

PERCEPTIONS OF RE-ENTRY MATURE FEMALE GRADUATE STUDENTS IN  
PROFESSIONAL AND GRADUATE FACULTIES: RATIONALE, INFLUENCES AND  
BARRIERS

by

Marilyn Ann Day

A thesis

presented to the University of Manitoba

in partial fulfillment for the degree

Master of Education

Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1987

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MARILYN ANN DAY

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

This form is to be completed in the light of the Faculty of Education policy on ethical review. This policy requires that Committee members take into account the relevant standards of the discipline concerned as well as, where appropriate, the standards specified by certain external funding bodies.

Project Identification

(to be filled in by investigator)

Investigator(s) Marilyn Day

Title Perception of Re-entry Mature Female Graduate Students  
in Professional and Graduate Faculties: Rationale, Influences  
and Barriers

This is to certify that the Review Committee has examined the research and experimental development project indicated above and concludes that the research meets the appropriate standards of ethical conduct in research with human subjects.

Date: 1/31/86 Signature of chairperson:

With love  
to my support system:  
Thurber,  
my family,  
my friends  
and  
the women  
who allowed me to  
become part of their lives  
and let this study become a reality.

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## Abstract

### Perceptions of Re-entry Mature Female Graduate Students in Professional and Graduate Faculties: Rationale, Influences and Barriers.

This qualitative study explores the perceptions of female graduates over thirty years of age enrolled in professional or graduate schools at the University of Manitoba. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven women, each from a different faculty, who had interrupted their former academic studies. Content analysis of the tape recorded interviews revealed certain common themes.

Research questions were used to investigate the motives, influences, and barriers experienced. Analysis shows three common reasons why mature women pursue advanced degrees: intellectual challenge, vocational concerns and personal development. Major influences are life change events, such as the realization of personal ageing, their children leaving home and feeling the need to contribute to or "do something with their lives". The barriers experienced are grouped into three categories based on the literature: institutional, situational and dispositional. Institutional barriers describe difficulties "unfair" evaluation of academic credits, the lack of in-depth course and program advice and dis-satisfaction with teaching methods for mature adults. The situational barriers are feelings of stress due to strict time management and feelings of academic inadequacies. Other themes, like age and personal health are interwoven among the dispositional barriers of feelings of doubt, guilt, academic success and personal changes. Dispositional barriers seem to be individualistic and related to feelings of self-confidence and stress.

New findings describe support systems, age and effects of stress. Children, husbands, friends, in-laws, parents and staff members are described as parts of these vital support systems. Combinations of family and friends and individual strengths appear to aid the women in their drive toward academic success. Age is an element with many facets. For some age is a "trigger" to start, for others it is an isolating factor yet all respondents report both pleasant and unpleasant experiences related to age. High levels of stress due to individual experiences and situations are dispersed among the themes. Findings suggest that mature female graduates academic studies and they make effective use personal support systems to overcome difficulties.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Methodology

#### Purpose of the Study

This is a descriptive study which explores the perceptions of mature female graduates enrolled in either professional or graduate faculties at the University of Manitoba. The study investigates the reasons these women decided to re-enter university, the influences which affected their decision and the barriers which they encountered when they put their decision into action. It is anticipated that the results of the study will promote not only an understanding of these perceptions but a more complete recognition of such women and their study-related concerns. Perhaps the academic careers of mature women can be even more complete and fruitful if faculty members, administrators and fellow students come to know them better.

#### Definitions of Terms

Definitions for the educational terms used in this study are provided to improve the quality of communication between the reader and the researcher. The meanings utilized are written in layman's language in order to facilitate clear thinking and to promote use of precise terms in describing the topic.

Graduate schools or graduate faculties are post-secondary schools which offer courses and programs leading to either the Master or Doctoral degree in North America. Examples of such schools and faculties include Medicine, Law, Agriculture, Education, Arts and Science.

Professional schools are post-secondary academic institutions which offer courses and programs leading to professionally related post-baccalaureate degrees, such as Medicine, Law and Education.

Re-entry mature female graduates are women of thirty years of age or older who have interrupted their academic education after receiving their undergraduate degree and are currently re-enrolled in university for the purpose of earning a graduate or professional degree.

Life change events, for the purposes of this study, are considered to be major events in the lives of the women interviewed which, for them cause a sense of disorientation. Such events might be death of a spouse, children leaving home, loss of a job or moving from one location to another.

