "I'm dropping out, I'm never coming back."

I took "Minority Relations" this last semester. The jocks--there were four--sat in the far corner in the room over there. A black woman sat basically alone in the middle of the room. The Puerto Rican young woman sat in the back of the class. The professor really tried to get discussion going. I never got to talk with the Puerto Rican woman till the day before the final. And she has a real beef about the way [with] such a large Hispanic community in this area the subject is ignored in class. The subject that got the most reaction--even the four young sportsmen in the corner couldn't stay out of that

discussion--was homosexuality. They are "agin" it. They were perfectly willing to grant women and all kinds of people rights and privileges, but not homosexuals.

We did a lot of writing in English 101. English for me was very easy. I have to give credit to my high school teachers. I knew what a capital letter was, I knew not to use sentence fragments, I knew how to write a paragraph, a paper. I mean, in a school that has open enrollments you keep telling yourself that grades are partially competition. I really was not confident enough to think, oh, gee, I've really got something. I was very quiet and timid in class.

Botany--I was terrified. The reason I chose Botany and Intro Soc. was that my daughter had taken Botany and had the book and my son had taken that Soc. course and had that book. It saved me the price of two textbooks. I introduced myself [to the Botany teacher]. It was his first experience with having the mother, in class, of a daughter he had had previously. Naturally, I had to get a 4.0 in Botany to hold my head up at home.

The sociology professor, a wonderful professor, talked about things that people don't normally talk about, about the sociology of the community college, and how the president has a big office, and teachers have offices, and students have nothing and students have no rights and students get relegated to the parking lots there up in the boondocks, and they have to walk, whereas teachers get to park out here and the president has "reserved." Never heard a teacher talk about it before.

My lab partner in Botany sat in front of me in History, and he was nineteen years old. Talking about even World War II for him was ancient history. The teacher would be talking about Adolph Hitler marching into Austria in 1938 and I'd poke him and I'd say, "I was alive then," and he'd go, "Omigod."

I loved my philosophy course. One professor had suggested, "Before you leave the school, take a course with Mrs. Burack. She is the most brilliant professor we have in the school. So I took Philosophy. [It] started out as a lecture class. The first day was in a regular classroom. But she took a look around and she said no, this is no way for this class to meet. And she found a little seminar room off the hall somewhere, so we met sitting around the table.

I am famous for my notes. I became practically class note-taker in some classes. What I do is get down almost every word verbatim. They would say, "Why do you do that?" I would say, "Because if I don't, my mind will wander. It forces me to pay attention to every single thing said in class. And I have it to refer to when I go home; I don't have to question, well, was it this, or was it that?" But if they'd never heard of it before or don't know how to spell it, that becomes a slight interference with the note-taking process.

For British Writers, I was taking notes for Nancy behind me because with the stroke and with the hand paralyzed, she could not take notes. She would copy my notes on the copy machine. And then we would arrange study sessions because we had more exams and quizzes in

that class than almost any other. So, she would hear it as well. She's forty-nine.

The Spanish teacher had called a couple of us up to her desk and said that there was a job available through co-op at the Boys' Club--they were in need of somebody who spoke English and rudimentary Spanish. The head of co-op said, "Well, what experience have you had?" And I said, "None. I've been at home taking care of kids for twenty-seven years." And he said, "Well, you know, you really don't have any experience and, you know, if you had some skills or typing or whatever. Really there isn't very much we can do." I said, "I've tutored here at the school in Spanish." He said, "Well, I really don't need Spanish tutors. How about something else?" I said, "Fine. Math? English? Anything." That was the last I heard of him. [One day] who comes walking along in the hall but Mr. Head of Co-op! "Diane, I'm so glad to see you! I think I have the perfect solution to your problem. The Girls' Club is looking for somebody to teach cooking and sewing to the little girls." I didn't say a word to him. I never went back. But he is instrumental in my deciding to go to a women's college because it would be taken as a given that I was serious and that I had a brain in my head and I wouldn't have to spend endless hours apologizing for the fact that I was a woman, that I was a wife, that I was a mother, and that I hadn't had any experience in the workforce. Men and women professors have been very, very helpful. I find the problems are in staff. The co-op! That type of thing.

The only meeting I had with a counselor was the one which was

required when I signed up and one that I requested and made an appointment to see, like the transfer counselor. I went to see her when I was trying to decide how many colleges I should apply to. I was thinking, here again, it costs money. I ended up applying to two. I figured if I did not get into the women's college the state university would accept me.

They are basically laid out for your two years, every course that you have to take. So what I did, after the first semester, was juggle what the community college required for graduation with the transfer compact that the state university would take and fulfill distributive requirements for the women's college.

I do have a 4.0 for two semesters. I basically was in competition with myself. I never failed to lend a book. I had people tell me I am crazy. I have lent notes two days before an exam, figuring I would have the day before to study and hope that they would get them back to me. I have never at that school had anyone disappoint me. I have studied with people, given them ideas, sat down and reworked papers with them.

Right now, I'm basically concerned and wondering, will I measure up? I remember the transfer counselor telling me that you could walk into a class in the women's college and be literally the stupidest one in the class. It's not like the community college with open enrollment. And maybe it's that thing of going from being, you know, the big fish in a little pond to becoming all of a sudden a little

fish.

I think the fact that I went back to school and did well is lovely, but I don't feel any different about myself than I did two years ago. Nobody cared. Those women who are home, taking care of children or working and taking care of children, they deserve a lot of credit. For me, school has been easy. I said that yesterday to my doctor. He said, "You deserve a lot of credit." I said, "Doctor, it was easier than staying home taking care of kids."

The intellectual life really is fun for me. But to grant the fact that you like this, can do this, you need a piece of paper. To say I went to school, now I'm smart. I think what's different is the way the world views me. And some people are--I have been told--intimidated by me which I find unusual considering the fact that I always thought I was the least intimidating person in the whole world. I'm not just regular people anymore. My relatives and my friends and my neighbors are mostly women who are non-college educated. And to them, that is rather intimidating. In the same sense that I, too, a couple of years ago, had a friend who was college educated. And sometimes just her vocabulary could be intimidating, like "prime" or "rites of passages" and things she would slip in. Terms that normal people don't use in everyday conversation. I hope I don't do that, cause I didn't want to say, "What does that mean?"

I had as good a background in chemistry and biology as high schools in 1954 or '55 had to give. But would probably feel uncomfortable in a [science] classroom right now with the advances

that keep happening. Plus my eyes. I have a terrible eye problem. Sometimes I have to get up and leave my seat and walk up and write down whatever is written on the board. I figured science more than anything else I think is visual, especially with the lab part. I guess I've learned to read blurred. And the lab--I'm not very good with my hands. Typing and sewing were my nemesis and I thought, all that cutting up and dissecting! I'm not even a terrific cook.

I almost decided to minor in women's studies. And I thought no, I will do that kind of reading and studying for fun; that's something I like to do. But you really have to study what the men have been saying about us all these years in order to know exactly what you're dealing with, what you have to combat. I wrote a paper--thought it was a wonderful idea--this search, for women, for isolation. Mrs. Dalloway had her little attic room, upstairs. The Awakening--you remember Edna's pigeon house. The Bell Jar, her attempt at suicide. Well, this is the theme of my paper. That these women had to isolate themselves because they felt they could not live up to male-defined definitions of what it means to be a woman. She gave me an A.

I decided a long time ago I am not going to worry about my femininity. I am female; I am a woman. If I decide to study physics, that's feminine. Because I'm a woman, I'm doing it. I'm female and proud of it and--we've got to work a little harder, that's all.

I would really like to get into the academic community, teach on the community college level, and do this kind of stuff that I

absolutely love to do, research and thinking and tearing things apart and putting them back together. Ideas pop into your mind. All of a sudden, something goes click. It's exciting you know. I have notes for all kinds of ideas for articles and books buried in my cellar from years past. I guess probably the world of ideas has grabbed me.

My professor said that there is only so much room at the top, only so much scarce resources to be allocated. One of the things they have done is set up the community college whose function it is to say, we're taking you all with open arms. Here's your chance, all ye tired, ye poor, ye huddled masses, yearning to breathe free. He said that the community college is set up so that you have professors who think they're teaching at Harvard. Professors who believe that you're there to do college work, that's your prime function, and no give-and-take on homework assignments. In the meantime they have to know they're dealing with a very different population who is probably working full-time, have a great many outside responsibilities. So that the counseling should be better, and they should warn you right from the beginning, "Start with three courses, start with four, you're never going to take five and work full time." There is tough, tough college work available at the community college. So what happens is the kid flunks, and he may come back another semester and he flunks again. And what he says to himself is, "There's something wrong with me. Society has given me every chance, second chances." Maybe what is needed is a transitional year. Where the stigmas are removed from the 0-level classes. The community college has been called a high

school with ash trays. I mean, that is the feeling of some of the kids that come there. Because there are regulations about class attendance and all types of high school type things. I certainly wouldn't want to go to college, first or second semester, and be given really high school level work. I want to go to college and do college work.

Recognition means that people are listening to you. I'm sitting here saying I want to be listened to. But most of the past two years, I have spent listening to other people. I'm a great listener. I just know that as long as they're talking and are sure that somebody's listening, they're not seeking isolation. My friend Luiz, he's a Puerto Rican, he's twenty-three years old. He took symbolic logic which he was terrified about doing. I said, Luiz, I'll help you. He had helped me in Spanish. And he's just boggled. "Me, Luiz, I'm doing A work!" He went to the counselor. "You know," he said, "I stayed back twice. I stayed back in second grade and third grade." His counselor checked and found out that in the town he lived in, every single child with a Spanish last name had stayed back in second and third grade. It just embittered him so much that he goofed off through high school. I talked to his professor in logic. I said, "How's Luiz doing?" He said, "He's my best student in that class." We became our own "encourage-each-other" group. Because we met in class a lot and talked an awful lot. Lent books. We became our own rah-rah cheering squad.

The people that I met were mostly women that were in the two-year career program because they're mostly secretarial or computer processing, delighted with the idea of a school where they can get a two-year degree and then go to work. One in particular went through a computer course and has a wonderful job. But she did say to me, "Oh, I wish I could start over again; I'd do what you did." But finances enter, too. She's going through a divorce and she has a little boy to raise. She figured, "I have to get out and earn some money."

I can think of no class I went to that I would sit here and say, wow, that was easy. There was reading, homework, sometimes weekly quizzes, exams every month. I mean, constant. With luck I didn't happen to have anyone sick or any horrendous family emergency. But I have seen women say, look, this happened or that happened, could I have an extension on my paper? They are marvelous about that. Yeah, you can take the exam next week. But as far as what they require, it's very rigorous. Professors will make exceptions and allowances. Some won't. One in particular will not--he is known for that. And counselors usually advise anybody who's "iffy" to not take him because he will not make any allowances. It has nothing to do with difficulty of coursework. It has to do with an unbending, unyielding attitude: "You are allowed four absences this semester. I don't care if your grandmother dies, if your child's in the hospital, more than four absences, don't bother to come back." And the people won't show up for that class the next day. I had one class that started out at thirty-eight people, and by the last day of class there were seven

people left.

I think [about] that wonderful community college where I have so many friends. We are all in the same boat; we all commute. We all come from somewhere else. We don't have the innies and the outies because everybody is an outie. I imagine that with people living in dorms I will have that constant feeling of being an outsider.

My mother is one of those women who believes that a woman's role is in the home, and to back up your man. My mother said to me, "Why on earth do you want to go back to school? You have a husband who's supporting you." Now my mother is my biggest booster. I think [my father] would have been very proud. I think he would have also regretted deeply for himself the fact that there wasn't this kind of opportunity. I saw my father's army records, just before he died. His I.Q. was 169. He quit school at fifteen. He was dealing with people in his whole working career that obviously weren't one-tenth as bright as he was. He didn't have the piece of paper. No diploma, no education. Worried about his English and his spelling. It wouldn't have been enough for his daughter to do it. You can't live through your children's achievements or your father's achievements or your husband's achievements. Only your own achievements.

Leslie Porter

Leslie Porter, twenty-five, was enrolled in her second community college, in a pre-engineering technology program in New York State. The first college was a two-year agricultural technology college where

she became the first "girl mechanic."

I started working at the company six years ago. I was nineteen and I was hired as an apprentice to go through a three-year apprenticeship program. Once you have gone through this apprenticeship they want you to stay there. I knew that I didn't want to stay there for the rest of my life. I looked at options for going to school.

I applied to a bunch of four-year colleges. I talked to a guy at one college and he recommended that I go to this community college. He said that for two years you can go there, it's a lot cheaper. Find out if I was good enough in math and science before I jumped into an engineering program. This guy said, "Well, look, you can go to community college for a couple of years and then know by your grades whether you should pursue this field." Engineering just seemed like my next logical step to go to. I didn't know I had the ability to perform with this math and science business. He said, "Just get some background, see if you like the math and science because that is the core of it all. And if you don't like that then there is no point in going on. Then you might as well stay in the technical field and just go and do something specific instead of trying this broad thing called engineering." I hadn't heard of this community college before that. I mean this guy probably saved me $10,000 you know. I was really considering going to a four-year school.

I try to do as well as I can and you know you can tell when you are slipping behind a little bit. This year things are tougher. Two of my courses I am working for A's and the other two I'm hoping for B's. I started in a course of mechanics. Now the prerequisites for that are engineering science one and two and I didn't take those last year, so I am having a difficult time. The courses that I followed in the sequence, like pre-calculus, Calc I, Calc II, and Calc III, everything follows along.

Next semester I'll probably be taking Engineering Science at a four-year college. I'll cross-register over there. When I started going here my adviser didn't give me a social science. I could have handled another course but they just wanted to see how I would do. So I didn't start the social science until the next semester. Psychology is a very interesting subject, but at this point I don't have the time to put into it so I read the chapters, I sort of cram for the tests. I think I chose psychology because it was easy.

I'm working also. I'm a receptionist at a veterinary hospital. Over the summer, after I completed the physics course, I knew that I wanted to make some money and I got into this. I like the work; it's relaxing. I can leave school and my mind is all worked up about math or physics and then for the next couple of hours I can just deal with people in a place where these pets are like their children, pets that have heart problems and pets that are taking chemotherapy.

I have to put a lot of time into getting good grades and I did

last semester too. That was pointed out to me before I started. They have seen a lot of kids under a lot of pressure and if you can't take it you are going to drop out. Before a test comes up you worry about your grades. The caliber gets harder and harder, your expectations get lower and lower. If I got an 85 on a test last year I was all upset; if I had just worked a little harder I would have had the A. That was the big goal, to get exempt from exams. Chemistry I had an A on every test until the last one, I got an 87, and I couldn't get exempt. Now if I get a B on a test it doesn't upset me like it used to.

With a two-year engineering science degree there is not much you are going to do with it, unless you go on to some type of technical program. I feel that everybody is going to transfer. Because if they were going into a technical program I don't think they would have bothered with all the math and science. Your "cum," it is everything. They really want you to keep your cum up because that is what the colleges look at. They expect people to transfer, so they help you out by bringing representatives from different schools.

Mechanics is very time consuming and there is a test every two weeks. With mechanics I've gone in for extra help because I need it. I look on the schedule, see when the teacher has an office hour, and then I go in and he tries to help me. The same thing with physics, if I have a problem. If I walk by the math room and I see my teacher in there, I may drop in just to say hello depending on whether he looks busy.

If I can pick up the courses that I want to pick up next semester and this summer, I may be able to start at a four-year institution next September. The teachers are very helpful about it, they want to see you do well too. I think they have a very good record and they are always referring to the number of students that have transferred. I think they are very proud of it and if they weren't good, I don't think the four-year colleges would have the transfer agreement that they have with them now. We parallel our courses to theirs for the first two years. If you go through the engineering science program here you are overqualified for a lot of colleges.

The only way that I see other people is in liberal arts classes, in social sciences. Once you get into Calc II that's about the break-off point and then Calc III, you are not going to find any people taking Calc III that aren't in engineering science. I took two semesters of composition, English, so I met a variety of people in there.

I really don't do a lot of socializing on campus. I almost feel I'm wasting my time because I could get a little extra help from my teacher in that time period or try and grab one of my classmates and get a lab done. On a nice day you see a lot of people outdoors playing frisbee, having a good time. Our mechanics teacher told us in the beginning, "You are going to feel like you are missing something when you see kids outside riding around in cars and out playing

football. You are really going to have to put your nose to the books, and it will pay off." We study together in the library. If there is a test coming up people try to work together on a lab. It's always much easier and much faster to work with groups.

The math teacher is easygoing. Nice guy, a funny guy, he tells a lot of jokes. We sit there and take notes and he lectures. People ask questions, everybody is relaxed. People generally don't skip the class, because every day it's important. Mechanics, you have to be prepared when you walk in there. He doesn't have time to fool around so he just starts at one end and goes to the other end. Physics--he writes a lot too. He may go over a lab one day, he may go over homework problems. One day he may lecture the whole class period.

