

**THE EFFECT OF MARITAL STATUS ON THE ROLE
ADJUSTMENT OF THE RE-ENTRY STUDENT**

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ON THE ROLE ADJUSTMENT OF THE RE-ENTRY STUDENT

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by
Glynis McHargue Patterson

March, 1984

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the effect of the presence of the spouse on the female re-entry student at Austin Peay State University. A questionnaire was sent to 393 female students, aged 25 or older, who were full-time students enrolled for at least twelve quarter hours. The results of the survey were obtained from the responses of the students who were married and living with their spouses.

The results indicated that the Austin Peay re-entry student is succeeding as a student and maintaining multiple roles. These women perceive that their husbands are cooperative and proud of their achievements as students. They believe their marital relationships have either remained the same or have improved since their return to college. Their role as students has not been adversely affected by the presence of their spouses in the home.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Glynis McHargue Patterson entitled "The Effect of Marital Status on the Role Adjustment of the Re-Entry Student." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Science.

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Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The pendulum for women's independence has swung back and forth many times since the first Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Names like Lucy Stone, Betsy Bloomer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Julia Ward Howe are familiar today, yet but for a brief time during World War II, women were relegated to the kitchen, or perhaps the typewriter. It has only been since Betty Friedan exposed the myth of the "feminine mystique" that growing numbers of women have dared to ask aloud, "Is this all?" (Freidan, 1963).

For the past twenty years, women slowly have been emerging from their kitchens into the world of work. True, for many, the first stop was the typing pool, but it was a move in the direction of a career.

This woman could have many reasons for returning to work. It could be the empty nest syndrome, economic reasons or the desire for a challenge. Regardless of her motivation, she is there in force. In 1978, 16.1 million mothers of children under the age of eighteen were at work (Berman, 1980).

In recent years, increasing numbers of women have chosen to return to college. More than one-third of today's college students are over twenty-five (Magarrell, 1978). Their reasons are varied: a desire to prepare for a more interesting job, relief from boredom, divorce or marital difficulties, escape

from responsibilities, and for many, a way of solving an integrity crisis (Letchworth, 1970; Rice, 1982; Bernard, 1977; Brooks, 1976; Badenhop and Johanson, 1980). Bardwick (1971) states that many investigators are finding that 10 to 15 years after marriage, women are indicating an increased motivation to achieve. According to Bardwick, it could be that once a woman's affiliation needs are met, she recognizes the existence of achievement needs, or it may be that achievement needs develop later in women. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that women are returning to college in unprecedented numbers.

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the number of women aged 25 and over returning to college has doubled between 1972 and 1978. In six short years, the number increased from 999,000 to 2,018,000! The impact on colleges and universities all over the country has been significant. At Austin Peay State University, one-third of the student population is 25 and over.

It is thought that this re-entry woman experiences special problems and stresses that affect her as a student. What sets her apart from the divorced or widowed re-entry female, of course, is the presence of her spouse. It is thought that the husband creates a set of unique problems that make her role as a student more stressful than that of the single student.

This study will attempt to show the effect of marital status on the role adjustment of the re-entry student. Very few studies have been conducted on this special population in regard to this problem (Ballmer & Cozby, 1981; Berkove, 1979;

LeFevre, 1972, Tittle & Denker, 1977). In order to meet the needs of these returning women, institutions of higher learning must be aware of their potential problems and be prepared to give adequate guidance in order to retain them as students and help them attain their goals.

For the purposes of this study, re-entry women shall be defined as married women over the age of twenty-four who are living with their husbands. They will include undergraduate students and graduate students who are registered for academic credit and are full-time students at Austin Peay State University, i.e., registered for 12 or more quarter hours.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature revealed that research on women returning to school has not focused on any one area. While much of the literature recommended special services for the mature woman student, including counseling concerning family issues, these family issues were rarely specified. Very little has been written concerning the effect of the spouse on the returning student. According to Rice (1982), much of the research in this new area that has come about in the last few years has been a result of support by the University of Michigan's Center for Continuing Education for Women. It was found in unpublished master's theses and dissertations. Much more has been written recently about the problems of the working wife. Many areas of concern overlap between these two groups of women; therefore, pertinent information from that field was used in this review.

Regardless of her reason for returning to school, the married re-entry woman made a choice that affected many people. According to Bardwick (1971), the very process of making the decision was affected by the husband. She claimed that it was the husband's orientation that was decisive. Markus (1973), Rice (1982) and Tittle and Denker (1977) found that the spouse and children were extremely important variables in a woman's decision to return to school and the success or failure of the

outcome of that choice.

Once she had returned to school, acquiescing to the opinions of her family, she usually found herself to be the next formidable obstacle. Until now, the most challenging obstacle she had faced may have been organization of the household or perhaps chairing a volunteer committee. Her self-esteem may have been extremely low, and she may have wondered why she returned to college. She believed she could not keep up. She may have feared making poor grades and speaking up in the classroom, revealing her ignorance (Brooks, 1976; Bergquist, 1973; Brandenburg, 1974; Letchworth, 1970; Watkins, 1974). "Often the husband's very achievements become the unrealistic yardstick to which comparisons of their own rusty skills are made" (Bergquist, 1973, p. 59).

Generally, her fears have been unfounded. Returning females have proven themselves to be very capable of satisfactory academic performance. Tittle and Denker (1977) reported that older women have achieved better than the 18 to 25 age group. They found that the majority of women in their study maintained a B average. These results supported Badenhop and Johanson (1980). They found that re-entry women had significantly higher overall gradepoint averages and were even more likely to achieve a 3.5 to 4.0 average after their return.

The higher grade point averages of re-entry women were matched by higher goals. Forty percent were intending to go on to doctoral or professional level degrees. Students who

graduated from high school and who continued their education without interruption were seeking only bachelor's degrees or had no specific degree plans (Badenhoop & Johanson, 1980). Bergquist (1973, p. 61) disagreed, however, saying that many mature women go back with limited ambitions because they are late starters. She claimed that some 70% choose the helping professions. "Is it because of our socialization or do we feel less guilty 'doing good'?" According to Watkins (1974), the returning student is serious, with definite goals, but she lacks self-confidence and has low self-expectation.