### Significance of the Study

The study reported here is of concern not only to re-entry female graduates in professional and graduate faculties, but to faculty members and the administration staff of educational institutions. Research which examines the perceptions of re-entry mature female graduates in the university is useful because this minority is increasing in numbers as the general population increases (Gavin, 1981; Trussler, 1983) and significant differences are observed in literature between these returning graduate women and the traditional graduate student. These differences include their reasons for returning and their life experiences. Many have experienced critical life events such as the death of a spouse, separation or divorce while struggling with diverse career and familial responsibilities which enlarge their field of experiences and promote personal perceptions not usually expected in traditional students. In some situations a "disorientating dilemma" such as the last child leaving home, coupled with other life processes, for instance, the concept of growing older, has caused these women to ask questions such as "Who am I?" and "What am I going to

do with the rest of my life?" (Mezirow, 1978). Consequently these women arrive at university with a variety of atypical experiences and expectations.

The transition from career, wife and/or mother to student can be intimidating as new roles are being tested and unanticipated barriers are encountered (Kaplan, 1981). Research (Daniels, 1981), reveals that misunderstandings between faculty and re-entry women tend to be due to academia's lack of pertinent and available information regarding these untraditional students. Faculty members, unaware of the perceptions of these women, may do little to encourage their socialization, to recognize their insights or to promote their participation in designing their graduate programs. Daniels (1981) suggests that research on this new "clientele" will improve understanding among academics and encourage a more positive atmosphere for learning in addition to promoting better quality communication between these groups.

This study, which focuses on women in Canadian graduate and professional schools, appears timely on two counts: first, the number of re-entry graduate women is increasing in university and it is incumbent upon educational institutions to create the best possible course design and administration policy to facilitate their enrollment and to support their academic efforts; second, there is a limited number of North American studies of re-entry mature female graduates in graduate and professional schools. Because most available information is based on American research, this study will add Canadian information to the topic.

#### Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into four chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study. It includes sub-sections on the Significance, the

Organization, and Methodology of the thesis. Chapter Two is a review of the literature related to the topic. Chapter Three describes the profiles of seven mature female graduates who were enrolled in Graduate School or Professional Faculties at the University of Manitoba at the time of the study. Chapter Four identifies, analyzes and discusses themes which emerge from the interviews based on the three research questions. The themes tend to be in sub-clusters due to their tendency to interweave. Conclusions and recommendations of the study complete Chapter Four.

#### Basic Assumptions

The following are the researcher's underlying assumptions:

1. There are re-entry mature female graduate students at the University of Manitoba who have had experiences which are similar to those described by re-entry women in current literature.
2. There are seven re-entry women who will consent to be part of this study.
3. There are administration and faculty staff that want both to understand and to be of assistance to this minority group of students.
4. There is concern in the university for the welfare of minority groups such as this one.

#### Limitations of the Study

From a quantitative perspective a significant limitation in this study is the sample size: seven women were interviewed. However, because generalizations cannot be made from perception studies, this size of sample is considered appropriate.

Researcher biases may be considered to be a limitation in some research. However, in this study, in order for the women to establish a sense of trust with the interviewer, it is necessary for them to recognize that both they and the investigator have experienced similar situations. Because the investigator is a mature female graduate returning to university who has experienced circumstances closely identified by the interviewees, this close relationship is a strength rather than a limitation.

#### Methods and Procedures in Qualitative Research

The methods and procedures used in qualitative research and in this perception study are described in this section. Descriptions of the sources, the collection procedures and the interview strategy used to obtain the data are included. A discussion of the method used for analysis concludes the section.

#### Qualitative Research

In the study of human behavior, there appears to be two major concepts in research methodology: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative methodology describes "what" in research, whereas quantitative methodology describes "how much". Quantitative methodology is not suitable for a study such as this because it tends to be discipline-based and restrictive in nature. For example procedures such as rigidly defining the topic or making predictions regarding the outcome of research before it is conducted, may limit and narrow perception studies. Perception studies require "new insights and findings (which) are necessary to understanding" (Van Maanen, Dabbs, Faulkner, 1982).

The object of this study is to explore and to promote understanding the perceptions of a minority group of university students: re-entry mature female graduates in professional or graduate schools at the University of Manitoba. Qualitative research methods have been chosen for this study because they tend to allow the researcher to become involved with the respondents and to adapt research methods to each particular situation. These methods encourage "increased awareness of the non-scientific components of research" and recognize that research with people is not "detached, neutral or purely descriptive" but is "a social and cultural process with deeply rooted moral, political and personal overtones" (Van Maanen, Dabbs & Faulkner, 1982, p.14). This statement implies that data from research dealing with people may not be adequately collected or described by using statistical data and there may be aspects to research with people which require personalized care by the researcher. Qualitative methodology allows the investigator to become involved with the interviewees rather than to attempt to be "detached or neutral " while she does her research.

Two research procedures were selected for this study: semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Both procedures are described in the following section. Innovations found to be useful in the interview procedure are discussed in the semi-structured interview division.