In certain classes people don't ask many questions. They don't want to feel stupid I guess. Some classes I ask a lot of questions, some I don't. I think I am the type of person who prefers to go home and try it myself before I will ask a question though, so I generally keep quiet. If I have something I'll speak up. Psychology is very relaxed. The only teacher that is female is my psychology teacher. She asks a lot of questions and you give her a lot of input, that is what she wants. She discusses a lot. Maybe something about perception or about language or about money. And she makes analogies to other things that apply to the text and it's interesting.

The classes are getting a little smaller after the midterm because people drop. When I took physics we started out with a huge class, a whole lecture hall was filled. By the end of the course we

had maybe twenty people. Physics III, by the time you got there very few people are doing to drop. Because they have gotten there, they might as well continue, they are going for something.

The first day of mechanics, he said, "A lot of people take three years to complete this program, a lot of people take five semesters, it has nothing to do with how smart you are. This program is very rigorous and if you want to maintain that grade-point average, do it the way that you can. You want to get into a good college, a college of your choice."

Sometimes I think, "What if I had the opportunity to go to a four-year college?" But I didn't and I often wonder if maybe I should have, but I don't think I would have known what curriculum I would have wanted to get into. But sometimes I wonder what I would be doing right now if I did go to a four-year school instead of a two-year school.

I look at my being here as an excellent opportunity for me to better myself, to start something new in my life, engineering, and I hope to gain many things by that. I can afford this school, it's perfect for my needs.

I am twenty-five. There are only seven years between me and most of the kids here, and I still see a great difference. I can look at it from a different perspective. I'm not talking about academically--everybody I think is in the same pool academically--but socially I look from a different viewpoint. There is a definite difference in

how you look at school and how you look at your grades, how you look at your life, your future, your past. I have a little bit more to look back on than they do. Four years of work experience as opposed to maybe a kid that has worked a summer. I've been in the forty-hour-a-week grind. It may be different at a four-year school. You get people who are a little older, at least two years older than the younger crowd here.

It seems so far I've always had to work for what I got. It may not go right for a while but eventually everything sort of works its way in. It's like little blocks eventually work their way together. I get mixed up and then I see the light and then I once in a while think, "Is that what I really want?" And then one day it will make sense to me. Like when I chose to go into engineering. Everything at first was, well, I don't know, and you think you can never make up your mind, and then something makes sense to you. You think back. Why didn't I see the light before? But it just takes a while. The year before I came to the community college I wasn't sure what my financial situation would be. I had no idea where I would be. Then all of a sudden engineering seemed to make so much sense to me. One day I said, "Well, of course that's what I want." Then I couldn't decide about the cost of a four-year school. How am I going to afford this? I had help from the guy at the college and then everything seemed to fall into place.

I just had an interview at a four-year engineering school and there are a lot of different types of engineering there,

environmental, materials engineering, things like that. Things like organic chemistry, which is something that I would like to take. I still have to do the same thing with other colleges. At this point I'm sort of in the same well that I was in before. Eventually things will fall into place--and then all of a sudden it will make sense to me. A lot of times you will talk to advisers or professors and they know what is right for the populace, but they may not know what is right for you. Eventually you are going to have to make the decision on your own.

Our psychology teacher was telling us something interesting about courses. She said that if you have any extra time, this college offers credit courses in you name it, cooking, skiing, tennis, music, whatever. She said, "Just take one, you are never going to know if you like something until you try it." If I had never worked on that car when I was sixteen years old, where would I be now? Would I be punching keys on the typewriter somewhere? All of a sudden you find out you really enjoy something and it's another surface to your life.

I don't think I'm into the real engineering yet. This is all really the math and science. I was associated with a lot of engineers at the company. Their work was design work or problem solving and I was always into technical things. Sometimes I don't think math applies to this because it's off in space somewhere but you will hit upon something in physics that is very interesting and you didn't know that before. A very small aspect of light, and all of a sudden

something hits you and it's nothing that you have been exposed to before. I haven't taken any computer science and I'd like to see if I'm adept at it at all. I'm taking a course called Materials--properties and stresses and strains on materials.

Math to me comes a lot easier than physics and mechanics. I did it the right way--I started with the advanced algebra to get myself back in the swing of things. I didn't jump right into Calc I. If you miss a big hunk of it, of course you are going to be behind. I didn't think that I was good in it in high school. After pre-calculus here I knew that it was going to be all right. A lot of people shy away from calculus. They hear the word and it just sounds terrible to them. I knew that I had to go through Calculus IV. It's the first step into a whole different thing. Am I going to be able to handle this? And then you get into it and you realize it's okay. Calc I is the break-off point. People either fail it and just don't go on in math or take it again because they have to. I took it the second semester, I'd say half or three-quarters of the people in there were taking it over again.

I think a lot of courses have that break-off point. I don't think it's an intellectual problem. I think it's more of an interest, or just the fact that you happen to be good at something. I don't happen to be good at writing papers. I'm used to a lot of numbers and I'm just not used to writing long, drawn-out reports. I think with physics the drop-out point probably is Physics I or II because if you don't plan to go on in Calculus you really are not going to go on in

physics too far, since it's calculus based. If you go into nuclear engineering--I was looking at the catalogue and they require an immense amount of mathematics--nuclear has two or three more advanced calculus, just going on and on in math. I don't think I'll go that far. I don't think I have what it takes to be a nuclear engineer.

Nuclear, chemical, they are very competitive programs. I'm not a real competitive person. I don't fight other people for my grades. The men always seem to be more competitive in one way or another. In high school it's apparent with football and basketball, and girls are geared more towards track, things like that where you are working against yourself. I think that is one of the reasons why men are basically the achievers, you know, but I think it is changing.

Women's lib has never bothered me particularly because I was part of the other side, I never felt that I was being cheated. I had all the opportunities of what the women's libber would like to see a girl do, so I could never say that I thought that they were unfair to women. I don't see any inequality myself, but it's there, don't get me wrong, I'm not that blind. I know there are a lot of women who have a good reason to scream but I've always felt that sometimes they are getting a bit too radical, they are taking it a little bit too far. But if they didn't, we wouldn't be where we are today. Here [at the community college] there is no discrimination at all that I can see. I don't see this campus as being a radical campus. I never hear arguments between males and females about equality. I don't think I

have been in a women's lib discussion for a long time. I think it has gone down a little bit as an issue. In these programs, engineering science, nobody has ever said anything about women, like "You can't handle this program," or "What are you doing here?"

I think I sort of ride the middle line. I work my way in and I work around all this women's lib stuff. I'll do it my own way. If I really decide on what I want, yes, I think I would fight for it. But I've got such a long way to go as far as deciding on chemical engineering.

There are some programs where you can combine your Master's of Engineering and your M.B.A. You can go into a professional program for a fifth year. Getting out in that one extra year with a master's really looks good. I imagine in the next year I'll see how the job market is, what is happening to these engineers with these masters'.

I like dealing with people. Just like I couldn't be stuck behind a desk as a secretary, I don't think I could be stuck in a room just designing something. I picture some engineers very isolated, wanting just to get into their own little world. Do I really think I would be good at just strict designing where you would sit down with your ideas, put them down on paper? Not really relating to people, just working with your thoughts? How can I combine the two? A valuable degree to have would be an engineering degree with an M.B.A. There they have an engineer who knows his stuff, can deal with people, knows the business world a little bit.

I think the doctorates are mainly for the engineers in the

chemical, or possibly nuclear fields. In business there really is no need to go on any further than an M.B.A. My father has his doctorate in microbiology and I think of a doctorate as a scientist. I don't see myself going after that, but you never know. Right now the master's is a question mark.

I think what I was trying to get at before was one, myself academically, what the school did for me; and the other, what it did for my mind. It is pushing me on to a four-year school, teaching me things about myself and my education I never knew before. Because I am older I think that's another aspect of it. You have to separate things academically and socially, and whether you want to admit it or not, you are not just there for the academics. In that respect this college has meant a lot to me. I've met people that I will never forget here. One kid I know made me smile whenever I saw him; he is gone now and he is in veterinary school. The kind of kid who would come in in a jean jacket and very long hair, bandana, you know, always bucking the system. Yet he wants to go on to college for the next nine years and he knows that he is going to.

I talk to people that I can tell are bright, but maybe they don't do well because they haven't studied. And you really want to shake them and just say, "Look, you did this well and didn't study. Imagine if you study a couple of hours." I don't try to sound like a mother. Kids that are eighteen today were born in about 1963. That to me seems unreal, I mean they were one year old when the Beatles came out or the President was shot. These kids don't even know the basics of

life.

I wish I had more of a musical background. I could use a couple of more writing courses. Once I get through the engineering, maybe I'll take some courses at night, take some music courses or some English.

I see my mother going back to school. She's taking a theology course right now at the university; so I can see myself doing that. I think she's enjoying it immensely and she's grown because of it. I really haven't had a lot of these liberal arts. I need a lot of rounding out. I have a lot of rough edges.

I definitely look forward to having children some day. I also look forward to having a time in my life when I'll have a career once they get older. I don't plan to stop. There is no reason why you can't go on after you have had children. I don't think I would want to leave my children at home right after they were born. I would like to stay with them for a while. But I don't see that in the next couple of years, I am too caught up in school right now. I want a degree. I want something I feel is marketable. I can't just have children now. I have to make some money, you know. You want to feel that you're worth something.

Marta Melendez Wilson

Marta Melendez Wilson, thirty-eight, was enrolled in the nursing department of a California community college.

I was twenty-one when I got married. I was working as a stenographer and I met my husband. [He was working for the same company.] He was a college graduate and he had a good job and I told him that someday I was going to school. We also wanted a family so I said, "I'll go to school, and my mother can take care of the kids."

I just wasn't that confident about how I would do in the classroom. I was afraid of coming out looking dumb. I was afraid of not making it, because college was a real mystery at the time.

During Christmas vacation the kids were born, close to two months early. This was a complete surprise. The doctor just said very calmly, "It looks like twins." So they were born that night and school started the week after and I went back to school. I think I missed one day.

And that's when I decided I don't want my mother to take care of my babies, I want to take care of my own babies. Once we finished our family I would go to school when they started school. I really enjoyed staying home those years except for the last couple of years with my youngest. I was anxious to do something else by then. I had done all of this stuff, and now I wanted to do something for myself.

I was always planning to go to the community college. My ex-husband is a graduate of the university. And I wanted no part of it. I was afraid of it. I already had that one semester right after I was married. I thought, they'll give me a background, and it doesn't cost

any money and the university was huge and I was really afraid of going there. I was afraid of going to the community college also, but there was snobbishness connected with going to the university. I was thirty-four when I started so it was like fifteen years. The plan was always there but what to study was not always there. I changed from social work to being a teacher and then finally, nine years ago, we have a really good woman pediatrician, and I remember thinking one day after taking the kids for an exam, "If I had it to do over, I would become a pediatrician." And that started me thinking in the medical field. Midwives were beginning to get into the news. I thought, "It's medicine and it's working with people." I felt really good when I finally decided on that. I had to become a nurse first and then go on to the training, and the community college did have a nursing program.

After waiting all these years I was really afraid even to get down there to register. Kept putting it off and finally it was late August when I went there and started the process. The whole process was really threatening. Even though I had had a good experience that one semester, everything came back, the fear and apprehension. And then my age--I was so much older this time, and I had a whole bunch of kids. And do women my age really go back to school? There were some people that were past high school age but I just remember feeling that I was the oldest. I thought I could go straight into an algebra class. I went to the class, they gave us a pretest--fifteen questions--I couldn't remember anything. I felt so terrible, so

deflated. So I registered for beginning math, the whole time feeling that everyone knows I'm dumb and stupid. I had math and Spanish and I took a speedreading class. I thought, well, I'm going to take it easy. I didn't even know what the prerequisites were for the nursing.

I was just really afraid of overdoing it. The math class that I had, the instructor was terrific. I mean, he was just so sensitive to me and how I was feeling. He could teach anyone math. I wasn't having trouble at all but I could see him with other people, how patient he was, and how many different ways he would explain the concepts and theories. We began a friendship talking not only about math but everything else. I would see him through the years, we've always talked.

At first I wasn't going to mention my age to anyone. I remember talking to the math instructor after the final. He knew that I had a family and he was impressed with the fact that in that book I did every single problem. I was determined to know that stuff. He knew of another woman that was doing the same thing and he said to me, "An older woman like you." I was crushed. But he didn't mean it as a put-down at all. He was just impressed that we were that intent on doing well. He asked me if I would tutor but I didn't. I had scary feelings about doing that.

The next semester, I got into classes with other women who were also going to be nurses. In talking to other people, the advice that we were getting, it was not consistent. There was only one nursing

counselor and something was not right. I could tell from talking to a whole lot of other people. I took a class that really wasn't necessary. There was an English 21A and B. 1A and B are transferable to a four-year college and he recommended that I take 21A, knowing that I was going into the nursing field, but never even suggested to me that I might try going on to a four-year college. He didn't tell me what my options were. I was going right ahead to the community college two-year nursing program which would only give me a license and no degree. I really started to feel angry that this was going on. We were being given information that was causing us to take extra classes that we really didn't need.

They gave me a good English teacher and he was really encouraging. The first day he wanted to see where we were so he had us write. I was always afraid of writing, feeling really inadequate. When I got the paper back I felt great because he had really nice things to say. It just kept me going. I remember my husband picking me up that day. I remember running to the car, showing him how good, how proud I felt with this paper. I remember the final paper was the big paper for the final exam. I wrote about myself, why I feel equal to men. It was about me and my family. It was just so neat to get that paper back because he said, "This is the best paper I've read in a long time."

The third semester I did start talking with the other people and I did look into a four-year college. I heard more and more talk about how the requirements were going to change. I knew that in the State

of New York by 1985 all nurses are going to be required to have a Bachelor of Science degree. What I was hearing, you might as well go get that Bachelor of Science in nursing because sooner or later things are going to change. I met a couple of women who were already R.N.'s who were coming back to get their additional education for their degree and it was taking them a long time doing it that way. Hearing these things, I started to feel like I wanted to do something about what was going on with the counselors. Another woman was really upset with the information she had gotten. We said, "We can't just let this happen." We were also in a sociology class together and our sociology teacher was a really strong feminist woman. That was the third semester and I hadn't had a woman before that. I was talking to one woman who also had four kids and she had also come back because she was going to be a journalist. I remember students coming into the classroom asking for people to get involved in student government. They always had positions open for student senators so I went in and applied. There was an opening and I got the position. I wrote something up and presented to the senate what was going on with the counselors and everyone agreed, "Yeah, we've heard of problems like that." So I got three good people that were interested in working on that committee and I mean we were persistent, and I wrote things up. We went through channels and it didn't take us long.

The counselors have a regular meeting. Our first step was to get into that meeting and present our problem. We wrote up this letter

and it was really kind of strong. The counselors were all defensive: Well, who is doing this? What do you mean? We said to them, "We have specific instances, and we'll talk to the head of the counseling department." There were four of us women, a woman I had met in my pre-nursing classes who was twenty-seven and had a child; another single parent who was about the same age; and another woman in her twenties. First we got a letter back from counselors saying, "You're all wrong." It was a long, long letter, putting us down. We didn't let that stop us. We just went ahead with our plan without getting emotionally involved and it worked. Most of the incidents were to do with science classes and nursing. But we said, "It's not just that department. There are problems in the advice students are getting that are going on to four-year colleges and we want something done about it." We really got to know the people in administration. We had it written up in the school paper. I got to know the president, the dean of students, the assistant dean, all the counselors. We were not seen as radicals or anything. I mean they worked with us because they saw that we were going to be persistent. They assigned more people to work on this articulation to four-year colleges. So we did get results and it didn't take too long, maybe three months. After that I couldn't spend any more time on it because I needed to get a job.

One of the women that I met in student government said to me, "There's an opening coming up in the Women's Center." I thought, I don't want to be a part of that feminist thing. Because I would feel

sometimes like an oddball in talking to other women because I'm staying home with my children. I could drop my son off at school and pick him up on my way home from class so that I didn't get any kind of child care. I never really did that with the three older children either. I just didn't like the idea, them so young, of being under someone else's supervision. I remember going to the Women's Center when I first got there, and it was kind of political, turning a lot of people off. I hadn't met the director, but when I went to her I said, "I have two things to talk to you about. The first thing is I know you're familiar with what we've been trying to do and I really want to know what you think about it. The second thing is that you have an opening in the Women's Center and I'm looking for a job."