Markus (1973) found improved self-esteem in the successful re-entry student but no grounds to establish a causal relationship. She felt that perhaps the presence of positive self-esteem was necessary for the student to choose to return to school and once there it increased, contingent upon her success.

Zatlin, Storandt, and Botwinick (1973), in their study of the personality and values of women continuing their education after thirty-five years of age, attempted to show that women returning to college in their middle years were unique in terms of personality characteristics, job values, and interest and agreement with the feminist movement. They found, instead, that these women were similar to women of the same age who had received their college education years earlier at the traditional time. They did find, however, that these re-entry women students were less motivated by social values and were less submissive.

According to Berkove (1979), when the husband gave his support for the wife's return to school, it was with the assumption that the household routine would remain the same. The wives attempted to arrange their schedules accordingly. Brandenburg (1974) noted that as these women became more involved in schoolwork, they had less time for family, friends and housework. The husbands frequently resisted and sometimes were openly hostile. Brooks (1976) found this resistance ranged from overt hostility to subtle behaviors, such as asking for affection when their wives were studying. Steele (1974) found that unsympathetic husbands made school adjustment for wives difficult by being uncooperative in baby-sitting duties or in failing to cooperate with finances. The husbands were supportive until they found their wives were taking school seriously and were not as readily available as before.

Probably one of the greatest problems the returning female student had was guilt. It was a subject that appeared in nearly every article reviewed about the re-entry woman (Angrist & Almquist, 1975; Ballmer & Cozby, 1981; Brooks, 1976; Hooper, 1979; LeFevre, 1972; Rice, 1982; Tittle & Denker, 1977; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Brandenburg (1974), Letchworth (1970) and Sales, Shore & Bolitho (1980) blamed socialization and sex-role stereotyping for the pervasive guilt feelings. Letchworth suggested that because men are products of the same culture, they maintain the guilt at a high level. According to Letchworth, the re-entry woman felt that she was selfish

for neglecting the full responsibilities of her home and family and that she was selfish for spending money on education and depriving her family of material goods. She also felt guilty for her aggressiveness in seeking new goals and for competing with her husband.

Stephenson (1976) also blamed socialization for the guilt feelings. She stated,

Though they know what they read and hear is right for them they are filled with guilt feelings as they begin to place themselves first in their own lives. They will carry this guilt into the family evidenced by increased desire for approval from the members. Because the family members are under more pressure due to the wife-mother's choice of returning to college they will often react negatively. (p. 17)

Brooks (1976) concurred,

A woman may feel conflicted and guilty if unable to attend to her family needs as fully as she had in the past. She may feel selfish and thus question whether she has a right to meet her own needs. At the same time, she feels a strong need to do well academically to prove to both herself and her family that her new venture

is worthwhile. Such feelings frequently create conflicting goals; being a Super-mom versus getting all A's. (p. 36)

These conflicting goals became a constant source of anguish unless the re-entry student made a choice or alleviated some of the problem by better time management (Brooks, 1976; Buccieri, 1970; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). Even so, the guilt remained. The re-entry student, to ease her guilt, attempted to do well as wife, mother and housekeeper as well as student.

Berkove (1976) also referred to the Supermom, Whether it was due to long established habit or ingrained pressure to meet traditional expectations, these women heaped burden upon burden on themselves--perhaps unnecessarily--in an effort to maintain their standing as "Super Mom" and "Super Wife" (and now "Super Student") even at the expense of their health. (p. 6)

Berkove (1979) stated that, for these women, these extra and unnecessary burdens were an effort to gain their husband's emotional support. Perhaps they felt that their husbands would not object to their return to school if everything remained the same at home.

According to Stephenson (1980),

The re-entry woman develops stress as she

fulfills one role out of a sense of duty and wishes she were fulfilling another. What she considers to be desirable roles may be quite disagreeable to her husband.

(p. 1)

The resolution of the problem can be quite difficult. The re-entry woman is expected to maintain traditional roles while adding the responsibilities of course work. The conflict between the student and her family over the family's style of life will affect the woman's student role directly (Diedrick, 1977; Hooper, 1979; Rice, 1982; Saslaw, 1981).

Rice (1982) found that some returning students may quit school if the family is not cooperative, yet others may continue in spite of objections, creating internal pressure and external conflict. For some, separation or divorce is the solution to the problem of role conflict (Steele, 1974). Parelman (1974), as cited by Hooper (1979), found that if the marriage is already nontraditional in role assignments, the family will be more cooperative. Apparently, if the equilibrium is not threatened, the family is able to adjust without difficulty.

This problem of multiple roles is something that must be managed if the re-entry student is to avoid stress. Choosing the salient role lessens the strain, clarifying the student's priorities. However, if the student chooses a role other than the family first, the husband's disagreement can increase the

strain (Van Meter & Agronow, 1982).

The husband's attitude is an important factor in the success of the re-entry student. If it is unfavorable, the wife may never return to school (Bardwick, 1971). If she returns in spite of his attitude, she may eventually drop out. The educated husband is the one most likely to approve of his wife's return to school. He may, in fact, encourage and support her and, according to Angrist and Almquist (1975), he may even accommodate his work plans to her needs. Van Meter and Agronow (1982) suggested that having a less educated husband created more of a role strain in women who put family role first. Possibly, they suppressed their need to achieve outside the home in order to satisfy their husbands' traditional view that the family will be the woman's primary role responsibility. In contrast, LeFevre (1972) found that graduate students were even more likely to have husbands who share and support their intellectual values and career ambitions.

Some husbands are ambivalent, feeling proud of their wives' accomplishments but threatened by their new autonomy (Ballmer & Cozby, 1981). Traditionally, men have taken their dominant role for granted and they perceive this dominance to be in jeopardy. They are no longer assured deference simply because they are male (Bernard, 1977). The husband's place as the chief wage earner has in the past assured his importance in the home. He has felt he had the final word on matters of importance because he was necessary for the survival and welfare

of the family. Now, with the wife becoming educated, potentially able to provide, and increasingly self-confident in her equal ability to manage a household, the husband no longer feels indispensable.