#### Semi-structured Interviews

The data for analysis was obtained through two probing in-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted individually with each of the seven respondents. These interviews were semi-structured so that time was used effectively. The women were extremely busy with both academic programs

and their personal lives, so time was important to them. To obtain information appropriate to the theme of the study each major question was composed of a series of components which was used to facilitate the women's replies and to help them to clarify their perceptions. These interviews were tape-recorded by permission and one is transcribed in complete detail.

The process of setting up interviews involves several steps. The first is to decide who will be interviewed. Guba and Lincoln (1981) and others (Carney, 1983; Bogdan & Bilken, 1982) claim that the nature of the problem being investigated determines who will be interviewed. This notion implies that research is limited by the definition of the people who are central to the issue. Consequently, many people within a population will not be suitable for interviewing for this study as it involves only women who fit the definition for "re-entry women". Further clarification of the data source is discussed in the section, Data Sources.

Although arrangements for the initial interview may be made by someone other than the interviewer, according to Guba & Lincoln (1981) there are two main reasons why the final plans should be carried out by the interviewer. First, effective qualitative research depends upon the quality of the interview information and the quality of the interview is related to the mutual co-operation and rapport established between the interviewer and interviewee. When the interviewer conducts the initial interview, feelings of mutual trust and confidence are invited, and if established, will create greater possibilities of high quality data emerging from the interviews. In other words, if the interviewer and the interviewee establish close rapport, not only are feelings of mutual trust established but a sense of joint ownership develops for the research. The personal investment of the

investigator in the issue being studied can foster interview information which is more likely to be not only highly personal, but will give greater insights into the issues discussed (Carney, 1983). Second, initial contact made by the interviewer indicates to the interviewee the interviewer's sense of courtesy and respect as well as the degree of her personal investment, all of which are important elements in establishing mutual confidence and trust.

Linked to the above mentioned idea of establishing trust is that, at times, the interviewee requires re-assurance from the investigator. For example, when certain questions arise, perhaps related to the background of the investigator, the purpose of the study or the methodology of the study, it is important that the interviewer be available to re-assure her and answer her queries. Greater feelings of trust are likely to be generated if the answers come from the investigator, herself, rather than from someone who is remotely tied to the study, such as a research assistant. Clarification by the interviewer at times like this is essential to creating "openness" based on mutual trust.

The second step in setting up the interview is the consideration of time. Because the lives of the women interviewed for this study tend to be very active and the women tend to experience many time constraints, each of the interviewees was given a copy of the research proposal abstract on the assumption that if the women knew the basic objectives and intents of the study they would be more focused upon the issue being studied when they came to the interview. In fact, the result was the women came to the interview with prepared questions and ideas, ready to share their perceptions with the interviewer. This is a beneficial procedure because,

from the outset, it promotes not only prudent use of time for both the interviewer and the interviewee but it actively involves the interviewee.

To ensure that interviewees from a wide variety of faculties would be involved in the study, initial contact was made through key faculty members. Once the investigator received the names of the possible interviewees, the remaining arrangements and interviews were conducted by the investigator. Care was taken to arrange the interviews at the convenience of the interviewees and in a location of their choice. Consequently, interviews did not occur in constant locations but often occurred in homes, laboratory settings, offices and faculty common rooms.

The third step is the preparation of an introduction of the study. This part of the interview is brief, easily understood and designed to help establish personal ties and to reduce any feelings of awkwardness or reluctance on the part of the interviewee about confiding in the interviewer. During this time 'ground rules', such as how the interview may be structured and the use of the tape recorder are explained by the investigator. In some instances the interviewees proposed minor changes to the suggested interview procedure and the resulting compromise established in a cooperative manner fostered high quality discussions.

Usually two interviews were conducted per student. However, one student requested a third interview to clarify and to re-state some sections of her profile. The initial interview lasted about 75 to 90 minutes and the second tended to be 45 minutes to 75 minutes in duration. When the third was used, it lasted 60 minutes. All interviews were tape recorded with the interviewee's knowledge and permission. The first interview was based primarily on the three research questions and the abstract. The second interview concentrated on questions formulated by the investigator after

studying the first interview tapes and recorded not only the responses to the subsequent questions but also the 'tone' of the interviewee's experiential descriptions. For instance, a common check for 'tone' used by the interviewer was: "Are these the right words?". Often the most suitable method to describe a situation or feeling was to use direct quotes from the interviews which were particularly acceptable to each interviewee. The second interview was an effective means for verifying, modifying and clarifying information from the first interview. At this time each woman was re-assured that she will see and have the right to alter the final copy of her profile before it appears in this document.

Methods of recording information are discussed in a supportive manner because, in some instances, such processes could have been distracting and could have interfered with the women's ability to talk "freely". Other details were explained, such as the necessity to comply with the university's legal ethics requirement which compels the women to sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the research.