It was a fantastic experience. The things that they were doing and the things that I was allowed to do, use my ideas and go ahead on them. They were going to invite speakers from different nontraditional careers and let women see what was open to them. And not knowing what I was getting into, not knowing if I could do it but feeling I've got to prove myself; I started to take that on. I also thought we should have a representative from the faculty in that field so that we could get not only what's going on in the field but what do we have to do to get into that field. It was a good series. We had a woman mechanic who was a graduate and one who was working for the city. Another one was working in the research department at an oil company.

It was really a hard semester for me. That semester I also dropped a class. I really felt bad because that microbiology class was one of the prerequisites for the state college. With the degree you can always work in a hospital, it gives you a lot more mobility. If you have that Bachelor of Science degree you can be a supervisor, you can work in a clinic. A license, R.N. license, is what you get at the community college.

One thing that we did for women was we offered help on the registration days at the Women's Center. We'll help you fill out your schedules, we'll go over to the registrar's office with you. We had about ten women come. They were so thankful. We took them on a tour of the school, showed them where their classrooms were. I remember one woman that I was helping--she kept squinting and I was telling her how to fill the form out. I said, "Would you like me to fill it out?" And I found out that it was true: she didn't know how to read. So I signed her up for the remedial reading class, a special Title III program. This woman had decided to come back to school and so she registered that day. I remember seeing her a couple times after that, getting A's in everything. And she was fifty-six years old.

I had to take two chemistry classes: one for the community college and the other I needed to get into the state college. I kept putting them off. Finally the fourth semester I signed up for a chemistry class and it was awful. I'm in a physics class right now. Oh, I'm going to need help on this. It's chemistry and things like that I just really am afraid of. That's a whole lot of the problem, I

have such a fear. I got through the chemistry class somehow. I got an A--he counted a lot towards the lab work. But then I had to take organic chemistry and that was a mystery to me. So much memorizing to do. I got a C in the class but that was my first C. It didn't devastate me. I was afraid it would. Now I was in the prenursing classes so there were more women closer to my age and we were all going through a lot of the same things. I remember that instructor being impressed with the number of women with families coming back. He said, "I don't know how you all do it." I had to go back and do the micro. I got a C, but I saved that till the last semester I was there. I went to one of the information meetings at the state college and they'll tell you everything. The woman there said, "If you have trouble with a certain kind of a class, just save it till the end because we're not going to count that last semester into your GPA. I got into the program. And let me tell you--I guess I want to brag a little bit--but when I graduated I got four scholarships. Every one that I applied to I got.

I think my experience at the college is not quite the same as most people. I did get involved and ended up working at the Women's Center and I was able to do so many things, setting up programs and running programs, being a counselor to other women. No one said, "You're not experienced enough." Everyone said, "Do what you can and we'll help you do it." There were so many teachers that were encouraging right at the beginning. One teacher happened to be black.

Most of them were white. The Spanish teacher was Puerto Rican. No one said, "What are you doing here? You're a little old, aren't you?" When I first came, I thought that I would do the nurses' training and that would be it. It was within the next couple of years that I decided to go on. And why not, I kept saying to myself. At first the idea--oh, no., that's too much for me. Just the extra requirements to the state college really kind of frightened me. There were periods--can I ever do it? What have you gotten yourself into? Can you really do this? But never strong enough to stop me.

I want to do something meaningful with my life. I see too many people unhappy in what they are doing. I don't want to attach my life to another person. I am separated now. I do look forward to another relationship, but it's not going to be my whole life. I'm going to have a career and I intend to work the rest of my life. When I chose this career there were so many things that were so good about it. First of all, just being a nurse meant I can work anywhere in the world. I will be needed, there will always be a need for nurses. I don't have to retire at a certain age, because I don't plan to. I can be an administrator, with a degree, in hospitals or in clinics. I want to be in a position to make decisions. Most people in power in any kind of field are white and I really want to make a difference with that too. There were never any real role models for me. I mean I want to be a role model and that's why I've always kept my maiden name. My maiden name was Melendez--Marta Melendez Wilson--and that is very important, and my children carry that name too. They use

Melendez Wilson. It's not hyphenated. With any kind of forms they put Melendez and it's important to them. I have always tried to give my children a feeling of who they were and they're not white; I mean, they are but they're also very much Mexican and they feel it. They've got a good strong feeling about that and they have a real strong identity with my family.

I heard about the Women's Health Collective just last September and it just sounded too wonderful to be true. They would give you this training and you give them back, after you were trained, volunteer work. I came home thinking I can't do it--school and working at the Women's Center and the Collective. I went ahead but there were problems. I would get dinner on the table and wouldn't really get a chance to eat. Pretty soon every Monday and Wednesday there was an argument before I left. But I was determined to do it, it was too important.

It was all very eye opening to me. Just so many women that held so many strong feelings, and I had a lot of these feelings too but they weren't really clear I guess, so all of this training coming from women I just really needed. I was also getting different things from people around me. I mean women had their place, the wife and the mother. It was 1964 when I got married and I think that was about the beginning of the feminist movement. But I stayed away from it mainly because I wanted to be home. Maybe I wasn't getting the whole picture but I knew what I wanted to do and I didn't want to be a part of that--although I had feelings. I remember purposely not reading any

of the feminist books. I didn't want to be a wild-eyed feminist.

I plan to work at a county hospital that serves mainly nonwhite people. Someone asked me, "How do you know that you're going to do that? And how do you know that there will be a position there?" I said, "There will be by the time I get done." When the time comes I will have what I want. I mean, that's how my job at the Women's Center worked out. That's how it's going to work out for me to get into the midwifery program. Once I get my license I will have to go and apply to the medical school--they have the midwifery training. All I actually need is an R.N. and I'm going to get everything before I apply there. I did talk to a midwife that was one of our speakers at the Women's Center. She said, "It's difficult to get in but if you're a minority you're going to have an easier time of it because they don't have many women coming into the training program that are minorities."

So everything is going to work out for me. Yeah, it really is. I've been planning it and it's going to work out.

Career Program Student Profiles

Sylvia Cobb

Sylvia Cobb, forty-eight, was enrolled in a two-year drafting program in a New York State community college. Her B.A. in sociology was completed twenty-seven years ago. She was interviewed the year

following her divorce.

I had been taking art courses at the university for my own pleasure. The crisis time was when I was discovering that I wasn't going to have mothering and housewifing as a life-long career. I realized that I was going to have to go to work. I wasn't competent to live on my own. I discovered that it was just a real practical problem and not some inherent character flaw.

I like visual things and I draw, and my first requirement was that [the work] was something that would be harmless to my drawing. I didn't want to go into commercial art where I would be compromising my drawing and my art skills all the time. Drafting had all the advantages of keeping up the hand and eye coordination and the visualization skills without having an emotional content at all, so that it doesn't interfere or spoil anything else you might want to do. I like making marks on paper. I like seeing made real what's in my head and I like logic and systems. Technology has been always easy and pleasant for me. My children were drafting in school and I had been enormously jealous. I hadn't realized that it was open to me.

I set about investigating the field. I went and talked to the state employment office, and I found some people in industry and talked to them. "Is drafting a good field and will I be able to make a living?" I was assured that it was a fine skill to have and I could always find a job.

[Drafting] is a sort of prefabricated program. You can't take odds or ends of courses or come in at the middle of the year. I didn't have any choices [of schools]. At least I believed that I didn't. The only other thing that I found out about was in a town which is too far away. The first day--it wasn't shocking or uncomfortable. I was certainly aware of the fact that I was older than everybody--no one is forty-eight except me. I think I was in a somewhat favored position as an older student because you stand out so people know who you are.

The administrative ambiance here is the best of any school I've ever seen. I can remember once at the university sitting on the back staircase crying because I couldn't get my schedule straightened out and couldn't find people to sign course cards. Here it works very smoothly, partly because there aren't a lot of options and electives. Registration process is easy. The campus is small so there is no problem finding your way around. Before I decided to come here I had had a long telephone conversation with the department chairman. He was very reassuring. There wasn't a lot of advice that he could give me because the program is the program, I did or I didn't join it.

I wasn't taking the same math course as everybody else. This was one of the few pieces of advice I had. I said that I was worried about math--it had been thirty years. The department chairman said, "Oh, well, then you want to take the advanced course," and I said, "What? I've forgotten everything." And he said, "Never mind what you've forgotten, what you remember is more than three people who have

recently been given math have ever been offered. The math courses were better thirty years ago."

The [math] teacher first semester was a very enlightening experience to me because when she came into class and did problems on the board she made mistakes. It cured me of math anxieties. She'd make a mistake and she would say, "Hey, that answer doesn't look right." And then she'd calmly go back and investigate her work. The second semester was a man, an engineer, retired from the army or the navy. He had a certain lecture that he gave every day and I think he disliked it when somebody interrupted him and said, "Can you explain?" And he'd say, "Just do it the way I told you."

I took this course called "Construction Materials." It turned out to be a course in concrete. Concrete--there is absolutely nothing more boring on the face of the earth. I was the only woman who ever had or perhaps ever will take that course. There was a lab, which largely involved filling garbage cans full of gravel and weighing them and then mixing up this concrete. And the only so-to-speak male chauvinist that I have run into was my partner in that lab. He told me that I belonged in a kitchen. He was somewhat older than the general routine of students--he was in his thirties. He wasn't English-speaking and he may have come from a culture where indeed it was truly shocking for a woman to be doing what I was doing.

That teacher was a scholar and a gentleman. He may be the most well-spoken, well-dressed, and cordial person on campus. Steel is his

love and every once in a while he would talk to us about steel and he would discuss the power and the might and the precision and the beauty of high steel. So I don't think he likes concrete very well either. More than half of the class time was spent on concrete and the rest was divided among all the other construction materials, steel, wood, everything else. We put some time into asphalt. You get covered with tar and grease. My lab partner and I finally by the end of the semester found somehow a line of intersection and we wound up the star team. He was a hereditary concrete worker I think and he must have been raised on concrete. Although the technology was new to him he knew it as an art and a skill. And I went whirling through the formulas and the technology like an ace, and we finally developed a mutual respect. We wound up the pair of us getting A's.

The next semester I had two electrical courses: electrical theory and electrical drawing, and a mechanical drawing course. And again math. Last fall I had a materials course which was terribly difficult--understanding the structure of steel itself. I mean molecularly and being able to distinguish the differences between one kind of steel and another. Or one kind of plastic and another. Given a lot of physics and chemistry it would have been easier. I had never had any chemistry.

I had tool design which I just loved. That's designing holding devices and fixtures for machining things. It's more creative. It was really a question of being given a problem and working on it in class and the teacher would walk around and you'd stop him as he

passed by and ask questions if you needed help or you'd go up and ask him. If six people asked him the same question he'd interrupt the class and say, "Here's the way you go about it."

I knew that I was going to get into technology, but I didn't know how much I was going to enjoy it. I'm now impatient with things that are simply drawing. The other course I had last semester was dimensional metrology. This is mechanical and not artistic drawing. If you want to draw it so that someone else can make one, you've got to measure it. You measure with vernier calipers and micrometers and a lot of fancy sophisticated equipment.

I have a course in industrial design which is piping and steel and stuff like that. I've got a course in air and fluid which is really hydraulic design, cylinders and valves, which I have trouble understanding. And I have a course in time and motion study which all seems terribly obvious to me. I'm taking an art course as an elective--getting my money's worth out of the community college.

Everybody warned me that second and third semester is the most difficult because of the materials course. Last year was the middle of the crisis, the leaving year. I was going to a marriage counselor and it's a very grueling thing to do, laying my soul bare and endless crises at home. I'd get home maybe around four. I've had to do studying on weekends all along. There has been a lot of work to all of it, rigorous or not. They want you to practice finding something in catalogues so you have three sheets of stuff to look up in

catalogues. My concrete course had some things that were sort of like papers. We had to write an imaginary proposal letter. We would suggest concrete of such-and-such a mix and we had to make up what company we were and what company they were. I can remember having a high old time with it. I named myself the Sorrowful Pit Gravel and Grit Company and everyone else was very sober and serious.

The students are a various lot. Of the people that I spend the most time with there are two girls, one of them in her thirties and the other is twenty, and the three of us are together a lot of the time. A man in industrial technology has become a friend because there aren't too many of us who are older around here. He's about thirty-nine. There is a boy who is very artistic and he and I hit it off, he is maybe twenty-five or something. Somehow just being one or two years older distinguishes some of these kids from the entering class that just graduated from high school. There are a couple of boys who are very very cordial and warm to me and who will if I'm sitting alone in the lunchroom come and sit down next to me. I'm not exactly sure what the relationship is. It may be a question of finding an older person who is not a parent who's cordial and easy to get along with. I wouldn't burden them with any of my personal problems and I find myself very easy about being burdened with theirs. It's kind of an auntie kind of thing.

The honor society--it's a national honor society for engineering technology; "technology" really is a way of saying it's an associate's degree, for a two-year college. It's sort of a junior

version modeled after the engineering society. There is a chapter here and I belong to it. I've got a 3.9 out of 4 point average and this letter from the president of the college congratulating me on my grade point average. The last line said that my academic performance "indicated maturity," which made my children just roll on the floor, they thought that was the funniest thing they had ever heard. Well, if you haven't gotten maturity now, Mom, you better give up.

Women are new in drafting. About six out of every thirty or forty are women, in every class except for concrete. Now we are having to say that it just is something that girls are good at, it's picky, it's fussy, and so forth. They had had girls in the drafting department at the community college three or four years when I got here. There aren't any women faculty--I don't think women have been in drafting long enough to have produced any women teachers. In every class we are getting the best marks, the membership in the honor society is more than half women.

This is vocational training after all and the obvious meaning is that it will help me get a job. I'm in the middle of job hunting now and times are tough and I don't know whether I'm going to find one or not. So I may in fact be competent but to no purpose. It's been a good chance to test myself. You do wonder whether you will do well returning as an adult, whether you're as mentally limber as you were when you were younger. My grades now are far better than they were when I was an undergraduate many years ago. I think I get a certain

amount of academic respect from other students, you know, who come to me for help. I don't think that has anything to do with my age. I do think that I am competent and I'm in the field and doing well. I guess I am coming to the conclusion in my own life that practical matters are for work and ideas of the head for play, and that's the way I'd like it to be.

I had never really confronted the question of what do I want to put my whole life into. I think I just kept putting one foot ahead of the other and didn't think, didn't really examine it. Now the practical world is a limited success, it has a roof on it. I find more control over this kind of thing in my own life than I do with any other. When my marriage was breaking up I was drowning in a sea of words just whirling around, half of which probably didn't mean anything. We were all deceiving ourselves. I have no cause to rebel against the world that I can put my hands on. Maybe I've just kind of withdrawn into a cave of the material world that I can handle and see and understand.

All of us in drafting have pretty good feelings about the whole thing. I don't think any of us feel that we are being put down. About my B.A., I've questioned whether I would want to make practical use of it any longer but certainly it's been enriching, I don't question that. The students who are friends of mine I think kind of consider it part and parcel of me being older. It doesn't change my qualifications in this program at all, so it's a curiosity, nothing more. Well, I write well, yeah. For instance, when we had to do

written things I had a good time with them while everybody else sweated and shook.

I wrote in my diary that the chief griefs in my life are not the things that they were supposed to be. [Leaving] the art program at the university was one that left awful scars. It was almost a year before I could drive past [that] campus without turning my head away. I didn't fight. I thought I saw what had to be done and did it. I kept telling myself, look, I was doing this for recreational purposes anyhow. Looking back on it I think I should have fought. My family say now they didn't know how badly I wanted to go. I think I realize now that there is nobody as well equipped as I am to know what it is that I want and to make the decision about whether or not I should fight for it. I don't know what the nonfighting comes from. I'm sure that part of it is the feeling that I don't have the right to. That other people's needs are more important than mine. I think part of it is: I wouldn't succeed anyway, or I'd be sorry later.

This vocational training for the most part doesn't hang a carrot in front of your nose the way the liberal arts things do. I seldom finish a course and determine to spend my vacation finding out more about it. Even in the course work all of us in the program are I think aware that the work that we do, the projects that we do, are teaching us more than a lecture or the textbook or anything else. It's really kind of a hands-on thing. I'd like to know more about analytical aspects of the system. For example, the world is getting

into kinds of things which have not been drawn before, things for instance which are microscopic and there are some issues about how should they be drawn. These are questions of communications and art and system, they are the formal questions of the subject, I'd like to know more about those things.

I have, I think, conquered how to be a student. I've learned to learn. Within a week or so of a class beginning I've figured out what the teacher's methods are, his style, his approach, and I figure out how to play his game. I did very poorly on the first test I ever took at the community college and it was my daughter who sat me down and told me instructions on test strategies I had forgotten. You know, do the easy things first, don't lose your cool so that you make the best of your time.