Hooper (1979) administered an Outcome Anxiety Scale, designed for her study, to 24 men married to re-entry women. She attributed the high scores on the scale to concern about what the wife will do once she has finished school. The husband may fear that she will want to move or will become depressed if she fails to find employment. Some may worry about the effect of the wife's new ideas or different friends. The husbands do seem to worry about the effect of the wife's return to school on the marital relationship. The more anxious they become, the less supportive they admit to being.

Aside from approval and emotional support, some husbands give behavioral support. This behavioral support is seen as helping with child care, shopping and household chores. Studies of this area leave no doubt, however, that the husband actually helps very little even though the wife perceives that he is helping more (Berkove, 1979; Markus, 1973; Steele, 1974; Stephenson, 1976, 1980; Spitze & Waite, 1981; Van Meter & Agrovow, 1982).

Full-time homemakers spend anywhere from 52 to 55 hours per week on housework while the woman who works outside the home spends 26 hours a week on housework (Bird, 1979; Nickles & Ashcraft, 1981). It is not surprising, then, that the re-entry student who attempts perfection in all her roles is overwhelmed.

While it is reasonable to assume that the husbands help more with household chores, Markus (1973) found that 67% of women students did all or most of the housework while only 17% of husbands did half the housework while their wives were in school. Berkove (1976) found that 20% of the husbands did not help at all with household tasks and 55% helped to some extent. Stephenson (1976, 1980) found that 40% of the husbands did not help with housework any more after the wife returned to school than he did before her return. The chores they did were most often the traditional male tasks, such as lawn or car care. She found that only 44% of the children helped more than before.

How does the woman's return to school affect the marriage? In a study at Skyline College in San Bruno, California, Steele (1974) found that most women (91%) reported their relationships with their husbands prior to their return to school as good or excellent. Only 9% admitted they were poor. The fact that so many reported their marriages as good or excellent could be attributed to the fact that this is the socially acceptable answer. In our society, we are expected to have good marriages. According to Gruver and Labadie (1975), studies report that about 35% of marriages in the general population are, in fact, not entirely happy. After returning to school, 72% reported no change in the relationship, 20% felt it improved and 8% thought it became worse. The greatest percentage of women whose marriages became worse as a result of returning to school were

the ones who reported their marriages as being poor prior to returning to school. The stress from the wife's new work load or new and unshared interests could have made the poor marriages worse.

De Groot (1980) found in her study of male and female returnees that, for female students and their spouses, marital happiness is dependent on the amount of support the student perceives her spouse to be giving and the degree of congruence between her perceptions of spouse support and her spouse's perceptions. Because there are so many considerations other than attending class and accomplishing the required work, the re-entry woman may discover that she suffers from a great deal of stress--stress that is created by role conflict and role overload. She has added the student role to her many other roles and is trying to do them all well. She feels guilty relaxing in any one of her traditional roles, such as housekeeper, so that she may do well in her new role. Receiving little help from her husband in doing household chores, she attempts to do it all. With little or no time for recreation and relaxation, she becomes tense and feels under pressure (Berkove, 1979; Hooper, 1979; Rice, 1982).

According to Roach (1976), as long as the mother maintains a traditional role, the family has positive attitudes toward her as wife and mother. When she returns to the classroom and eradicates her fears and insecurities, she finds the experience challenging and revitalizing. Inevitably, this brings about a

new view of herself and concomitant changes in attitudes. As she tries to explain her new feelings of autonomy and self-value, the family is perplexed that she seems to be rejecting or at least redefining her old role--the one they prefer. This is sometimes interpreted as a lack of caring. The mother who has very good feelings about herself does not understand their reactions, and tension results. Brooks (1976) stated that the confusion and depression found in re-entry women is not neurotic but stems from situational stress incurred in her multiple roles.

One of Berkove's (1979) most significant findings was the relationship between areas of husband support and the woman's experience of stress. It was found that women who experienced significantly fewer problems were receiving the highest level of husband support. Their husbands had more liberal attitudes regarding women's roles and capabilities, were emotionally more supportive of their return to school, supported them financially and were involved in many household tasks.

Markus (1973) found that the wife who received more support from her husband and family was more likely to remain in school. Sixty-four percent of these women who received support had more positive feelings about the school experience.

In summary, the mature woman who returns to school may find herself in a situation far more complex than she anticipated. Finding that she has overcome her fears and insecurities about returning to school, she is pleased with her success and

new self-confidence. However, her husband's ambivalence may create new problems. Attempting to please him by maintaining a high level of competence in her traditional role and satisfying herself by maintaining a high level of competence in her new student role, she discovers herself to be in an extremely stressful position. The kind of support she receives from her husband will determine her success and retention as a college student.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to show the effect of marital status on the role adjustment of the re-entry student, a survey was conducted of the married, female students at Austin Peay State University. The research sample consisted of female students, twenty-five or older, with spouse present, who were full-time students enrolled for at least twelve quarter hours during the Spring Quarter, 1983. A list of these students was obtained from the Austin Peay State University Computer Center. The list also included single students since marital status is not programmed into student data. The student's marital status was obtained from the completed questionnaire.

A cover letter was sent to all of the 394 persons whose names were on the list to inform them about the questionnaire they would be receiving and to explain that it was research for a thesis. The students were not informed that the study was to determine the effects of their husband's influence on them as students. This was done in an effort to obtain completely honest, unbiased answers. Confidentiality was stressed. One letter was returned because the student had withdrawn from school.

One week after the cover letters were sent out, 393 questionnaires were distributed in the Campus Post Office boxes.

Forty-four percent, or 174, completed questionnaires were returned. Of those, 56 questionnaires were not used in tabulating the results because they were returned by single women or women who were not living with spouses. Thus, a total of 118 questionnaires were analyzed for the study.

The questionnaire contained thirty questions covering six areas: personal data, study and time use, socio-economic level, evaluation of student's problems, student's perception of husband's attitudes, and areas of responsibility. Space was also available for additional comments.

The students were instructed to mark only the best answer. If more than one answer was checked, that question was not used in tabulating the results. Therefore, the N for some questions was less than 118. The results are shown in percentages.

No code numbers or any other means of identifying the respondents were used. Complete confidentiality was thus insured.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The findings of this study generally agree with those reported in the literature. The re-entry female at Austin Peay State University is a serious student making good grades and perceives that she has the support of her husband.

It was found that a full 48% of Austin Peay re-entry students have an overall grade point average of 3.5 or better, and 31% have an average between 3.0 and 3.49. This means that a majority (79%) of re-entry females are maintaining a B average or better. This is in keeping with the findings of Tittle and Denker (1977) and Badenhop and Johanson (1980).

TABLE 1

Overall Grade Point Average

| Grade Point Average | N | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Less than 1.5 | 0 | |
| 1.5-1.99 | 1 | 1% |
| 2.0-2.49 | 8 | 7% |
| 2.5-2.99 | 15 | 13% |
| 3.0-3.49 | 35 | 31% |
| 3.5-4.0 | <u>55</u> | <u>48%</u> |
| | 114 | 100% |

N = 114

There are two possible explanations for the high grades of the re-entry woman. First, an older woman who is truly incapable of academic success probably will not return to school or if she does, will not remain in school, thus making the returnees a somewhat select group. Second, the older woman who summons the courage to return to school, overcoming some difficulties to do so, is going to make an effort to succeed. In other words, she is motivated.

The Austin Peay re-entry student has succeeded for reasons other than long hours of study. It was found that, as full-time students carrying a minimum of 12 hours, 47% studied only 8-14 hours per week. However, 44% do study 15 or more hours per week. It is surprising that these women who study less than 14 hours per week maintain such a high grade point average with a modest amount of study.

TABLE 2
Time Spent Studying

| Hours | N | Percent |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| 0-7 | 11 | 9% |
| 8-14 | 56 | 47% |
| 15-21 | 35 | 30% |
| 22 or more | <u>16</u> | <u>14%</u> |
| | 118 | 100% |

With home responsibilities and child care, they may have little time left for studying. While 25% of the women surveyed do not have children, 39% have children ages 4 or under. This may seriously limit the available time for studying. Twenty-eight percent have children between the ages of five and fifteen. This age group may also be demanding on the mother in terms of help with homework, arbitrating sibling arguments and chauffeuring.

TABLE 3
Age of Youngest Child

| Age | N | Percent |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| No children | 30 | 25% |
| 4 or under | 46 | 39% |
| 5-10 | 21 | 18% |
| 11-15 | 18 | 10% |
| 16 or over | <u>10</u> | <u>8%</u> |
| | 118 | 100% |

N = 118

Feelings of increased independence in these women have coincided with the return to college. Prior to returning to college, 17% considered themselves very independent, and 58% considered themselves independent. After returning to college, there was an increase in feelings of independence with 23% now feeling very independent and 66% feeling independent.

TABLE 4
Independence Prior to College

| Independence | N | Percent |
|------------------|----------|-----------|
| Very independent | 20 | 17% |
| Independent | 67 | 58% |
| Dependent | 28 | 24% |
| Very dependent | <u>2</u> | <u>1%</u> |
| | 114 | 100% |

N = 114

TABLE 5
Independence After Return

| Independence | N | Percent |
|------------------|----------|-----------|
| Very independent | 27 | 23% |
| Independent | 77 | 66% |
| Dependent | 11 | 9% |
| Very dependent | <u>2</u> | <u>2%</u> |
| | 117 | 100% |

N = 117

The number of women who feel dependent or very dependent decreased from 25% to 11%. One woman specifically mentioned that she was more dependent now than prior to returning to school because she wanted a college degree and was dependent

upon her husband for the financial means of achieving it.

When asked how important is a future career, 58% replied that it was extremely important to them. This finding is consistent with the Watkin's (1974) study in which women who returned to college did so not just to relieve boredom but to prepare for a future career. According to this study, they have serious goals in mind, and this determination is the basis for the motivation of women who return to school and succeed in spite of many difficulties. Five percent said that a future career is only an "insurance policy." For them, a future career would be contingent upon the loss of present financial support, such as the death of their husband.

TABLE 6
Importance of Career

| Importance | N | Percent |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|
| Extremely important | 68 | 58% |
| Moderately important | 23 | 20% |
| Important | 19 | 16% |
| Not very important | 1 | 1% |
| An "insurance policy" | <u>6</u> | <u>5%</u> |
| | 117 | 100% |

N = 117

Re-entry women encounter many problems when returning to the school situation. Acquiring good study habits and coping

with financial burden are the two most difficult problems the women had. This is understandable when it is taken into account that 51% have family incomes of less than \$20,000 per year. The difficulty of acquiring good study habits is reflected in the few hours per week these students spend studying.

The third most difficult problem is lack of self-confidence. Nine percent listed this as their most difficult problem. Surprisingly, of those who lack self-confidence, 70% have been attending school five or more quarters and are maintaining a 3.0 average or better. Apparently, academic success has done little to give them self-confidence.

TABLE 7

Most Difficult Problem in School Situation

| Problem | N | Percent |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Course work | 5 | 5% |
| Acquiring good study habits | 26 | 24% |
| Adjusting to role of student | 2 | 2% |
| Getting along with teachers | 0 | |
| Age difference of other students | 1 | 1% |
| Poor academic counseling | 8 | 7% |
| Insufficient help in determining goals | 5 | 5% |
| Lack of self-confidence | 10 | 9% |
| Financial burden | 21 | 20% |
| No serious problems | 26 | 24% |
| Other | <u>3</u> | <u>3%</u> |
| | 107 | 100% |

An increased work load was the most difficult personal problem encountered by twenty-five percent of the women. This agrees with all the findings that point to role overload (Berkove, 1976; Brooks, 1976). These women have taken on the student role, adding that to their other roles, thus increasing their work. The fact that another 18% of the women have guilt feelings about lack of time with the family and 19% have difficulty finding time to study would suggest that they have not lessened their performance in any of their other roles. They are attempting, instead, to do it all, as described by Berkove and Brooks when they used the term, "Supermom."