I think I affected all of our lives, because I will get a far better job than I would have if I hadn't had any training. My children are not that young, they like the idea of my being in school. My son works at McDonalds as well as going to school and I feel that he shouldn't have any household responsibilities. This way we have each got two jobs. I have the house and the school and he's got McDonalds and school. Somebody said to me, "You'll be one of those families with their picture in the newspaper: "Mother Graduates with Son."

Althea Williams

Althea Williams, forty-two, was enrolled in the gerontology

program of a Virginia community college. She had been divorced for two years.

It was kind of hard coming back to school, after twenty-something years. I was nervous. I was leery about asking people for help. It takes some adjusting. At first I was self-conscious about going to school with children the same age as my children. I didn't know how I was going to be accepted as an older person. But after I had gotten here, I think the majority of the student body is older people. In my psych class I had a seventy-five-year-old man. And quite a few people in their sixties and seventies are going to school on this senior citizen thing.

I'm enjoying it so far. I'm learning at a faster pace than I would prefer, because it's just things being constantly drilled into you. When I finish here I'll go to the other community college campus because that's where my major is offered. All of the community college campuses are interacting. This is my home campus, but I can go to [the other two campuses] and take classes if they're not offered here. Only the basics are offered on [this] campus. My sociology and psychology and math and history and English--all those things, I can get here. My CPR I can take here. Everything that's related to gerontology is at the [other] campus.

The counselor said [history] is required. "You don't see it now, but you'll need it." I say I don't think so. What will be beneficial

to me? Learn History of Western Civilization to work with the elderly? My history instructor--he's a lecturer, period. From the time we go in, he never takes a breath. He talks and talks, until it's time for us to come out. And you take notes, because about fifty percent of his tests are from his notes.

My English teacher--he has patience with me. He takes time; he tries to help me out. I don't like to write--I like to read. We have basics--you know, your verbs, nouns, and pronouns, and the rest of the time it's writing. You write about your job, what you want, what you hope for--everyday things. He marks them and we correct them. he rechecks them.

My economics class--my teacher, he's good. He's a former banker. He breaks it down to layman terms, where we can understand it. The majority of us aren't going to be bankers or accountants. And my psych teacher does the same thing: he only gives us the basic fundamentals, more or less. He said, now if we were psych majors, that would be different. He'll say, "What's the meaning of psychology?" Maybe one student would say, Well, I think thus and so. And there's talk about that. And then [he'll] ask for another opinion. We put it all together and come up with the best solution. I like that kind of teaching--an exchange. I feel you can learn more like that.

In the placement tests I placed above average in history and reading. But just average in math. Math is still hard for me, it's a

mystery. The written word--I can understand that. But I had a good math teacher, she was patient, would break it down for you. But that first day--I didn't know nine time nine. I said, "I don't know the times table." She said, "You're just nervous, that's all." My mind just went blank, wouldn't think at all.

A lot of things in my curriculum aren't gerontology. I don't see where they're necessary. I don't see the need of them. Psych or sociology, I can see it might be beneficial. But economics? And oral communications, American government, all these things? Give me things dealing with the elderly. But like my counselor says, "It's a required class." They can't tell me why, but I wonder why.

We have three sociology classes I have to take. I enjoy my instructor, but when I first started with her I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." She gave me a study guide, she explained it to me. This was something new for me. I could memorize it and write it down. I said, "I don't want to do that, I want to know what it's all about." To memorize and still don't understand anything--that's not any good. We have a book now--Southern Living. One was Street Level Bureaucracy. I said, "These little books, good grief, I don't see any sense in them. Supposing I don't do it." She says, "Then you'll get an F." "Well, I guess I'll have to do it, if you put it that way." We studied southern living in Virginia--the elite, and their old. But that's a different elderly; these are millionnaires. You can't lump six elderly people with all the money in the state of Virginia with the rest of the elderly people. No sense in that. This

wasn't the norm. But she's a good teacher. We talk so much in sociology. Because everyone has different ideas. We were talking about the people that run things, and trying to figure out how we solved problems. You have to get to the higher powers through the lower powers, like the gatekeepers. If you can't get past the receptionist to get to the governor, you're not accomplishing anything.

It's only two chapters that deal with the elderly, in sociology. In psych, only one chapter. I want to know the problems of the elderly. In order to write a text that would be beneficial you would have to study different [elderly people] over a period of time. We'd have to compare what's going on in India and all of those places. There are no elderly in these studies. They push youth on you, they show you the teenagers and the babies. If you're going to teach me all of this--poverty, slums, ghettoes, urban renewal--then put what I'm interested in in there, how it affects them, and why.

When I first get up in the morning, I get a cup of coffee, wash up, and I get dressed while my youngest daughter--she's seventeen--is getting dressed and eating breakfast. I warm up the car and then I take her to catch her bus, I come back. I get my baby up about 7:30, and feed him, and I take him on to school. I take the time from when I drop him off at school to come to the library to study. All of my classes are ten o'clock, so I study from nine until my ten o'clock class. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, I have a break in between

classes and I come back to the library and I study again. Then I go back to class. But Tuesdays and Thursdays, whenever the teacher lets us out I go home. And I go to sleep. Then I get up about one-thirty and I pick my baby up, and I'll put out what I want for dinner, and my oldest daughter, she will finish for me. She works part-time. She dropped out of school to help me. I don't have to worry about a baby-sitter. I change clothes and go to work.

Scrub nurse--fancy name for the maid. I clean up after every time someone has a baby. Sometimes we'll be in the delivery room with all four of the delivery rooms full--everybody helps out. I like it, but it's messy. If you have a weak stomach it's not for you. When I saw my first C-section the charge nurse told me if I felt like fainting to roll over in a corner cause nobody would have time for me.

[I got the hospital job] by accident. A girl friend of mine was applying. She tells me, "Here, fill out an application." And I got the job! I'm just lucky. At the time, I was doing hair and I was thinking about going to school. And I said, I can go to school now. Because when you do hair, that's all day and sometimes at night too.

I get home maybe about twelve-thirty and I study some. And it's about two o'clock when I go to bed. My daughter gets up at five-thirty; she'll come in and tap me and wake me up.

When I started school, the hospital took me off the day shift and gave me permanent evenings, so this way I could go to school in the day and come to work at night. I average about four hours of sleep a night. But hopefully when I finish school I'll be able to work in

gerontology like I want to. But I've thought sometimes about quitting. You know, I get tired. I say, it's not worth it, and I say, yes it is. I've come this far, only another year to go--I can make it.

The majority of the students [at this community college] I guess they're here to learn, but a lot of students are just here. They're not very attentive in class and they're out in the halls sitting on the benches, drinking coffee, eating candy. But most of my classes about thirty percent are my age or older. They're serious, they're dedicated. It's no messing around at all. They are here for one reason and this is to do. The younger people in the class, I get along with them, now that I'm accustomed to being around them. We do our homework together, we take notes together, we come to the library and we study. A lot of times they talk to me like one of their peers, and then they'll catch themselves. About their boyfriends and going out, and clothes.

A lot of people come here that wouldn't be able to go to the university. They're taking high school courses to pass to go on to college. The average university doesn't do that--you're supposed to have high school when you get there. Like a fellow here, he's on his second quarter of Basic. He's flunking those. They're Basic English, Basic Math.

Black or white, they're equal here, just about. It's a mixture. It's not like the university--it's predominantly white. The state

college is predominantly black. I grew up around Italians and Jews. My high school picture, I guess you would say out of 900 there were about 200 of us. Here, there are a lot of black people. I went to school in New York--there were more white people. My kids would point to the school pictures. "Look, momma, there's only three of you all here." Only three black people. At the time, I didn't pay it any attention. This is the way I grew up--people were people--we were in and out of each other's houses. But I knew, when I would leave home for the summer, and when I changed the train in Cincinnati and got on the other one--I knew what was what, because it was a segregated train. I didn't like it. Don't put me back there! When my uncle put me on the bus in Birmingham, I would sit right behind the bus driver. Once some white ladies were up there [near the front]. Then this white sailor got on and he went all the way in the back and sat down. They looked at him and they looked at me, and I guess they said, "Something wrong with those two." The summer that Emmett Till got killed in Mississippi--I think he died at nine o'clock that morning and at twelve I was on the way home. My mother had sent for me. I was in Alabama. I didn't even know what all the to-do was about.

My history teacher, he has two die-hard [students], really rebels. He says he has to be so particular about what he says, like teaching the Civil War. Because they'll disrupt the class. He had to take them in his office and talk to them. As far as they're concerned, the war isn't over. It takes a lot of adjusting to live in the South. They have different ways. Where I live now [it] is

completely black. [The next town] is completely white.

You can tell if a person doesn't like you. They look at you funny. I think a lot of them are still adjusting to integration. There are so many private schools out here--they don't want their kids mixed. I have been called a "nigger" since I've been here. Oh, the South! You're set to hear a rebel yell anytime, especially in the summertime with the car windows down.

[At the community college] I haven't seen any black teachers. I don't have any. Three of the counselors are black. In Financial Aid, most of those are black. The cashiers are white. The majority of the faculty and staff are white. I heard a couple of students talking about the "rebel teachers." Yesterday we were in the study room in the library. A couple of the black kids were truly upset about this particular teacher. They were saying they just can't win. It's like they would try to discuss something [in class] and you're not right regardless of how you go about it. A girl was showing me her grades. She says none of them gets over C, regardless of how hard they try. I told her to report it. This particular English instructor that they talk about, I wouldn't have any classes with him. The race situation, it's there. But it's not discussed. It's just like something you put in the closet and let it lie there. It's not out in the open.

[Men and women students] are evenly distributed. At home--in Brooklyn--the majority of students were women. And when I took

classes at [the state college] here, you had a class of thirty, about twenty would be female. You don't see that many women instructors. And that always exasperates me. The sciences, the shop programs--all of them are male. We talked about that in sociology: women now, you know, are breaking the barriers.

I came for one thing--I already knew what I wanted to do. I've spoken to younger students--they're undecided, as far as a career. I knew what I wanted. This sixty-five-year-old man, he wanted to go to school. So now he's finished: the grandfather and two of his grandchildren graduated together. And my mother's going to school, taking refresher courses to keep up with what's going on in nursing. She's going on sixty-seven. I'm doing it to achieve something I want--my reasons are different. Most of the elderly people, when they come back, this is what it is--fulfillment. To complete something that they started years ago. Regardless of whether they'll ever use the diploma or not. It's there. So you're competent. That's what it is.

I always wanted to go to school. I've taken classes on and off all the time anyway. I'm trying to get a degree, and maybe later on I'll go back to school and get another degree. I think as far as I would go if I continue--get a master's. I wouldn't try to get a doctorate. I don't know. I've thought about it. In the paper week before last was this lady, seventy-one--didn't start school until she was forty-six. She was getting her doctorate this month.

[The job] I am doing now I'll continue to do until after I get

out of school. Then after I graduate, I'm going to try to find something in the field. Administration, with the elderly. Trying to find things for them to do, to make them more comfortable. I'd like to work in a home and hospital for the elderly--a place that's a combination of the two. Freedom--they don't get much freedom. They take them and they sit them there, they're little bookends or something. It's just like you're placed there--you've used up your usefulness. They like freedom--fresh air, conversation, dancing, the same things they did when they were young. I would ask them. They should be allowed to have pets--dog, cat, bird, fish, whatever. And that's what I hope to do. To be a Director I'd have to have two or more years. I could be an assistant; I could make these suggestions. This book I'm reading now, The Convent by James Michener--if you hurt yourself and were part of a tribe, they left you. They gave you a bone with a piece of meat on it, some water, and you stayed there and died. We haven't advanced much. We put 'em in a building and just sit 'em there.

My children are encouraging me, they're behind me. My youngest daughter tells me she wants A's--"Don't bring me B's. I want A's." And my oldest daughter tells me, "Go to your room and study. Girl, did you hear what I said?" And my baby, he tells me, "We go to school, don't we, Ma?" With my husband, he had this thing that women are supposed to stay home and that's it. Since we're not together there's no problem.

Definitely I wouldn't be going into [this work] for the money. It's just something I like to do. Right now, I have no interest whatsoever in getting a husband. I'm content where I am. And I'm comfortable being in the house alone. I didn't see my husband that much anyway, cause he was a truck driver, he was on the road.

I would prefer that my children wait till they're much older to get married. To live, see the world, do what you want to do. Before you settle down. That would be the only thing I would change in my life.

Elena Zamora

Elena Zamora, twenty-nine, was enrolled in the Legal Secretary program in a Massachusetts community college. This was her second time in the community college. The first time she left because she was pregnant with her fourth child. She was divorced when this child was born.

I felt awful that I had quit. The year after that is when I came back, but this time I decided to try to be easy on myself, so I went to the Bridge Program cause I had been out of high school for a while. I remember I used to be very smart. I had biology and the first test I had a 95 and I was so proud of myself. I showed everybody my A. I think the Bridge Program is great--it opens up your mind. Everybody is there to help you.

I scored high on my English course. Mrs. Grant used to look at me and say, "People that need to be here are not. People that have English as a second language are doing very well and people that know the language are not. One day I was really sick. I went in and she was saying, "People that are dying are here!"

Usually I do [my work] in the lab after I get out of work. I go an hour every day and do my typing. If I have cases in Business Law I usually do them over the weekend and for the English it is usually reading, and I do that when I get home. I am taking typing, Business Law, and English 101, and I am doing well in all of them.

I usually get up at 6:00 in the morning. I wake my sons up, the two oldest, so they can get set for school. My [oldest] son goes in at 8:00; usually he will take his own breakfast or he will tell me that he will eat at school and he leaves. He is nine. The other one catches the bus at 8:30 and he usually goes with me to take the baby over to my sister's. I get my daughter's clothes and I dress her in bed cause she won't get up. This is the three-year-old. Then I get the baby dressed and then they start fighting, those two. So I get things ready for my sister's. I start getting myself ready about 7:30, which I never finish cause there is something that comes up. I take a shower and I dress and I have to fight to get my son's coat on. I put my daughter's coat on. Usually when she has everything on she wants to go the the bathroom and that puts me back. I have to leave the house a little before 8:00 and I never do. I have to try to get my daughter in school by 8:15, so I can walk up the hill and catch the

bus--but I never do. I am always missing my bus. So after I get my son ready I take him out and I have to walk three blocks, and my sister lives on the fifth floor, so I go up the stairs and people everyday look at me like, oh, you poor thing, why are you doing this to yourself? I figure at the end it will pay off. I take my son upstairs--my daughter waits for me--and I puff all the way upstairs and I puff all the way down, and then I start walking her to school. She is in day care about three blocks away. She never wants to walk, so I sometimes carry her. I took her to class. I took her things off. It was twenty after and my bus goes by at City Hall at 8:30. That is about ten blocks away. I run up the hill and a bus goes by, and I was lucky and I caught it. So I go into class.

Then I hurry up and grab something real fast to eat and I come and I start working. Usually I take ten minutes to eat. Then I work usually until 3:00. I process books, you know, stamp, and I will shelve. Next week we have two days off and the library is going to be open. They asked me if I wanted to work and I said, "Yes, of course." I didn't really want to but I should because of the Christmas holidays. I am going to need the money. Yesterday I worked from 12:00 to 3:00. I did technical processing. I do the stamping and the labels and jackets. Then I looked up some stuff for my research paper. I remember that it was 3:10 and my bus goes by at 3:15, so I start getting ready. I run down the stairs and I miss it by about three feet.

I get food stamps the thirteenth of the month and I usually go to the grocery store that weekend. This month I don't know what happened, I didn't receive any food stamps. In the summer I was working thirty hours a week so they raised my rent. If you try to climb the stairs they will hit you and there is no way to get up. They will find some way to get you down. I have to go to the Welfare Office every six months. Usually I work it in after I get out of Tuesday class. I go take the bus real quick and I go down there and wait for hours. I hate welfare. I hate going in there. Sometimes I feel like quitting school and getting a job at a shop.

The lawyer from Legal Services called me about a month ago and she said, "Are you still looking for a job?" I said, "I am in school." She said, "Yes, I know you are, are you interested in a job? I would like for you to be my secretary cause we need a bilingual." I said, "I would love to but I just started taking typing this semester." And she said, "Will you promise me to keep me in mind if you ever need a job?" She said if I want to join Co-op just give her a call and she will work it out so I can work--and get credit for it. So after my first year I will go talk to her.

I am going part time so I am only taking three classes. I am not full, not part time, in between more or less, three-quarters. I have nine credits instead of twelve. The first semester I was here they gave me an adviser and I was afraid to talk to him. He would look at me so weird. I told him I want to take the accounting over. And he said, "You are passing so you must be doing something right." It was

like he was forcing me into something that I didn't want to do. I was afraid to tell him anything else. This adviser that I have now, she is great. She is like a friend. I can talk better to her than to my mother. She is always there and she listens. I am taking Word Processing I next semester, and Typing II and Advanced Support Services. That is where you learn how to plan your boss's calendar and you learn how to file. [My adviser] gives me good teachers.