Only three percent found objections from their husbands to be a problem. Many women stated, instead, that they could not do it without their husbands' support. Evidently, the majority of these families are used to making decisions together and working together to carry them out, because when asked to describe their husbands in terms of their leadership role, a majority (72%) described their husbands as being democratic. Apparently, the wife is considered an equal partner in the relationship, and her desires are as important as the husband's in decision making. It also could be that, as Hooper (1979) found, the husbands are supportive because they do not feel anxious about the effects of the return to school on their marriage. Twenty percent describe their husbands as authoritarian, and only 8% think their husbands are unconcerned about decision-making in the home.

TABLE 8

Most Difficult Personal Problem

| Problem | N | Percent |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Increased work load | 26 | 25% |
| Finding time to study | 20 | 19% |
| Objections from children | 0 | |
| Objections from husband | 3 | 3% |
| Guilt about lack of time with family | 19 | 18% |
| Financial burden | 11 | 11% |
| Lack of confidence | 1 | 2% |
| No serious problem | 20 | 19% |
| Other | <u>3</u> | <u>3%</u> |
| | 104 | 100% |

N = 104

Prior to returning to college, 50% of the women had excellent relationships with their husbands and 41% had fairly good relationships. Only 9% admitted to having fairly poor or poor relationships. These results are identical to those of the Skyline College Study (Steele, 1974). Perhaps the figure for excellent marital relationships is high because that is considered an acceptable answer in our society. Another possibility is that having a loving, trusting relationship with her spouse enables the older woman to return to the stimulation of the academic environment without the spouse

feeling threatened by her involvement outside the home.

After returning to college, 52% reported no change in their relationship with their husbands. Another 35% reported that their relationships with their husbands improved. It is quite possible that if they were bored while staying at home that this created friction in the form of increased demands on the husband's time. Returning to school, the wife developed interests of her own and the relationship improved. Another possible explanation could be that increased self-esteem in the re-entry student enabled the relationship to improve.

TABLE 9

Relationship Before Return to College

| Relationship | N | Percent |
|--------------|----------|-----------|
| Excellent | 58 | 50% |
| Fairly good | 48 | 41% |
| Fairly poor | 8 | 7% |
| Poor | <u>2</u> | <u>2%</u> |
| | 116 | 100% |

N = 116

TABLE 10

Effect of Return on Relationship

| Effect | N | Percent |
|------------------|----------|-----------|
| Greatly improved | 12 | 10% |
| Somewhat better | 29 | 25% |
| No change | 60 | 52% |
| Somewhat worse | 14 | 12% |
| Much worse | <u>1</u> | <u>1%</u> |
| | 116 | 100% |

N = 116

Only 13% feel their relationships worsened after they returned to school. Of those 14 women whose relationships worsened, nine had fairly good marriages prior to returning and four had excellent marriages. Only one person who had a fairly poor marriage felt it worsened. Half of the fourteen women whose marriages worsened had authoritarian husbands. Only one of these seven felt she had increased her independence. Perhaps these authoritarian husbands feel they are losing control, even though the wives do not feel that way because they still consider him to be authoritarian.

It was found in this survey that 36% of the re-entry women perceive their husbands to have occupations that are considered professional, 21% are service workers and 18% are foremen or craftsmen. Laborers comprise 7% and 5% are husbands who are

retired. A wide range of occupations was represented with the largest percentage being considered professional.

The husbands of these students are generally well educated. Thirty-eight percent have bachelor's degrees or better, and 39% have some college experience.

TABLE 11
Husband's Occupation

| Occupation | N | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Professional or semi-professional | 42 | 36% |
| Business manager or proprietor | 8 | 7% |
| Clerical worker or sales worker | 6 | 5% |
| Foreman, craftsman, operative | 21 | 18% |
| Service worker | 24 | 21% |
| Laborer (non-farm) | 8 | 7% |
| Laborer (farm) | 0 | |
| Retired | <u>6</u> | <u>5%</u> |
| | 115 | 100% |

N = 115

TABLE 12

Husband's Education

| Education | N | Percent |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Less than high school graduate | 4 | 3% |
| High School graduate | 23 | 20% |
| Some college | 46 | 39% |
| Bachelors degree | 32 | 27% |
| Graduate degree | 9 | 8% |
| Post-graduate | <u>4</u> | <u>3%</u> |
| | 118 | 100% |

N = 118

It was proposed that some wives would discover that their husband's career might place obligations on them, interfering with their student role and increasing the role strain. This was found to be true with 46% of the women surveyed. With 15% of the students, this occurs frequently. However, in 23% it seldom occurs and in 31%, the husbands' careers never interfere at all.

Most returning students perceived their husbands to be proud of them for furthering their education. This was indicated among 81% of the women surveyed. There was no change in 4%, and ambivalent feelings existed in 8%. While it had been speculated that many husbands would feel threatened by their wives' return to school, this occurred actually in only 7% of the cases surveyed.

TABLE 13
Husband's Feelings

| Feelings | N | Percent |
|------------|----------|-----------|
| Proud | 95 | 81% |
| Ambivalent | 10 | 8% |
| No change | 5 | 4% |
| Threatened | <u>8</u> | <u>7%</u> |
| | 118 | 100% |

N = 118

Given this information, it is not surprising to find that 75% of the re-entry students credit their husbands' feelings as having a positive effect on them as students. Possibly, knowing their husbands are proud of them encourages them and enables them to continue even when things become difficult. It is inconsistent, though, that with only 7% of the students reporting husbands who feel threatened, 11% report their husband's feelings as causing some or a great hindrance. Perhaps the students who comprise the 4% difference are bothered by the lack of change in their husbands' feelings.