A lot of times I am so tired. The day I got so upset I went to the nurse and they told me to talk to this counselor. I just wanted to go home. I was sick of getting up early and I was sick of this and that. I used to fall asleep on top of my books. But this time I was determined. Before I came back I decided that I was going to finish and that I was going to be somebody. I wanted to get my diploma so I can get a job.

This summer I was working a half a day here [in the library] and a half a day there, in the Registrar's office. They both wanted me. I was told by the head librarian, "I have been getting a lot of good reports about you. Everybody that wants a job done, they want you to do it." For a minute I thought she was going to tell me something's wrong.

I feel that I have changed a lot. I have learned and I have experienced a lot. I am kind of aiming high, aiming to be a lawyer. I am taking it easy--all secretarial--and then if I don't succeed, at least I will have something to fall back on. I want just better

things for my kids. I don't want them to be going through what I have been through. I don't want them to suffer. I hope I can go all the way. I don't know, it is hard. I want to go all the way to be a lawyer. I am going to try. The way I have it figured, when my son [the baby] is five and he is kindergarten, I would like to start going to a four-year college, part time, and start taking classes, slowly, and hopefully work as a secretary on the side. I guess it will take me my whole life. All the way is getting that law degree, that would be all the way for me. I hope my kids do the same. I hope my kids strive for the highest, aim for the sky.

I got a feeling that if I do become a lawyer I am probably going to work with the poor, the ones that can't deal with things. Probably work for Legal Services. I probably won't make money out of it. I will just help who needs the help. One time I went to court and there was this guy--he didn't speak English at all--and the judge would say something and the interpreter would interpret something else to the person. When the guy came out I said, "If you want to win this case you had better get yourself another interpreter." I told the guy in Spanish, "The best thing you can do is get your own interpreter. The court interpreter is going to sink you."

Ever since I was in high school I wanted to be a lawyer. But to me that was something I would never achieve. In that semester when I had so many troubles, I gave up, I completely gave up, and I said I will never be anything but old dumb. Then one time something came over me and I said, now wait a minute, I can't believe all these

lawyers out there are geniuses. If they can do it, I can probably do it. You are going to go back to school and you are going to try. I figured out that I would try legal secretary, that is the closest thing to law. Maybe after that when my kids are all in school and I don't have that much trouble I can probably go and take paralegal studies and be a lawyer's apprentice.

You know I used to be smart. Just that my brain took a vacation, a real long one, and it is taking some time to get it to come back. The first time, oh, things would come and go out and they would not stay. Then when I went into the Bridge Program I felt so good. When I had a course in basic math it was like taking me back, all the way back to two and two is four. It is like taking you back in time when you were in grammar school and bringing you back up to the high school level, and you learn to keep things in your head. It was like I was given another chance. I was put back in my senior year in hihg school and starting over. It is a good feeling. I just hope I can keep it. Before that, I would say, "Oh, my God, what did he say?" But now I can, how you say, retain, retain.

Somebody is smart to me if they get good grades or things are easy to them. I have to study, study, study, and it is hard a lot of times. It is hard, my kids fighting and arguing all the time. And they go to sleep, my oldest like around 9:00, and the little girl is up until I go to sleep; my son also, he does not go to sleep at all. If I want to really study I have to wait until one o'clock in the

morning and by that time I am pooped. I try to study in the library, or if I have a free period I study. During the weekends I do my assignments for the week. I try to keep up.

In Biology, that was my first A since high school. I felt so proud, and the teacher gave me a star, and it was like, oh my goodness! Then my second test I got another A and it built me right up. Then we had to do an oral report and I got another A and we had to do some disease charts and I got an A. We grew some bacteria and I got an A. And I mean it was like A's were hitting me all over. In English I was doing well. I was getting A and B on my papers. I guess the classes were simple. They were just building you up. They teach you how to study, how to take notes, and how to do outlines and things that I did not know how to do.

In Business Law I have to brief cases. The cases are in the book and all I have to do is put the plaintiff and the citation and the defendant and the facts of the case, and what is the issue, and then what is the position of the lower court. You have to tell the cases to the class the way that you have written them, not from the book. At first I was scared but since my first ordeal I have learned to speak out. Before, I was afraid to even ask for tutors. Now I have taught myself you have to ask for tutors if you want to pass. You just go into the Learning Assistance Center and say, "I need a tutor for such and such a class." The tutors are students that are smart and are doing well in a particular course. They get paid and you do not pay for the tutor. In the basic math that I took for the

Bridge Program, it started you down at the bottom and took you all the way up to algebra. Before, when I took the algebra, I didn't know what the parentheses were for. Then when I took the basic math I said, so that is how you do it.

I didn't have a tutor for Business Law. I have been doing okay in that. I could do better. I am taking Legal Secretarial and I have to take Government. Legal secretary, that will be my first step toward law school. And if I am working for a lawyer, that lawyer can probably help me. I told that to my adviser and to no one else--I feel that they would probably laugh. My adviser said, "Good for you." She told me that I would make it cause I know how to study.

I would like to have everybody to be treated the same. A lot of times you walk in a place and they look at you like you are worthless. I would like to be able to walk into a place and be welcome. I am embarrassed that I am on welfare now. It is degrading. I want to get a job and get my first paycheck and go and rub it on their chest. If you go to the drugstore they say, "Where is your Medicaid card?" They look at you and if you are Spanish you are on welfare. Another time this lady starts arguing with me. She tells me, "We pay for your education and you are always in the way." She said it out loud. I guess she figured that I didn't know English. At the welfare office they always have an English lady at the front desk and she says, "Is there anybody that speaks English here?" and I always get up and help them. They should have Spanish workers. It is just--I don't know,

life is unfair.

In the summer when I was working with the Registrar, one of the girls that was in my Spanish class started talking to me in Spanish. This guy from behind the counter says, "When you are in my room we only speak English." I told my adviser, and she said, "They have no right to tell you where and when to speak your own language." Another time there were a bunch of us and we were talking, and this colored girl was asking us this word and we were telling her how to say it in Spanish. The lady that worked next to the Registrar's Office--I guess she is a secretary or something--she says, "Is there any reason you are speaking Spanish?" And I felt so, ah, out of place. She said that it is rude. We were not talking about anybody, we were just translating some words. I told my adviser again and she said that she was going to bring it up at one of the board meetings cause they have no right to be telling us things like that. She told me, "Don't ever be afraid to speak your own language. Just tell them it is none of their business." I said, "I don't want to be rude, cause I was taught respect your elders, no matter what they do."

I have a woman teacher for typing and two men for English and Business. The typing teacher, I think she has something against minorities. There is a colored girl named Minerva, she is real dark, and me. [The teacher] is always getting us confused. Minerva says, "There is no way that we look alike, and there is no way that she can get us mixed up." She gets everybody else's name except Minerva and myself. One time I handed in my assignment and she said, "Well, you

had better start working and catch up for this week's assignments." I have not been late yet, so I don't know if she is giving me credit or what. She said, "Minerva, you had better start getting your [work done]. I said, "I am Elena." She will say, "Minerva, is this done?" I will say, "Yeah." I don't even bother anymore. She always gets everybody else's name, and she never gets mine or hers.

There is a lot of things that I would like to change but things I know I can't change. Mostly what I would like to change--and I know I won't--is a lot of discrimination against everybody. They say, "Why don't you go back to Puerto Rico or why don't you go back to Africa or wherever you belong." People treat us like we don't belong here at all. I wish I could carry a sign that I am an American citizen and don't bother me.

Every time I have a chance I try to tell people about the school and I tell them that they have a nice Bridge Program and you can go in and they will help you out. And they say, "How am I going to pay for the courses?" And I say, "You just fill out the financial aid." A lot of people take advantage of the aid, and when they get the reimbursements they leave, and I don't think that is fair. That would be one of the things that I would change. You would have to finish the semester before you would get the reimbursement. That would be the best way to keep a lot of people in school.

I would like for my kids to go to college. My oldest likes to study and he is always interested in science, and I am trying to keep

him interested. I tell him that they have some new books in the library, a book of dinosaurs, and he says, "Oh yes, bring it for me." I want to keep my sons so interested in school that they will want to come to college. Now I am back in college, but I wish I had gone to college when I had graduated. It would have been much easier for me. Every chance I get I bring them into school so they can see the school and me and my teachers. My biology teacher last semester showed them the lab and she says, "See, your mother is back in school and you should be proud of her." My daughter, I would like for her to go to college. I think she is going to be probably a teacher. She is smart and I would like her to go all the way also.

Mary Beth Nash

Mary Beth Nash, forty-three, was enrolled in the business department (Accounting) of a Massachusetts community college.

Right off they talked about the placement tests. Well, you mention the word "test" and off I go--anxiety plus. It had been almost twenty-five years that I had been out of high school, and you start talking about tests it makes it seem awfully real. Can I really do this? English and Math are required courses. And you cannot enroll in a class--there are no exceptions--without taking the placement tests. It was a very anxious time, but it was very exciting to me to think that I'm finally doing something that I didn't think I

ever would do.

There were other older people, which made me feel better--I'm not the only one. I felt like I was going to be the grandmother in all the classes. But I was just amazed that it was so friendly, and the young people would talk to old people. In Oral Communication this past semester, there was another woman that was fifty-three and there was one fellow that was 35 and another around 30. All the others were right out of high school and they were mostly all boys.

I was in computer information systems for my first two semesters. And this last semester was my third. And midway I decided to change my course of direction because I don't want to be a programmer. I've always been interested in how things work and knowing that computers are a coming thing, I wanted to know more about it. But programming [is] not a direction I want to go in. I changed my program to accounting.

I will probably take another two years now after doing a year and a half. But I figured, well, if I waited twenty-five years to get to it, what's one more year? Might as well do it right. The advisor I had said, "After all, isn't that part of education, being able to make a decision, and being able to change it?" And I thought, gee, it really is! It was real hard to get used to--the idea that you can do your own choosing. It's so different from high school.

In the classroom I sit in the front row, right in the middle, right in front of wherever the instructor is. I don't want to be distracted by the ones that don't care, and I don't want to miss

anything. The instructors don't forget you--they're constantly looking at you.

This past semester I took Accounting I. The instructor is a C.P.A., and we sat at long tables--I've never been in a classroom like that. On the last [test] I was the only one in the class that got 100. I know I understand it. [In one class] part of the grade was on attendance. I was there every day, but he only figured 85 on attendance. It brought my grade to 89. But he said it wasn't important. He yelled at me right in front of the whole office, that he was not about to discuss it any further. I went to the dean of academic affairs. The dean heard my story and he said, "What do you want me to do? I would never tell an instructor to change a grade, but I could ask him to review it. And to think over the matter." I got a call from the professor, and he said that he'd been thinking about my grade and would like to reconsider. He was willing to change it. It was a good feeling. I took four courses and with a B changed to an A, that gave me all A's.

The summer was wild. I worked full time at the college on work study, as close to forty hours as I could get, I worked weekends at a gas station, I was taking a summer course. When classes rolled around, I wasn't ready to start school again. And I couldn't afford to live at home--my car is getting old and feeble. The director of counseling said it would be more practical if you didn't have the household expenses. She said, "I know a family that has two teenagers

and they would love to have somebody with them. You'd be ideal."

I took Intermediate Algebra last summer. I passed it but I didn't feel I had a good working knowledge of it. The summer is tough, it moves so quickly. [For the work study] I answer the phone, I cover during lunch time, if there's a stencil to type, I type that. I enjoy the atmosphere of the campus--getting to the point where I don't ever want to leave it.

First semester I took Critical Reading, Basic Algebra, Introduction to Computer Based Systems, and English Comp. I was very active with the re-entry group--largely women. The attendance daytime is approximately 2,000, and 478 are re-entry age. That came as a surprise to me. We could discuss the problems we were having, like test-taking or adjusting to coming back to school. We found we were basically having the same kind of problem: if you have a fmaily, at first they tend to support you real well and then they kinda get jealous of the time you're putting into school work. Your lifestyle changes, you know. Everyone was feeling like, did I make the right decision? Everyone is saying, gee, you feel that way too? It was just really, really helpful. Many sessions on stress and assertiveness training, how to read a textbook, how to study, how to take tests. It was a group like a club. The placement director is in charge. Another thing we discussed--everyone feels that you drive yourself to drink almost to maintain all A's. I can't accept that a B is a good grade. Once you made the decision--and it's taken so long to get to making the decision--you feel like you've got to push

yourself to do the very best that you can, particularly with women. I don't think it does bother men quite as much. At least they don't talk about it as much if they don't get an A. There were only three [men] that came regularly. We got really excited when one of them got elected study body president.

The older students, we get along very well with the instructors. They don't worry about if we're going to be interested in the course because it's 150% all the time. I gotta get my money's worth.

Music History--the instructor, he's a very difficult person. He's very very strict. I understand he just got his doctorate cause everyone's kidding and calling him doctor. He's a very hard marker; his tests are very difficult. I took Chorus with him and he has temper tantrums. He has standards and he's not going to back down. He threw somebody out at dress rehearsal, brand new tuxedo and all.

Now Dr. Bill Glover--everybody calls him Bill--he is super. I had him for Algebra. I kept saying, "I can't do algebra," and he said, "You're not going to be saying that soon, you're going to do it." I started on that Finite Math course and I [told him] that I was changing to Accounting. "Well," he says, "if you're doing that, then drop this course. Don't work yourself into an ulcer--it's not worth it." The counselor had said, "You'd better stick with it--if you ever want to transfer into another college, the business math won't transfer." I said, "I don't care. My immediate objective is to get

my degree here. If I need math courses to transfer at a later date, I'll do that."

So my second semester I took General Psych, Music History, English Comp II, and Cobol I. Psych--I've lived through a lot of what he was talking about. Made it easier to understand. You've already raised a child through all these stages. When you get into abnormal psychology--I understood that all too well. It all rang a bell. Younger people sort of giggled through a lot of it. One class I remember particularly. We were talking about genetics--he was explaining the combinations of X's and Y's and stuff--he said they have found by putting them under the microscope the difference between brown genes and blue genes--the blue genes have little tags on them that say "levi." He was making it so-o-o serious. His tests were always multiple choice and true and false.

[Coming to this college] has given me the courage to follow a dream: the dream if you want to work at something you can do it. People say that all the time, but experiencing it has given me the courage--I guess that's what education is, really. It's not just going into a classroom or it's not just a piece of paper. I decided to join the ranks of trying to get a piece of paper going in my favor. This is all part of life experience too. I guess I keep coming back to the confidence. I really know and believe you always do have a choice. You might not like the choice. But there is always a choice. I keep it in mind more. My adviser was saying, "That's part of an education." There's nothing wrong with changing and I never could

before. I think I'm gradually able to do things that I want to do and not what I think other people think I should do.

I thought college was always out of reach for me. It was something that I wished I'd done right from high school, and I never had the courage, never had the confidence to do. It's given me self-confidence. I mean a real feeling of accomplishment that I've set about to do something to improve my life instead of just talking about it. And then succeeding in it besides--I just want to keep going. I very jokingly say, gee, it's only ten years to get to the doctorate--I probably will never get to that point. But never is a long time. You shouldn't say "never"--maybe "not now."

People say, "How do you know you'll ever use it?" Well, you can't help but use it. The insights you gain into things--oh, I didn't know that! I didn't know that's how that came about! The origin of something, how things fit together. It's just exciting. I didn't think I could ever get to that point.

I have a strong interest in accounting and I expect that I will complete my associate's degree as soon as possible and then try to get into the workforce and pursue further courses on a continuing education basis. Of course ideally what I'd like to do is go to Bentley. Bentley is a good accounting school, one of the best in the East I guess. To become a C.P.A., you have to have at least a bachelor's.

[Accounting] is not tedious to me. Because I do understand it

and I can do it. And so why not just do it? As far as a profession, it makes as much sense as anything, from a practical standpoint. If money were not a consideration, I would happily move on and transfer to Bentley. I couldn't because I think tuition alone is something like $8,000 a year. They say that some of these expensive schools have tremendous scholarships for re-entry people because they know they're serious and will do well. I know one--he's the one I said was class president. He's been accepted and got a good scholarship.

Every once in a while it is fun to dream and say, "Money isn't everything, but let's find out what's in second place." My ideal way of living is just to be comfortable and not have to think about money as being a problem. If I didn't have to worry about income, then I know I would be into music somehow. I keep getting back to that.

You see, I was never encouraged [by my family] in music as a profesison, especially for a woman. That was for fun. For kids. I thought I wanted to be a music teacher and my superintendent of music wanted me to. He said, "I imagine you could make it to the Boston Symphony if you really worked at it." I'm not sure I could do it anyway. But I'd like to take more music courses. The church that I'm in encourages music particularly for women. I wrote a trumpet part for a number the church choir did. Someday I'd like to own an organ--I love the organ. Someday I would like to pursue theory. I would love to get into composition. And I like conducting.

In English Comp I was sure I couldn't write. I think it goes back to high school when I missed the honor roll and that was

Composition that kept me back. I've always been afraid to put into writing any feelings, and I think that goes back to my grandmother's influence. She would read every bit of mail I got and anything I sent out she had to read. But I could never read any of her mail.

I think I'd like to try taking more literature courses and really get into it. I have all these things on the back burner that someday I'm going to do. Who's to say what I will do in the future?

I never liked speaking in front of anybody. I never felt like I had anything to say that was worth listening to. But now I found out that I know how to organize a speech, how to outline a speech, and how to give a speech. I can do it. On our last speech, what Mrs. Knowles called "a fallout shelter speech," the problem was that there were only going to be six survivors, and your speech had to be why you should be one of the six. We all moaned and groaned. Why should we have to do that? She said, "You're going to have to do it more times than you think." Selling yourself. I was one of the "survivors."

I guess I've always been a survivor. I've had a lot of surgery. I remember hearing from a doctor in intensive care, "Well, you've gotten over the hardest part," and I said, "What's that?" "You survived."

I don't very often admit the times that I don't feel good because of the surgery. I keep thinking that, if I felt good all day, what could I accomplish? My typical day--I'm up at 7:00 and I don't quit before midnight, and I'm usually going full tilt. I won't ever

admit defeat, that I can't do something. I won't quit just because I don't feel good. I'd like to live to be about 900 years old to do everything I want to.

I don't think I was much concerned about feminism--maybe "aware" is a better word. Once I got into college life, there was one group in the re-entry on women's roles and there were two guys that stayed and wanted to participate. These guys stuck through thick and then and boy, did we give 'em a hard time. They said it was a real eye-opener to realize some of these issues, particularly looking back to their mothers. We hit 'em with both barrels. What choices did women have? It used to be the only choice you had as a woman was you could be a nurse, a teacher, a secretary. There were a few oddballs that tried to do other things, but that was about it. And that's how I was brought up--that education wasn't important for a woman as long as you could cook and clean and take care of children. I tried that channel of being the perfect model, go through high school, you graduate, you get a job, you get married, you raise a family.

It was important to go through high school. But beyond that, that was for real college material. There were people who were college material and there were people who weren't. And girls were never college material.

But now that I'm independent, I like it this way. I am lonely, and it would be nice to have somebody to share my life with. I finally am getting to the point where I think I have something to share.

My younger brother, the instigator, keeps asking how I'm doing, and my older brother thinks I'm foolish for doing it. My mother and Grace constantly are telling me, "I always knew you could do it!" But they never told me that before. Beryl said when she got married, "Now maybe it won't be too long before you're a grandmother!" And I said, "Now wait a minute! I just started back to college--I'm not ready to be a grandmother and a student at the same time!"

Part-Time Student Profile

Sherry Kaufman

Sherry Kaufman, forty-three, was a part-time student in a Virginia community college. For the past seven years she had been taking one or two courses each semester. Shortly before the interviews, she had officially enrolled in the program "Media Production."

I started at the community college in our area in about 1978, mainly because I was tired of doing volunteer work and I felt like my mind was getting kind of stale. I had two children who were adolescent at the time and of course was busy running here and there and taking them to lessons and doing what not. I just decided that I would like to go back to school and learn mostly things that I had not had a chance to learn when I was in dental hygiene school. I really

wanted to learn business. So I started and it just kind of opened up my whole life--I got so excited to be learning again and in a school situation and realizing that I had these goals that were actually short term and I could complete the course and I could learn as much as I wanted to learn about and I could say to my family, "I can't do what you need me to do right now, I have got to study." It was just wonderful--my life changed.

After I took the first two classes, I just continued and I am still going. One was first aid and one was personal finance. I only wanted to go two mornings a week--and these were both taught on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. From there I took accounting: Principles of Accounting I, II, and II; Taxes I; Economics; Speech; Business Letter Writing. I can't remember all of them.

I decided to concentrate on learning things that I felt would help me, that would be beneficial to my life in the long run. I got tired of being a stay-at-home mother, even though I did all of this community work. It still did not fill something in me. I always believed that you were never too old to learn and that there is always something that you can learn. I am not much of a reader so I was not reading. I needed to be in a school situation.

I live about ten to fifteen minutes [from the] college. I did not want to drive to [the university]. I was driving a lot with the children and taking them here and there. I never had any experience with a community college. I thought about it for a while before I

actually gave them a call. I really felt like a pioneer.

I think registration was the biggest hurdle. It is just the idea, oh, I have got to fill out forms, and I don't know where to go and I don't know which forms. I have found that a lot of people have that same headache. Once you fill out the forms you think, isn't that silly, it is really quite simple. I enjoyed my first two classes which were first aid and personal finance, and I found that there were other women there for the first time. It was a nice feeling of camaraderie, just the idea that we were returning women and we had children and we had not gone to school much in the past.

I was smarter than I thought I was. I was able to answer more questions and I was not afraid to answer the questions like I was in high school and in dental hygiene school. And I also asked more questions. It was just invigorating.

The teacher in first aid was about my age, maybe a little older. If somebody had problems learning a certain first aid technique, she took the time to work with the person and to explain. The personal finance person tended to read from his notes too much. I found I knew much more than I realized, so I was able to breeze through the course. I wanted to learn how to do bookkeeping. I thought it would be good if I learned and could work in [my husband's] office and do his bookkeeping, and I really had no experience except for keeping a checkbook for the house.

Then I went on to Principles of Accounting I, II, III and found that I was not as bad in math as I thought. I took those courses very

seriously and I felt that they were important to learn. When I finished those I took Taxes I. If I had a problem and I wanted to speak to the instructor, they were all always willing to help. My parents used to tell me, "Go up and tell the teacher when you don't understand." "Oh, I can't!" Well, here I was thirty years later saying, "I don't understand, can you help me?" And I found out that when I didn't understand something, other students did not understand. There was a nice feeling among the students, and they accepted me even though I was older. I expected to have this definite line of demarcation. They treated me as an equal!

I took my first photography class after I had been going to the community college for three quarters. I had been taking photos for years and years--what is called--stand-and-grin-at-me--and I would snap the shutter, and I just wanted to learn how to take better pictures. I took a course to learn to draw. I liked the instructor so well that in the winter I took a painting workshop with her. She got sick and the man who took over for her also taught photography. I liked him and the way he saw and the way he worked. I continued to take photography classes. There was a group of about six women who had taken courses together before. We had one instructor who gave us a course, not for credit, and we paid him to give us a more advanced nature photography class.

Design I was an excellent course, and I found it very difficult. In Design II, which worked with colors, I also had a difficult time

until about the seventh or eighth week. We had to do a freer composition. I was able to really let myself go. I remember that I did it in a tenth of the time that I did all my other projects and I came in to the instructor and I said, "I took this design from one of my photos. I really loved doing this." And I was just so proud and she was pleased.

You know you have to go through certain stages. You have to build on things and you have to learn to see, and I got to a point where I felt that I could. I wanted to print black and white better than what I had learned in my classes, so I went to [the university]. Now this was around the bicentennial. Photographers were going out and documenting the area. They were students and amateurs and people who had some advanced photographic skills. We could choose whatever we wanted to document and wherever we wanted to go. I chose the Mennonites in Virginia and the children at the Mennonite school. I felt like they were moving away, just vanishing. I was the first person in the group to photograph people--everybody else was photographing buildings. After they saw my people, they said, "Oh, these are terrific." I did not realize they were that good. When we had our exhibit at the museum I had several photos there. I just lucked out.

I decided to take a marketing course at the community college so I could learn how to sell. Then I took Principles of Economics. That was tough, it really was. At least I was familiar with some of the terms. I have had some full-time teachers and some who have been

teachers for one or two courses, especially the photography instructors [who] would teach one or two courses. One was a painter. He had an M.F.A. in painting or drawing and he could not make a living at it. He was the one who taught me to see the abstract and I liked his course so much I took it twice. He showed us his slides and some other people's works, and just seeing these things projected on the screen and having him talk about them and how he did them, I just learned. He was a self-taught man, [a] very smart man and very well read. And I just kind of blossomed. The more I did the more I could do.

I did not want to go back home again. I wanted to really do something. Still undecided but, ah, something. The design classes I took more to improve my being able to see better, to compose photos better. The photography courses were a combination of learning to see things in a different way. [The instructor] said, "Do a still life of two apples and three pears." So I would go, ha ha, what can you do with two apples and three pears? The different ways to light it or whether you stand them up or if you lay them down on their side or how you group them or if you cut them or you put water droplets on them.

Up to then I was just interested in learning and thinking. I did not care if I got a degree. I declared a major which was Media Production. I had a coordinated internship, in the fall in the educational media department of the school system. That department puts on slide shows and compiles shows for all the schools. They put

music and audio with it. I said, "Can I continue this internship in the winter?" and I offered a couple of suggestions about me going out and taking the photos and compiling a slide show. One of the suggestions that I offered was to go to the School for the Gifted and Talented. They called the principal and made arrangements. It turned out very well and I thoroughly liked working with the kids at that school.

In the summer of 1983 I went to Baylor campus of the community college to take a color course in photography. That was my first venture to another campus. The courses I took at the Arlington campus were all during the day. The ones at the Baylor campus were all at night because they were given with working photographers. The Baylor campus has a totally different feeling. I don't know if some of the feeling comes from the fact that it is an evening class and that the people are just plain tired. A lot of talk, a lot of communication between the students. The ones I saw in the evening tended to be from the lower economic scale. Looked like they could be country people. A mixture of black and white. They are more advanced students and more serious. At Arlington campus it was very arty and very relaxed.

I took a photojournalism course at Baylor campus. Two men were teaching the course: [one] from the paper and [one] who was an audiovisual specialist. I basically have a photojournalist style. So I had an internship with the paper this past fall. Learned a great deal. I found that in an internship program you have got to be the aggressive person. I went twice a week for ten weeks, almost the

whole day. Some of the photographers were not comfortable with me along. Jane O'Donnell, the only woman, didn't seem to mind at all, and she was very helpful. Bill [the photographer] said to me, "Are you really serious about this? Some of the people think that maybe you are just a housewife, and have this as a hobby." I don't think I ever think like that.

My goal is to get an associate degree in graphic art, specialization in photography. And I have about four or five more courses to go. In the fall I took a class at Charleston campus for black and white photos. That met on Saturday morning, all morning, from 9:00 till 1:00. The people were different at Charleston campus. Not as urban. But a good class.

[The university] has more of a fine arts program whereas at [the community college] it is geared more to commercial, toward people getting a job. That is why I like [the community college], because it is geared to the marketplace. [The university] is expensive and it is far away.

I got very discouraged, though, in a few of my classes, because the equipment was so lacking. You could not do this and you could not do that. I really got angry and I said, "Here I am to learn and there is no equipment." In the beginning of the course you got the outline. I found that in a few of the courses I did not learn what was stated on the course outline. I am not eighteen years old, so I was very frustrated.

I had a very difficult time juggling everything. I felt very guilty, at times. I believed that a mother should make a dinner every night and my husband believed this. Dinner time was always a very difficult time for me. I would get very tired and when I would start to cook dinner I was really yelling and I was impossible and I would get uptight and grouchy and I was very unpleasant in the kitchen. I used to think that when he came in I should immediately put dinner on the table and you get all crazy about it, so finally I just said that we will eat dinner at a certain time.

When the girls were adolescents and I went back to school, they encouraged me. In fact, when my older daughter graduated from high school, they came to [my community college] and we had classes together and I got the biggest kick out of that, and the kids did too. The girls are both proud of what I am doing and I can set a different kind of example for them and they won't feel that they need to be home all the time. It is okay to go out and pursue some of your own interests. I feel, looking back, that it would not have hurt to have had a part-time job. I think it would have been helpful to say to the girls, "Look, I am working, and I need you to get dinner."

My husband would like for me to be home all the time--he is not one of these liberated men who would like to see their wives working. It was all right as long as I was home to cook dinner and have it on the table at a certain hour. But now that I don't always have dinner on the table it takes a little readjusting. Sometimes I say to myself, "You don't have to rush home, it is all right." And so

instead of eating at 6:30 we will eat at 7:00, or 7:15. What difference does it make? I think he will get used to it. I think he won't get used to it without a battle, and not easily.

I find a lot of women admire me and I have encouraged women, some of whom have college degrees, some of whom have never finished college, and some of whom have never gone. I say, "This community college has so much to offer," and some of them have gone back. Some women have said, "Well, I can't do it now, but I am going to do it in a couple of years." So pleased that I have it so close and have taken advantage of it. When my mother came down here about thirteen years ago, she was just kind of at loose ends and I suggested that she go to the community college. She had never been to college and she had no idea what it was like. I said to her, "Mom, you are as smart as everybody else." She did sign up for a course and she loved it as much as I did. Then she started to get into photography--about two years ago. It just opened up a whole new world to her. Neither one of us has been under pressure to go to school. There have been no deadlines. I think that has a lot to do with why we have not encountered problems in school.

When you are raised by a mother who basically does mothering for twenty years, this is the role model I was following, and it really did not fit into my personality. I am better off and I am able to pursue some of my other interests and be with other people.

Of course a lot of women were returning to school to get skills

that they could use immediately. They had more concrete goals than I did, and a lot of them had to go to work. I was able to pursue things at my leisure. I could explore. I am so thankful for that opportunity. And to be able to take all of these courses at a reasonable price.

In five years I would like to have a body of work. I would like to continue documentary photography. I just feel like it is important for people to see what things are like today. I would like to have a book published someday of my photographs, in particular the photographs of the Mennonites. I had a show of my own a couple of years ago. It is a thrill to win a prize, or get an honorable mention, or even to be chosen for a show. It is an honor.

I have taken a big step of going into business and trying to set it up. I am sharing a studio space with another photographer. Oh, I feel like home responsibilities at times take priority, which I am going to have to stop doing. I feel like if you are in business you are going to have to put the home front on the back burner during business hours. I think now is a very good time for a woman to go into business. I feel like the time is right.

Afterword on Profiles

Sherry Kaufman says, "The time is right." Her words are echoed by other women. Paula Moore says, in essence, "If not now, when?" Kaufman is ready "to put the home front on the back burner," where her

own interests have remained for many years. "Somehow, someday, somewhere," women will find a way to use their talents, to find interesting work, to win a prize, to explore, to get the "piece of paper," to feel competent, to feel "worth something." Like Kaufman, they are "thankful for that opportunity." Their stories help us to understand why they go to a community college, why they feel for the most part well served, why they are cautious about going full time, about trying the university, or being part of the feminist movement--and also why they "aim for the sky" and are willing to take their whole lives to get there.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Returning Women Students

This study concentrated on the day-to-day experience of eighteen returning women students in nine community colleges in four states: how they happened to make their choice of college, what going to college was like for them, and what going back to college meant to them. They were high school graduates born between 1911 and 1957 in seven states as well as in Puerto Rico, Canada, and Italy. Four were black and two were Hispanic. Their fathers were farmers, carpenters, construction workers, businessmen, custodians, assembly-line workers, professors, mill-workers, soldiers, dentists, or laborers. Two of their mothers were employed full time (nurse, secretary)--the other sixteen were housewives for the largest part of their lives. At least one member of the five sets of parents was an immigrant, as well as both grandparents of four more participants.