TABLE 14
Effect of Husband's Feelings

| Effect | N | Percent |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|
| A great help | 61 | 53% |
| Some help | 26 | 22% |
| No effect | 16 | 14% |
| Some hindrance | 11 | 9% |
| A great hindrance | <u>2</u> | <u>2%</u> |
| | 116 | 100% |

N = 116

Asked the hypothetical question of what they would do if their husbands asked them to quit school, 10% specifically wrote that their husbands would not even ask. Compromising by taking fewer courses was the reply of 32%, and 33% stated they would neither quit nor compromise. This again is evidence of the determination and motivation of these returning students.

TABLE 15

Reaction to Husband's Request to Quit

| Reaction | N | Percent |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Quit permanently | 1 | 1% |
| Quit temporarily | 19 | 16% |
| Compromise, take fewer courses | 37 | 32% |
| Not quit or compromise | 39 | 33% |
| Wouldn't ask | 12 | 10% |
| Depends | 6 | 5% |
| Miscellaneous | <u>3</u> | <u>3%</u> |
| | 117 | 100% |

N = 117

In a further attempt to discover the re-entry student's roles, the students were asked if their husbands help with household chores. Fifty-six percent replied that their husbands help more since they returned to college. Of this group, 13% are regarded as helping out much more than before. However, for 43% of the students, there was no change at all. These 43% were truly adding the new student role to an already full schedule which did not change.

TABLE 16

Husband's Help with Chores

| Help | N | Percent |
|-----------|----------|---------------|
| Much more | 15 | 13% |
| More | 50 | 43% |
| No change | 51 | 43% |
| Less | 1 | 1% |
| Much less | <u>0</u> | <u> </u> |
| | 117 | 100% |

N = 117

What is interesting is that while so many wives perceive their husbands as helping out more with household chores, the husbands, in fact, still are not as involved with household tasks as the wives. The re-entry women do 58% of the chores alone, the men do 24% alone and they share the duties of 14% of the chores. Children only help with 1.4% of the chores. For the most part, the men handle the traditionally male tasks such as lawn care, house maintenance and car care. It is not surprising, then, that 68% believe their grades would improve if they had fewer duties at home. After class attendance, studying and performing home duties, 82% of these women say they have little or no free time.

TABLE 17

Division of Chores

| Chore | Wife | Husband | Children | Other | Husband & Wife |
|--|------|---------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| Shopping | 80% | 8% | 0 | 0 | 12% |
| Household Management | 83% | 6% | 0 | 0 | 10% |
| Household Record keeping | 71% | 20% | 0 | 0 | 9% |
| Food preparation | 76% | 6% | 2% | 0 | 16% |
| House care | 61% | 7% | 4% | 3% | 25% |
| House maintenance | 38% | 42% | 0 | 5% | 14% |
| Yard care | 28% | 41% | 7% | 6% | 17% |
| Car care | 12% | 72% | 0 | 4% | 12% |
| Physical and Other care (i.e., bathing children, taking children to doctor) | 74% | 10% | 0 | 2% | 14% |
| Average | 58% | 24% | 1.4% | 2.2% | 14.3% |

In summary, the women who return to college at Austin Peay State University are succeeding as students and maintaining multiple roles. These women perceive that their husbands are cooperative and proud of their achievements as students. They believe their marital relationship has either remained the same or has improved since their return to college. Their role as student has not been adversely affected by the presence of their spouses in the home.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect the presence of the spouse had on the married female re-entry student. It was found that the Austin Peay State University re-entry student perceives that she has a supportive husband. He is proud of her success as a college student and his feelings do affect her positively in her student role.

The husbands of these women have at least some college education and most are perceived by their wives as professionals. Studies have shown that professional men are the most likely to agree with and support their wives' return to college (Angrist & Almquist, 1975).

Most of the women reported good relationships with their husbands which improved even more after their return. Perhaps the husband's new found pride in his wife's accomplishments produced an increased mutual respect. As one re-entry student put it:

My husband is very proud of me and has been a big help. I have been out of high school almost 10 years and the support I'm getting from my family has made college a lot easier for me. My husband is, very willingly, paying for my education and I feel fortunate to have a husband who cares so much.

Agreeing with other research (Stephenson, 1976, 1980; Berkove, 1976; Markus, 1973), this study showed that the student's husbands are helping more with the household chores. Upon closer examination, however, it is found that the wives still do most of the chores. While 24% of the husbands have total responsibility for many chores, this can be misleading. The chores that the husbands do are mostly the traditionally male chores, such as lawn mowing, car care or house maintenance. These chores are not done as frequently, nor do they take as much time as the daily chores of the housewife, such as cooking, cleaning and laundry. In other words, the student wife spends considerably more time at the chores than the percentages would indicate. In spite of these actual figures, the re-entry wife is pleased that the husband helps out more. This is evident in the wife who says:

I never have time for anything. My washing, house cleaning, etc., is never done. If it wasn't for my family I would not survive at all!

The husbands may help, but apparently the household chores are still considered the woman's responsibility. This is indicated by the wife who comments:

As terrific as my husband is about helping with the housekeeping, I still have to ask when I get behind the workload at school.

The husband's career often places increased work on the

student wife. Nearly half the wives responded that this interferes with their student role. For 15%, it is a frequent occurrence.

One student states:

My husband recently moved to a high pressured job which requires many overtime hours at the office. Due to this change, I've taken care of most of the family affairs which in turn takes an awful load off of him.

She does not mention the effects of the increased load on her student role.

Another writes:

My husband wants me to get a degree but he hasn't changed any of his schedules in order to help out more at home. This means I do everything I did prior to returning to school plus school.

Perhaps it can best be summed up by the student who says:

It seems to me that a young, unmarried student living in the dorms or at home would have an ideal study situation; no responsibilities.

The problems are not all one way, though. Some husbands suffer also. A minister's wife confesses:

One of the difficult things for me coming back to school besides the time to study is the strain that it puts on my husband's

job. We have only one car and two children at home. When I have the car my husband stays at home with the children. He cannot get out and visit or go to his office. We do not have the financial means to get another car. This puts quite a strain on me and him.