This is not to say that community college returning women students are alike because of their similar heritage. For most, the "roads not taken" have made a big difference in their lives. The few middle- and upper-class families have taken for granted the college education that many community college women see as a "dream." Again,

characterizations are not across the board: the "reverse-transfer" and the rebellious upper-class woman have idiosyncratic experiences, different from first-time college students. Therefore the following summary statements are meant to be interpreted as characterizations that fit at least some of the participants and often a majority; all are drawn from the interview material. With this caveat, then, I learned from the study that a returning woman student in the community college was likely:

--to have come to the community college because it was closer, less expensive than other colleges or universities, smaller, friendlier, and more accepting, not "snobbish," more flexible, easier to get in, offered a two-year degree; to have seen an ad in the paper or received a flyer in the mail; to want job training or study toward a state exam; to begin with one inexpensive or free course, a way to ease into college;

--to have decided to return to school because it was something she always wanted to do, it fulfilled a dream, it was a matter of pure personal fulfillment, a way to find out "what I am all about"; to need to change field of work, get "new skills," a better job; to want not to be put down for taking one or two courses; to want an education, was missing it, had a right to it ("would not have gone at all if the community college were not there");

--to take the first steps slowly; to find registration a hurdle,

and first tests anxiety-producing; to be embarrassed at having to take "basics" (0-level, pre-college courses); to take a single nonthreatening course (jewelry-making, first aid, guitar) the first semester; to be a part-time student if married; to make a program--or get a degree--through a succession of part-time courses;

--to be conservative in her views of education; to be cautious, "leery," wary; to want to "do things right"; to accept traditional ways of teaching even while questioning the lecture method; to follow the rules; to value tradition in colleges, to be rarely rebellious;

--to feel at first like the "oldest one"; sometimes to hold back; to be worried (but only at first) about being "older"; to find that even twenty-five was "older," different; to be more active in class than younger students and to ask more questions; to be surprised at her abilities, to feel favored ("people remember you"); to get along well with younger students, to counsel, help, and study with them;

--to be a serious student, dedicated, "no messing around"; to dislike time wasting and not sticking to the syllabus on the part of faculty; to want to be heard and to have something to say; to be adventurous and humorous; to do as well or better than men in traditional men's fields; to do better in college than in high school; to talk about high aims and possibility of advanced degrees; to be conscientious, hard-working, determined to get

good grades, pressing for A's; to drive herself, do 150 percent, get her money's worth; to persist against odds, in spite of barriers; to find textbooks inadequate to her experience and interests; to be most successful when using her own experience (for example, in writing papers);

--to have low self-esteem and little confidence about her abilities; to be tentative, unsure at first, surprised at success, expected worse (brains "dried up"); to take one step at a time, to be afraid to bite off too much; to have thought of college as "an impossible dream"; to feel second rate, second class, dumb;

--to wish she had gone to college earlier; to have never really confronted the question of what to put her whole life into; to have not thought ahead (in earlier years) to schooling, work, and supporting herself; to feel she did not have the right to do what she wanted to do, or to spend family money on her education; to feel guilty taking time or money for herself;

--to be of working-class origin; to be the first in the family to go to college; to revere the "piece of paper"; to feel like an outsider ("outie"), not like "regular people";

--to like being independent; to like having school, children, and job better than just home and children; to feel "set free"; to enjoy doing own choosing--to like having chosen this college rather than having her education handed to her; to be embarking

on a second career;

--to find mentor-teachers a crucial support; to find most counseling elusive or oppressive; to act as counselors and tutors for other students; to like women's centers and being with other returning students; to be especially grateful for help, reassurance, and guidance from mentors and mother-figures; to say, "I would have quit" without certain helping persons;

--to be ignorant of financial aid options; to underestimate her choices; to be surprised at discovery of alternatives; to want to make money to feel "worth something"; to prefer part-time work except when money is a problem; to need financial support--grants or work-study; to be preparing for a job; to be putting herself through college;

--if married, to have a husband who is not totally supportive of the return to school and to limit schooling to two mornings a week; if divorced, to have children who are supportive and encouraging; to be guided by an ethic of care in her choices of work and eventual accomplishment; to want and expect education, children, and work;

--to have a different concept of "life time" than the accepted, or male, one: to conceive of time as adjustable and of "life stages" as flexible;

--to say that learning makes her "feel alive," gets her "out of the rocking chair," gives her "all kinds of second chances," makes her feel "worthwhile"; to crave intellectual stimulation or to be

astonished at its power in her life; to discover pure joy in learning ("the insights you gain into things!");

--to be accomplished or experienced in one or several ways: political work, hospital volunteer, house-building,--as well as to have a variety of past careers: beautician, editor at Time magazine, secretary to college administrator, dental technician, alcohol counselor;

--to stretch out the two-year college period to three or more years; to take "my whole life," if necessary;

--to want to achieve something, to be "aiming high"; to want to be "competent," to complete something, to do "something for myself," to go "all the way"; to do what she wants to do rather than what she has to do, to feel she has waited long enough to take an old goal off "the back burner"; to think of the community college as a "stepping stone";

--to have had a checkered history of schooling--different community colleges, technical schools, occasional year at a university, adult education courses, "reverse-transfer" or "reverse-reverse-transfer"; to have been tracked in women's fields in high school and to have had little math and science; to be assigned to remedial classes in math and to be amazed that she can learn in a "math anxiety" class; to have had past experience of sexism in school--"girls weren't college material"; to have been suspected of "dabbling," of not being serious, of being a restless

housewife; to have been strongly influenced by early school experience--good or bad;

--if black or Hispanic, to have had many experiences of inequitable treatment in the community college and outside: to be confused with another "minority" student; to be reproved for speaking a language besides English on campus; to be the object of racial slurs;

--to work a double or triple day when going to college; to have serious conflicts in her role as mother, student, and job-holder; to be divorced or single if a full-time student;

--to be exhausted.

Research in adult education has in the past few years identified some of these same characteristics and goals of returning women students (Tittle and Denker 1980; Project on the Education and Status of Women 1981). This study confirms much of such research and adds the richness of detail that the in-depth interview unearths. In addition, the dimension of meaning in the lives of women looking for learning and finding windows open for them is an added product of the extended interview.

Knowing <u>who</u> the students are and what their present and past experience is like, and what it means to them, is basic to the understanding of what kinds of learning and teaching are appropriate for them. This study may supply some of that knowledge.

For example, expanding on the thought of college as an

"impossible dream," participants had much to say about what going to college meant to them. The following excerpts from seven interviews show how powerful is the drive to be someone, to fulfill one's dreams (especially that college dream) at any age and how confident these women are in the ultimate rightness of a decision which in many cases totally redirected their life course:

> I look at my being here as an excellent opportunity for me to better myself, to start something new in my life, engineering, and I hope to gain many things by that. . . . I can afford this school, it's perfect for my needs. (L. Porter)

> For the last eight years I prepared myself to go back to school but it's just so slow, you know, kids, they just seemed like they were never going to get big. And one day I looked up and there they were . . . and it was time for me to do something. I drew this little mountain and I knew that in order to get to the top of this mountain I had to go back to school. Now I'm here. I have to go to the top now. (R. Stephens)

> I thought college was always out of reach for me. It was something that I wished I'd done right from high school and I never had the courage, never had the confidence to do. It's given me a real feeling of accomplishment that I've set about to do something to improve my life--instead of just talking about it. . . .
>
> People say, "How do you know you'll ever use it?" Well, you can't help but use it. The insights you gain into things--oh, I didn't know that! I didn't know that's how that came about! The origin of something, how things fit together. it's just exciting. I didn't think I could ever get to that point. (M. B. Nash)

> I want to do something meaningful with my life. I see too many people unhappy in what they're doing. . . . When I chose this career there were so many things that were good about it. First of all, just being a nurse meant I can work anywhere in the world. . . . I can be an administrator, with a degree, in hospitals or in clinics. I want to be in a position to make decisions. Most people in power in any kind of field are white and I really want to make a difference with that too. There were never any real role models for me. I mean I want to be a role model. (M. Melendez Wilson)

> I came for one thing--I already knew what I wanted to do. I'm doing it to achieve something I want. Most of the elderly people, when they come back, this is what it is: fulfillment. To complete something that they started years ago. Regardless of whether they'll ever use the diploma or not, it's there. You're competent. This is what it is. (A. Williams)

> It was the time I needed to get confidence in me. The teachers, the students, the program prepared me. In the first semester of the second year I learned that Margaret O'Donnell was not a failure. (M. O'Donnell)

When women reflect on their community college experience, they speak intensely, expressing strong positive feelings about the importance of the return-to-school decision for their lives. How vividly their words contrast with the views from outside--that housewives are just looking for something to do; that they are "dabbling" and can not be thought of as serious students--the same views, essentially, that often prevent women from getting, or being promoted to, well-paying positions ("she will leave and have babies"--O'Donnell interview). Under the guise of protectiveness or of being "realistic," the male establishment has kept woman in her place and then blamed her for being there. Small wonder that women feel "set free" in the community college, and are surprised to find, as top student Diane Fleury did, that going to school is a lot "easier than staying home taking care of the kids." And for Mary Beth Nash, even when the original goal was training for a better job, the unexpected and exciting discovery was finding out about "the origin of something, how things fit together."

Community Colleges

To listen to returning community college students is also to learn something about the community college as institution and about what goes on there that is a part of each student's existence.

The eighteen participants in this study were drawn from nine community colleges in four states. The origin and early history of these colleges were very different from one another. Today more than 1,100 community and junior colleges are spread across the United States, and there is a two-year college within a few miles of almost everyone. (For a comprehensive discussion of the American community college, see Cohen and Brawer 1982.) Although there is now a loose affiliation for most of the colleges with the AACJC (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges) these colleges are separate institutions varying widely in their structure, size, and offerings. It is understandable, then, that the stories of the participants demonstrate some differences as well as similarities among their community colleges in different parts of the country and in different types of communities. In Virginia, for example, there are "rebel teachers" and "rebel students" who have not yet accepted the fact that the Civil War is over. But commonalities stand out most in the interviews. From the points of view of the eighteen participants in this study, their community colleges were likely:

--to be easy to get into: "you just sign up and you're in."

--to have few requirements for enrollment: high school graduation

or a G.E.D., being eighteen years old, and in some cases these requirements are waived;

--to offer, but not to publicize adequately, financial aid: a Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, a Pell Grant, or Tuition Assistance, these not dependent on previous academic success; to offer work-study or other paid work to compensate for other schooling expenses;

--to present varying opportunities for counseling and advising, depending on the kind of program the student has chosen to enter, and depending on the college's counseling system: opportunities vary from no counseling to satisfactory or excellent counseling; to provide part-time students with little or no out-of-class assistance; to have a required orientation course for new full-time students; to have peer counselors in a women's center; to make a practice of counseling students to remain more than two years;

--to have some faculty who follow traditional patterns of academic classroom behavior, with lecturing the modal style--who give multiple choice rather than essay tests, who seldom make discussion a part of the classroom, who rarely consider the experience of students as appropriate material for the classroom, who approve of the conscientiousness of their adult women students even though they are frequently called to account by them;

--to have other faculty who search for ways to accommodate the

various backgrounds and learning styles of the enrollees, who work extra hours with students who have problems with their studies, who are strong mentor-advisers;

--to offer at least some courses in each program (vocational or liberal arts) which students consider serious and thorough ("there is tough, tough work in the community college");

--to provide for the diversity of students by special organizations, clubs, preparatory and review classes, career counseling, learning resource centers (libraries) where free tutoring is provided--attempting to cover all bases;

--to have within their walls the racism, sexism, and classism that echo their communities, their society and times; to have some faculty and staff who are openly racist, who object to hearing other languages than English in the college; to continue inequitable sexist and racist faculty and staff hiring practices; to be only rarely and subtly ageist in policies and practices--by offering, for example, scholarships to graduating high school students and members of sports teams;

--to offer a huge "smorgasbord" of courses--liberal arts, vocational, and recreational--with few restrictions or prior requirements; to offer also some programs, or classes within programs, which are designed for transfer (or special application) and to convey the message that the quality of these classes is superior: to have, in other words, a few closed doors

behind the "open door";

--to put more effort into recruiting students into classes than into keeping them there;

--to be only mildly supportive of "special" programs which appear to favor certain groups, e.g., women's centers, older student organizations; to lag behind the four-year colleges in support of Black Studies or Women's Studies as part of the academic program;

--to make some modest attempts to accommodate older women students' needs: a child center on campus, or the adjustment of some class hours--useful but not enough and extra costs prohibitive;

--to have few or no nontraditional types of learning experiences offered, or innovative ways to earn credit (except for the cooperative or intern experience);

--to stream enrollees through four main "doors": transfer or liberal arts, career (vocational-occupational) programs, continuing and community education, developmental (basic, remedial, O-level) courses;

--to have more "minority" students proportionately than the closest university;

--to be considered nonresident institutions, but to have (in some states) cottages and apartments, rented by students, immediately adjoining the college campus;

--to foster "recurrent" education, with students dropping in and out over a period of years;

--to offer two-year programs which appear more upward-leading than

they actually are: e.g., "Legal Secretary," "Executive Secretary," "Criminal Justice"; to promise successful job training; to offer career counseling, done by computer in career information office;

--to make few efforts to encourage men and women to enter opposite-sex-typed courses (but to accept those who come on their own initiative);

--to offer single courses in response to "demand" from the community; to treat these students differently from "regular" enrolled college students;

--to have more male faculty and even more male administrators; to have very few black of Hispanic faculty or administrators (except in urban colleges);

--to have a large proportion (one-fourth to one-third) of "older" students (over twenty-one) in most college classes (participants' estimates); to often have three generations in a classroom (i.e., ages 20, 40, 60);

--to have few faculty who promote writing in their classrooms, who give essay tests, and who use personal experience as subject for writing;

--to please returning women students, to live up to their expectations and often to exceed them.

Through the accounts of both transfer and career students in the study, as well as those who would not classify themselves as either,

we can view the community college today as something like an "educational supermarket" (Hurn 1979) or as a "community resource for lifelong education" (Gleazer 1982). Either one of these designations seems more appropriate, in the presentation of many participants, than the model of the first two years of four years of college or the two-year vocational program. "The lines between career and collegiate education have become blurred," writes Cohen (1982, p. 219), "since more students began transferring from community college career programs than from the so-called transfer programs." And, we might add, since more persons with a B.A. have returned to the community college for two-year career programs.

Older returning women students see their community college in somewhat different ways from younger returning students. For the former, a career program is often a lifeline to a way to earn money after a divorce, and both career and transfer programs equally represent the culmination of a lifelong desire to complete college, a deferred "dream." The community college is perceived as a way to ease into college with less pain and anxiety and sometimes a way for a woman to get a college education one day at a time, one course at a time, one year at a time, without an immediate or possibly unmanageable commitment, a way to find out gradually what she "really wants to do." And for the oldest older women, a way to "get out of the rocking chair," to find pleasure in learning without "pressures," and to find out what she is "all about," after years of caring for and

educating others as mothers and as daughters and as wives.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Returning Women

I have suggested earlier that the stories of the participants in this study might illuminate the realities of everyday life for other older women students in the community college, and might also provide new insights and connections for women who are considering a return to school. It might be tempting for a woman planning her return to assume that the tribulations of other students will be hers as well. A careful look at the variations within the study sample will dispel that illusion. It is also important to note that for most of the women the early concerns and problems in the community college wore off very soon, and success was the order of the day for all participants. That does not mean that their plans did not go through some change or that their work proceeded without difficulty. When the effects of racism, sexism, and classism, along with the stresses of a "triple day" of job, school, and child-care, were simultaneously endured by a returning woman student, the experience could be devastating. It is remarkable that some of the participants suffered all of these insults to their minds and bodies and still fought to get their education, to prove their competence, and to plug away each day.

One way to look at the prospect of returning to school is to think of the "authority of experience" which each older woman

inevitably brings with her if she is willing to trust it; and to think of the persons in the classroom as a "multiplicity of authorities" (Culley 1985). Although her formal education has been interrupted (by that space in which she has sometimes been occupied with what she perceives as nonintellectual duties which have "dried up" her brains) that does not mean, as she soon finds, that she is less capable of learning. It is soon clear that she is, rather, more capable: motivation, determination, and diversity of experience make up for recent practice. The typical self-doubt and lack of confidence, if looked at in a feminist context, are concomitant with the persistent voices of a patriarchal society that works hard to keep women feeling that they are never good enough, that they belong in homes as caretakers of families, and that their valued femininity would be compromised if they were assured and outspoken.

Returning women have learned to look at "time of life" nontraditionally. In their stories, they turn the psychosocial crises (Erikson 1950) upside down: haveing been "generative" persons in their earlier years (taking care of others), they turn toward being themselves ("identity") in middle and late life. More women are beginning to arrange their lives according to their own imperatives.

This study should indeed give hope and encouragement to more women who are about to take the pot off the "back burner." One of the messages that comes through clearly is that it is unnecessary to wait or to worry, that there are many options (within and without the

community college) to be explored. The older woman student is no longer "the only one."

Implications for Further Research

Further research using in-depth interviews would add to our knowledge about women's experience in education. Single older women, lesbian women, Asian-American or Native American women have not lent their special perspectives to the study. A community college in the Middle West or the deep South, or on a reservation in Arizona, might (or might not) be significantly different from colleges in other areas.

Issues that have been touched on lightly here, and elsewhere by quantitative and survey studies, should be examined in more depth. As Cross (1971) puts it, traditional means for studying nontraditional populations may result in misleading information. Some of the nagging questions that have not been satisfactorily answered in relation to returning women students as a special population are:

--the question of "dropouts": how often do they return?

--the question of transfer: what eventually happens to the community college graduate who does not immediately transfer?

--the question of the community college versus the four-year college or university: is the older woman student who returns to a community college less likely to complete four years, and if so, why?

This is not to say that in-depth interview research can satisfactorily explain all such questions. But the evidence from the transcripts in this study points to much irregularity and repetition in entering and leaving. It must certainly be difficult to keep track, for statistical purposes, of the persons (not only women) who drop in and drop out of schooling. When they leave they are often counted as dropouts, and when they return, as new students. For women like Sherry Kaufman in Virginia--who took a class or two a semester for seven years until she found out what she wanted to do--or Antonia Gonsalves, who did the same for fourteen years, finally went elsewhere and got a master's degree and then came back to a community college for a single class--there is probably no office record that has made sense of this kind of idiosyncratic schooling. It is important also to understand whether statements in the literature which refer to the totality of community college students (the vast majority under twenty years old) are also equally applicable to the older woman student. The evidence of this study suggests that these are two quite distinct populations.

This study has discussed very little of the recent research in disciplines such as gerontology or the psychology of aging. Useful as the material of these fields is for looking at questions like "Does ability change with age?"--the primary focus of the study has been on the experience of women students returning to college <u>as they see it</u>, and the primary interpretive emphasis has been on the <u>social construction</u> of knowledge. A feminist understanding of many of our

society's fondly-held beliefs about differences between men and women, for example, is that these ideas are socially constructed, not built on any biological "truths" (Bleier 1984). For this reason, and because the words of the participants belie much of our "knowledge" of aging (based on what we see aging people doing which may be based on what they think they should be doing), many aspects of "life stages" (Erikson 1982; Levinson 1978; Wolf 1982) are not a significant theoretical buttress for this study. An important research project for the future would be a critical examination of the interrelationship of physical, psychological, and social theories of aging and learning.

Suggested also for further research is the investigation of the experience of returning men students, or a comparative study. The small group of five returning men whom I interviewed gave me enough information to see that there were, indeed, some differences. And in Wolf's (1983) study of returning students over sixty, older men were clearly distinguished from older women by their attitudes and approach to learning (the women were more social, for example). More in-depth interviews with both sexes in the same educational environment might be enlightening.

Further research on the problem of counseling for returning women students is indicated again in this study, as in others. In spite of the "steady stream of articles dealing with the counseling needs of women," Tittle and Denker conclude that many counselors in college

settings "are not practicing the ideas that have evolved so far" (1980, p. 64). Is it possible that counselors whose past work and training has been with seventeen- to twenty-two-year-olds are not prepared adequately for work with older women? Or are there other systemic causes for student dissatisfaction which has continued for several decades as reported in the literature? The evidence of this study points to the importance of not separating the advising (or counseling) from the academic work of students and toward the (old-fashioned?) notion that teachers are the best counselors.

For many returning women, a large part of the counseling-advising relationship is concerned with the serious problem of financial aid. There is still some evidence that more aid is available to men and to young students (athletic scholarships, grants to high school students). The women in this study tend to be proud of "putting themselves through college," paying their expenses when they can with work-study and outside jobs. They have not, on the whole, been adequately informed of possible opportunities. Further research is indicated. "There is no systematic study of whether or not returning women are discriminated against on the basis of age or marital status" (Tittle and Denker 1980, p. 38).

Recommendations for Educators

What does the study show that would be useful for educators--for community college faculty and administration in particular but for

other educators as well--to consider in planning for the future?

Much that has been said here by returning community college women has been specific to their own college environment, but much also is connected to the subject of adult education in general and to the education of older women in particular. The following recommendations are suggested by the words of the students in this study and are informed by my sense of the community college's mission as an egalitarian institution, in educating persons who have not traditionally had access to higher education:

1. Recognize and act on the racist, sexist, and classist conditions that exist within each college. The persistence of inequities so glaring as the imbalance of gender and race among faculty in community colleges demonstrates the need for immediate action. "Democracy's college" (as it has been called) should not continue to be the preserve for white male faculty members and administrators. And how can "rebel teachers" still be functioning with the blessings of state funds? As far as the question of speaking other languages, it is certainly past time for all staff members in schools everywhere to get the message that every language is an acceptable medium for expressing thoughts. Community college administrators need to agree that all persons in the college environment shall be treated by all staff with dignity and courtesy and to spell out what that means.

2. Review and revise as necessary the total curriculum within

the college (courses, texts, syllabi) for inclusions and exclusions relating to women. (For an excellent source on "making women visible," see McIntosh 1985.) Consider making this revision process the responsibility of administrators and faculty who are knowledgeable in Women's Studies. "A failure to attend to the gender imbalances in a coeducational curriculum, and to correct those that disadvantage women, means that women do not, in fact, have equal access to educational opportunities" (Schuster and Van Dyne 1985).

3. Make Women's Studies a department in the community college as it has been for ten years or more in many four-year colleges and universities, and in a few community colleges.

4. Double efforts to recruit women professors in fields not usually associated with women (engineering science, drafting, accounting, for example).

5. Establish "networks" or "support" groups on campus--or promote the establishment of such groups, for women students, women faculty, older third world students, and collaborative ventures involving staff, faculty, and students. Encourage and fund those which have been established, such as women's centers and older students' groups.

6. Accept and promote the community college, in a "lateral" view, as a knowledgeable innovator, not as a second-class higher education institution. Some strategies which have been tried in some community colleges should be more widely available. Needed (and lauded by students where they appear) are: transition or "bridge"

programs; English teaching--reading or writing--in small groups; tutoring, by trained staff under a supervising faculty member, of persons who can't read.

7. Similarly, promote the horizontal or lateral placement of intellectual and manual labor as material for college study: each is needed and ideally everyone should have some of both--not the elitist and hierarchical assumption that it is "better" to work with your head than your hands. No course should be without its experiential or personal experience components. (Listen to community college faculty talk about their concerns in this area [see Seidman 1985].)

8. In the classroom consider the multiple possibilities of teaching styles and methods which will reach many different people in different stages of their educational life. Returning women students report that the lecture, supplemented by occasional discussion, is the characteristic teaching mode in the community college. Legitimize the use of "liberatory pedagogy" or "critical pedagogy" or "feminist pedagogy" (which are similar in their goals of empowering students, collaborative methods, and emphasizing personal experience as valid subject matter for study (Shor 1984; Freire 1973; Culley 1985).

9. Aim for <u>differently</u> appropriate educational goals for the community college and for the students who go there. This does not mean diluted or "easier" work. The community college does not have to emulate the university in the structure and style of its teaching and learning. But if it does not, it should not necessarily have "lower"

status. (The lower status comes from the attempt to copy traditional forms of the conventional institution and not being able to do this satisfactorily because the traditional institution has a different group of students. Both students and faculty tend to want the community college to be like their vision of what a college or university is "supposed" to be.) Legitimize the possibility of goals that are different but not contradictory, nor "lesser."

10. Take seriously the past experience of adult women students, as mature persons who are taking their education very seriously. Even the part-timers are not "dabbling." Their potential cannot be estimated by the extent of their first involvement. Assume no deficits, teach and treat older women as able, expect good work. That does not mean being "unyielding and unbending."

11. Keep up with the research on aging and learning. Don't just let old people in free, but persist in seeing them as active learners, push them to participate more fully, assume that they can learn, write, act. (See Gleazer 1980, p. 141.) Review the gradually expanding literature on women as students, on older students, on experimental programs in community colleges and in universities.

12. Review the counseling system and process. Ask the questions: Does counseling and advising reach everyone? Is it a matter of funding or of choosing a different process? Is it a matter of the number of counselors, use of their time, or order of importance in the eyes of the administration, the faculty, or the community? Establish certain minimal regulations; e.g., all students, including

one-course registrants, shall see a counselor or adviser or take a required informational course close to entrance time, and be advised of their options. Use faculty as advisers in addition to counselors, but consider faculty time constraints and heavy course loads. See that students have the freedom to change counselors and seek new mentors. Reconsider "career counseling" as it exists most commonly in the community college. The personal connection with a faculty adviser or counselor cannot be taken over by the career room, the computers, and the career library with a description of a job field.

13. Remove the stigma from the "basic" or "developmental" programs in the same way that the "learning centers" (libraries) and tutorial services are now doing: students seek these out because they want them and find them of real value; faculty encourage and promote them, as do students for each other. Making the "basic" courses as good as some now are (see E. Zamora, profile in chapter 8) rather than having students assigned to them as the result of placement tests would improve student morale and promote their sense of autonomy and power.

14. Review the issues of false hopes and expectations and implied promises in advertising and syllabi of such courses as drawing, or music and recreation, or any occupational course, in relation to students' career expectations; the issue, that is, of what <u>can</u> be taught or learned in one or two years, or in one course, and how realistic are job hopes.

15. Re-establish reading and writing "at the center of all curricula in the community college" (Seidman 1985, p. 271). Without this clear emphasis much of the rhetoric about equal opportunity will be empty slogans. Students clearly state the importance to them of expanding their writing practice, of learning how to put together a research paper, of writing about their own life experience. Their previous and ongoing writing and reading experience has been especially valuable to the students in two-year vocational programs.

16. Set up a research project on campus to determine the possible "chilly climate for women." (See the two studies of the Project on the Status and Education of Women by this title, 1983, 1985.) And also for other "different" student populations: blacks, Hispanics, the handicapped, older students, homosexuals, the aged, various religious groups. In other words, demonstrate a true concern for inequities that matches the community college's stated mission.

17. Finally, enlarge upon opportunities for students to have nonhierarchical, collaborative classroom experiences as well as opportunities for self-directed learning. Consider the model of feminist teaching, which is not for women only. Men can be, and are being, feminist teachers. One male college professor has said, "I have come to believe that feminism holds the key to all other liberation struggles" (Snoek 1985). Feminist pedagogy acknowledges its relationship to interactive pedagogies, to "critical pedagogy" and "liberatory pedagogy." But it takes as its base the experiences of women which up until recently "did not officially exist" (Culley

1955). historian Joan Kelly said that feminism is "a perspective on social reality as well as a social movement (1984). Older women returning to college are part of continuing movement toward education for all. They are capable of being active, reasoning human beings (like all students) and partners in the educational enterprise whose own experience is a necessary ingredient in the process of learning.

A P P E N D I X A

Table of Participants

Table of Participants

Distribution by state; age; type of program (liberal arts or career); part, full, or "part-full" (9 credits) time; location of college (urban, rural, suburban); ethnicity of student (black, Hispanic, white); marital status (married, divorced, single [never married], widowed); number of children; social class of parents (working, middle, upper); interviewer initials.

State	Age	Program	Part, full, p-f	Loc. of coll.	Ethnicity	Marital stat.	No. children	Class of prnts	Interviewer
California									
1 PM	50+	LA	P	S	B	M	3	W	MBS
2 LW	54	LA	P	S	W	M	4	M	MBS
3 MMW	38	C	F	S	H	D	4	W	MBS
4 FF	35	LA	F	S	W	D	1	U	MBS
New York									
1 SC	49	C	F	S	W	D	2	M	MBS
2 LP	25	C	F	S	W	S	0	M	MBS
3 HK	49	C	F	S	W	D	2	W	MBS
4 RS	36	C	F	U	B	D	2	W	MBS
5 EG	42	LA	F	U	W	D	0	W	MBS
Massachusetts									
1 EZ	29	C	P-F	S	H	D	4	W	MBS
2 MO'D	27	C	F	R	W	S	0	M	MBS
3 DF	46	LA	F	S	W	M	5	W	MBS
4 AG	49	C	P	R	B	D	3	W	MBS
5 LM	70	LA	P	S	W	M	4	W	MBS

Table of Participants--continued

Massachusetts--continued									
6 MBN	43	C	P-F	R	W	D	1	W	MBS
7 KB	30	C	P-F	S	W	W	1	W	MBS
Virginia									
1 AW	42	C	F	R	B	D	3	M	MBS
2 SK	44	C	P	R	W	M	2	M	*JBT

Note: Age range: 25-70; Mean age: 42.1; Median age: 42.5.

* One assisting interviewer in Virginia.

A P P E N D I X B

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Of the eighteen participants in this study, six are "minority" students (four black, two Hispanic). Using father's occupation as a definition of class, ten students were of working class origin. Eight of these could be described as leading middle-class lives at the time of the interviews. English was not the first language for three of the participants and five had parents or grandparents who were immigrants. All participants were graduated from high school and ten had some further education; three had attended a four-year college or university before coming to the community college, taking one or two courses at a time, or, in one case, attending for a semester. Two others had the B.A. degree; three had attended two-year technical training institutes; one had an R.N.; one had worked toward and received a M.A. degree during the same years in which she was enrolled in community college courses.

At the time of their interviews, thirteen women stated that they planned to get the A.A. degree. Eight of the thirteen had started at the community college with a single course or with two courses, some continuing to maintain this schedule, others increasing the semester load as time went on. Of the eighteen students, eleven were clearly vocationally motivated; a job, or a better job, was a stated goal. Three students were enrolled in traditional liberal arts programs and were intending to transfer to four-year colleges or, in the case of a student with a B.A., to graduate work at the university. Four persons

started with miscellaneous courses in which they were interested but had no plans for a degree or transfer. One of these subsequently planned to get the degree and to transfer, one to get the degree and start her own business, and two to continue taking occasional courses.

Taking one or two courses on a part-time basis is more characteristic (in this sample) of students who are married: four out of the five married women are in this category. The fifth will be transferring to a women's college close to her home. Another factor possibly related to the amount and commitment of course-taking: the mean age of the part-time students who enrolled for less than nine credits is fifty-four--fifteen years older than the average full-time student in this study. The ten divorced women have distinct career goals in mind; six of them are enrolled full time, half of these planning to begin their careers at the termination of their two-year programs.

Three are on a "part-full" basis (my terminology--usually nine credits rather than twelve or fifteen) and one who has an advanced degree is taking a particular course for career purposes as preparation for a state examination. One widow and two single (never married) women are full-time students in career programs; all three are planning transfer. Fifteen out of the eighteen students have from one to five children. (The mean number of children for the married women is 3.6 and for the divorced women, 2.2.)

Seven students were the first in their families to go to college.

(In defining "families" here I have included husbands and children of the students.) Eight were born and lived elsewhere (two outside of the continental United States) for five to fifty years, but the other ten had lived almost entirely within a few miles of their present location. Four had parents who, like them, had begun attending the community college in their area, three for "enrichment" purposes and the fourth for further training in her field of work. Of the nine participants with children of at least college age, six had children who were attending, or were graduates of, four-year colleges; children of the other three were in technical institutes or community colleges.

A P P E N D I X C

Participant Information Form

Participant Information Form

Returning Women Students in the Community College

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

Telephone (home) _____ (work, college, etc.) _____

Name of college _____

College address _____

Please check where applicable: liberal arts? ___ transfer? ___
vocational or occupational program? ___ special program? ___
other? ___ (please describe) _____

_____

What is the goal of your present study? _____

_____

Previous educational attainment (number of years in school, last year in school, diploma, degree, GED, etc.) _____

_____

_____

Previous work experience _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Birth date _____

A contact where you could be reached in case of change of address or telephone _____

_____

A P P E N D I X D

Written Consent Form

Written Consent Form

RETURNING WOMEN STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

To participants in this study:

I am Mary Schatzkamer, a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst. The subject of my doctoral research is: "Returning Women Students in the Community College." I am interviewing women in California, Massachusetts, and New York State, and possibly in some other states, who have returned to study at a community college after an interruption in their education for any one of a number of reasons. You are one of approximately twenty participants.

As a part of this study, you are being asked to participate in three in-depth interviews. The first interview will be focused on your experience before you came to the college, the second on what it is like to be a student in the college, and the third will be concerned with what it means to you to be back in school--as you reflect on your earlier experience and look ahead to the future. As the interviews proceed, I may ask an occasional question for clarification or for further understanding, but mainly my part will be to listen as you recreate your experience within the structure and focus of the three interviews: your previous life, the college experience, and the meaning of that college experience.

My goal is to analyze the materials from your interviews, in order to understand better your experience and that of other women who re-enter schools and colleges for their own various reasons. I am interested in the concrete details of your life story, in what led up to your decision to return to school, in what your everyday experience is like now, and what it means to you. As part of the dissertation, I may compose the materials from your interviews as a "profile" in your own words. I may also wish to use some of the interview material for journal articles or presentations to interested groups, or for instructional purposes in my teaching. I may wish to write a book based on the dissertation.

Each interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed by me or by a typist (who will not be connected with your college and who will be committed, as I am, to confidentiality). In all written materials and oral presentations in which I might use materials from your interview, I will use neither your name, names of people close to you, nor the name of your college or city. Transcripts will be typed with initials for names, and in final form the interview material will use pseudonyms.

You may at any time withdraw from the interview process. You may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts used, if you notify me at the end of the interview series. If I were to want to use any materials in any way not consistent with what is stated above, I would ask for your additional written consent.

In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims for the use of the material in your interviews; you are also stating that no medical treatment will be required by you from the University of Massachusetts should any physical injury result from participating in these interviews.

I, _____, have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated above.

_____
Signature of participant

_____
Signature of interviewer

_____
Date

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