Concern about her increased work load showed in the comments of one re-entry student:

Going to school is viewed as a way to fulfill some extra time that everyone thinks I have. And studying is something that I am supposed to do in whatever way I can. My obligations are the same whether I'm in or out of school. This bothers me because I find that I have to cram-study rather than studying as I go along.

The Austin Peay re-entry women have guilt feelings and often feel pressured in their student role. The woman who complained that she never had time for anything said:

I feel guilty a lot and wish I had more free time to do the things I want to do. I feel so tied down with school . . . Sometimes I wonder if I will ever get out from under the responsibilities of school.

In spite of all the hardships, the re-entry women are

succeeding. The majority are good students with B averages or better, and they have the perseverance to work against these hardships. One student, apparently enlightened by the intervening years, wrote:

In comparing my grades and study habits from going to Austin Peay State University 1973-77 and presently, my grades show much improvement. Being older, I find I have my priorities straightened out, and am taking a much more serious approach. I wish I could get that point across to some of the younger single men and women that do enough just to get by.

A number of factors may explain what it is that helps these women overcome the difficulties in their multiple roles. Possibly, it is having a caring husband who gives emotional support, a kind of support that is more meaningful than help with household duties. There were many comments that pointed out the gratitude for emotional support:

My husband has been so fantastic and supportive of my returning to school. I couldn't get through the nursing program without his moral support and his help with our children.

Another wife says:

My husband has been very supportive financially and emotionally and it would have been extremely difficult without his positive and caring attitude.

And another:

I would not be able to go to school without the support and confidence my husband and family give me.

One husband became more than supportive:

My husband has been so supportive of my return to school that he has considered returning to school himself.

But what of the unfortunate wife who does not have her husband's support, either emotionally or behaviorally? One such woman writes:

When I returned to college I did so to fulfill a need my marriage couldn't.

We were very unhappy and hopelessly so.

College became my outlet for success.

My marriage became even more severely torn. My husband made it as hard as he could for me. My education was another threat to him. We divorced, lived apart 7 months, remarried after some changes. Now we work together, play together, and he supports my efforts totally. He realizes that my education is for our life not just my life.

Not all such stories have happy endings. Many interesting comments were made by divorced or separated women whose

responses were not included in the results of the survey. They shed some light on the students who were affected by unsupportive husbands.

One woman, separated from her husband, states:

Having two conflicting careers and two different sets of friends and social activities has really upset me. Our separation is mainly due to this and my husband's opinion that I am now too independent.

Another student had a different problem:

Because of the time school required along with full time employment when I first returned to school, my husband found other (female) interests and we are no longer married. I feel it would have happened anyway but school had a big bearing on the way and time it happened.

And another:

While college hastened my divorce, it was not the cause, perhaps the straw that broke the camel's back, as the old saying goes.

But one student feels her return caused her divorce:

I'm divorced and have been for two years. I feel my need to go to college and study for

a professional level career of my choice had some impact on our breakup. I feel my husband saw it as a threat--we grew apart.

Clearly, the return to school does in some cases hasten the failure of a bad marriage or even cause a marriage to fail.

The married women in the study appear to have overcome difficulties caused by the return to school and are remaining as students while keeping their marriages intact. These are the survivors. This could account for the fact that 70% of the respondents have been in school for five quarters or more. The women who cannot overcome the difficulties, such as an uncooperative husband, drop out of school after a few quarters and are no longer enrolled.

Further research needs to be conducted on the women who drop out to find out the reasons why they did not continue. It could provide valuable information for student counselors. Perhaps special counseling programs could be set up to aid these potential drop-outs by giving marital counseling and helping them to remain in college.

For the women who succeed, college can be a positive experience. A sixty-five year old student comments:

(I) have nearly a 3.0 average--would like to have done better and had I been completely alone with no family obligations I think I would have. But I have no regrets. I would not change my family situation and I have

thoroughly enjoyed these past two years . . .

All in all it has been great.

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APPENDIX I

April 18, 1983

Dear Re-entry Student,

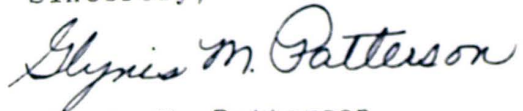
I realize that you have been asked to answer many questionnaires this year but I hope that you will take the time to answer one that you will be receiving shortly. You have been selected because you are a female student over twenty-four years old. The questionnaire is designed to find out any special differences between you and the average teenage college student.

This questionnaire is to aid in research for my thesis as part of the requirements for completion of my Master's Degree. In order to get a valid test I need as many responses as possible. This is entirely voluntary and your cooperation would be greatly appreciated. The results will be completely anonymous.

If you would like the results of the survey there will be a request form sent with the questionnaire to be returned separately to insure anonymity.

Again, I ask your cooperation in returning the questionnaire. It will not only help me to achieve a more valid survey but it will help future female re-entry students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glynis M. Patterson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Glynis M. Patterson

APPENDIX II

May 19, 1983

Dear Re-entry Student,

The response to the questionnaire was overwhelming and I can never thank you enough! I received 167 responses to the 393 questionnaires sent out and they're still coming in. This will definitely provide a good number with which to work.

As many of you single students remarked, most of the questions dealt with husbands. I am researching the re-entry female student's perception of her husband's feeling about her as a student, and if this affects her as a student. The University Computer Center does not have student's marital status on file, so the questionnaires went out to single as well as married students. To bias the sampling as little as possible, I did not mention the specific nature of the research. Many of you divorced students had provocative comments and the information will be used in my thesis. There is enough information from single as well as married students to generate further studies.

As of today I have received 111 questionnaires from married, female re-entry students. I will be working on an analysis of the results for weeks to come. The following is a composite of the married female at APSU.

You've been married between 6-10 years, are 25-30 years old and your husband is also 25-30 years old. Your youngest child is 4 or under or you have no children.

You were independent before returning to college and are independent now. A new career is extremely important to you.

You're taking 13-15 credit hours which is what you normally take, half of you study 8-14 hours per week and over 80% of you have a 3.0 average or better. You either have no serious problems in school or are having difficulty acquiring good study habits. Many of you are burdened financially by attending college. In your personal life, the most difficult problems are an increased work load and your feelings of guilt about lack of time with your family.

Your relationship with your husband is the same as it always was....excellent, and your husband is proud of you for increasing your education. Your husband's feelings about your return to school are a great help to you as a student. If your husband asked you to quit school, you would not quit; you might take fewer courses. Thirteen of you wrote in that he wouldn't ask you to quit.

You were about evenly split as to whether or not your husband's career placed obligations on you that interfered with your student role.

Now that you're in college your husband helps out more but you still do most of the chores. Your husbands do the traditionally male tasks. Approximately two-thirds of you consider your husbands to be democratic rather than authoritarian or laissez-faire.

Each and every one of you is a survivor. Many of you are working very hard to succeed even though conditions are not ideal. You proved it by your determinism (the overwhelming majority of you have been here 5 or more quarters) and you have proven it by your grades.

I would welcome any further comments from you. Good luck to you in the future. Again, many thanks for your cooperation.

Glynis Patterson

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glynis Patterson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.

P. O. Box 9505

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RE-ENTRY WOMEN

please check only the one best answer for each question.

1. Are you married and living with your husband? Yes___No___

2. How many years have you been married?

0-5 _____

6-10 _____

11-15 _____

16-25 _____

26 or more _____

3. What is your age?

25-30 _____

31-35 _____

36-40 _____

41-50 _____

51 or over _____

4. What is your husband's age?

25-30 _____

31-35 _____

36-40 _____

41-50 _____

51 or over _____

5. What is the age of your youngest child?

No children _____

4 or under _____

5-10 _____

11-15 _____

16 or over _____

6. If preparing for a new career, your future career is

Extremely important to you _____

Moderately important to you _____

Important to you _____

Not very important to you _____

Only an "insurance policy" _____

7. Prior to returning to college, you considered yourself

Very independent _____

Independent _____

Dependent _____

Very dependent _____

8. Now that you have returned to college you see yourself as

Very independent _____

Independent _____

Dependent _____

Very dependent _____

9. Approximately how many hours per week do you study?
- 0-7 _____
- 8-14 _____
- 15-21 _____
- 22 or more _____
10. For how many credit hours are you currently registered?
- 3-6 _____
- 7-12 _____
- 13-15 _____
- 16 or more _____
11. How many hours do you normally take?
- 3-6 _____
- 7-12 _____
- 13-15 _____
- 16 or more _____
12. For how many quarters have you been attending?
- one _____
- two _____
- three _____
- four _____
- five or more _____

13. What is your overall GPA for the courses you have taken at APSU?

Less than 1.5 _____

1.5-1.99 _____

2.0-2.49 _____

2.5-2.99 _____

3.0-3.49 _____

3.5-4.0 _____

14. After school hours, studying and home duties you have

Plenty of free time _____

Some free time _____

Little free time _____

No free time _____

15. Are you employed:

No _____

Yes, part time _____ Number of hours _____

Yes, full time _____ Number of hours _____

16. What is your husband's occupation?

Professional or semi-professional _____

Business manager or proprietor _____

Clerical worker or sales worker _____

Foreman, craftsman, operative _____

Service worker _____

Laborer (non-farm) _____

Laborer (farm) _____

Retired _____

What is the title of your husband's job?

17. What is the highest level of education attained by your husband?

Less than high school graduate _____

High school graduate _____

Some college _____

Bachelors degree _____

Graduate degree _____

Post-graduate _____

18. What is your annual family income?

Under 4,999 _____

5,000-9,999 _____

10,000-19,999 _____

20,000-29,999 _____

30,000-39,999 _____

40,000-49,999 _____

50,000 and over _____

19. In returning to school, what is the most difficult problem which you have encountered in the school situation?

Course work _____

Acquiring good study habits _____

Adjusting to role of students _____

Getting along with teachers _____

Age difference of other students _____

Poor academic counseling _____

Insufficient help in determining goals _____

Lack of self-confidence _____

Financial burden _____

No serious problems _____

Other _____

20. In your personal life, what is the most difficult problem resulting from your return to school?

Increased work load _____

Finding time to study _____

Objections from children _____

Objections from husband _____

My guilt about lack of time with family _____

Financial burden _____

Lack of confidence _____

No serious problem _____

Other _____

21. Before returning to college what was your relationship with your husband?

Excellent _____

Fairly good _____

Fairly poor _____

Poor _____

22. What has been the effect of returning to school on your relationship with your husband?

Greatly improved _____

Somewhat better _____

No change _____

Somewhat worse _____

Much worse _____

23. Increasing your education makes your husband feel
Proud of you _____
Ambivalent _____
No change _____
Threatened _____
24. Do your husband's feelings about your returning to school
have an effect on you as a student?
A great help _____
Some help _____
No effect _____
Some hindrance _____
A great hindrance _____
25. If your husband asked you to quit school you would
Quit permanently _____
Quit temporarily _____
Compromise, take fewer courses _____
Not quit or compromise _____
Other _____
26. Does your husband's career place obligations on you that
interfere with your student role?
Frequently _____
Sometimes _____
Very seldom _____
Never _____

27. Generally speaking, which family member does the following chores. Place the following appropriate number in the space provided.

1. You 2. Husband 3. Children 4. Other

Shopping _____

Household Management _____

Household record keeping _____

Food preparation _____

House care _____

House maintenance _____

Yard care _____

Car care _____

Physical and other care _____

(Examples; bathing children

taking children to doctor) _____

28. As a result of your returning to college your husband helps out with chores

Much more _____

More _____

No change _____

Less _____

Much Less _____

29. If I had fewer duties at home my grades would be
- Greatly improved _____
- Improved somewhat _____
- No change _____
- Worse _____

30. Which do you think best describes your husband?
- Authoritarian - desires control _____
- Democratic - willing to share decisions _____
- Laissez-faire - unconcerned about decision-making _____

31. Please feel free to make additional comments.