The fourth step in the semi-structured interview depended upon the interviewee and the nature of the study. Because the role of the interviewer involves 'active listening' and clear expression of ideas (Carney, 1983), the interviewer was careful to ask questions which indicated to the respondents some framework for a sense of security, but were not "leading" their responses. There appeared to be a fine line that the interviewer had to tread..... between "leading" the interviewee and allowing the interviewee to "wallow" in her thoughts, seemingly going nowhere and becoming frustrated. This, perhaps, was the most difficult part of the interviews for both. The interviewees voiced some confusion and concern over the lack of "structure" in their first interview. This was not considered

to be a serious issue, once the interviewer further explained the reasons for the seeming lack of structure. The second interview actually had more structure than the first interview because the interviewer generally had many questions and thoughts from the first interview which required further explanations and illustrations.

As the interviews took place several modifications were found to be useful for improving the quality of the interviews. One such innovation was a pre-interview consultation session which was valuable for clarifying interview strategy and procedures. It is also, it seemed, a testing time - a time for the interviewees to judge the level of commitment they wanted to make and degree to which the interviewer can be trusted. This opportunity gives the interviewer an opportunity to explain further her reasons for conducting this particular study and this, in turn, invited further questions from the interviewees. Situations of this nature appeared to increase the quality of the interviews.

A fifth step, not built into the original plan, was added: a de-briefing session which was held after each interview. During this period the discussion centered on what was good about the interview questions, the interview procedures and what the interviewer could do to improve the sessions. It allowed the interviewee space to voice her concerns and feelings about how she felt the sessions were going. Some suggestions which resulted from the de-briefing sessions include: re-phrasing replies which appeared to help the interviewees to remember better their ideas; playing back the tape to reduce their repeating information and experiences; more structured interviews. For the women interviewed the latter suggestion appears to be a partial solution to their concern: 'where do I begin?' The de-briefing process helped the interviewer to structure the

second interview in a manner which maximized the strengths of all concerned. One interviewee suggested that by re-playing her previous taped interview her memory would be "re-freshed" and would give her time to think of other valuable information which could be added to the research data.

It is essential for the interviewer to create as 'natural as possible' a setting or atmosphere for the interviewees. "Naturalness" promotes the emergence of insights into perceptions (Guba, 1981). The interviewee needs to feel physically comfortable in order to talk "freely" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Private interview settings seemed to indicate to the women being interviewed that not only confidentiality was valued by the interviewer but that the interviewee was encouraged to speak openly. Consulting the interviewee about the location where she might be most comfortable for the initial and succeeding interviews was found to be valuable as it gave the interviewees a feeling of some control over the interview process. Consultation with the interviewees provided insight into the degree of flexibility of the interviewer. Most preferred informal settings such as private living rooms, faculty common rooms and other quiet places to more formal ones, such as faculty offices, because they felt more relaxed and more free to speak honestly about the concerns of the study. Most were more concerned about the convenience and privacy of the interview location than the comfort of the surroundings.

### Content Analysis

As the purpose of this study is to understand the messages of re-entry mature female graduates, it is important for the researcher to recognize how people communicate. Krippendorff (1980) states that in order

to understand messages we must recognize the 'communication processes, functions, (and) effects in society and systems'. Holsti, a recognized authority in content analysis research, defines content analysis as 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages' (cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 240). Because this study anticipates using interview "messages" for selecting emerging themes and making inferences in a manner similar to that described by Holsti, content analysis seems to be the most appropriate method of analysis.

Messages may be written, oral or pictorial (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Whatever form communication takes, the researcher must be aware of three components: content, effect and intent. "Content" refers to the messages collected in the interviews; "effect" relates to the impression that the message or "content" has on the intended listener; "intent" alludes to the primary purpose in the message. Inferences, suggestions and conclusions are interpreted by the researcher though they may be brought out more clearly from the perceived intent, either direct or indirect. Indirect inferences are subtle and difficult to assess, whereas direct inferences are concrete and more easily assessed.

Because researchers recognize content analysis as objective and systematic in selecting special aspects of the language used and relating them to inferences, content analysis is recommended as a technique to improve the quality of inferences (Borg & Gall, 1983; Carney, 1979). Content analysis allows "specified characteristics" to emerge from the respondents' replies which give the researcher insights into the perceptions that are not possible in rationalistic research and "virtually guarantees that categories (of inference) will be grounded in data and, hence, in the content" (Guba and

Lincoln, 1981, p.240). This study uses both content analysis and clustering to investigate the meanings and important elements in the interviews of the interviewees. Clustering is a method of sorting and refers to groups of closely related ideas and elements in the interviews.

Other important reasons for choosing content analysis according to Krippendorff (1980) is that content analysis is exploratory in nature and is concerned with "real phenomena" such as a person's feelings and perceptions. Content analysis has the capability of being predictive and "specializes in symbolic events to which other research methods are insensitive" (p.10). Reports utilizing content analysis are sensitive to information which is difficult to describe numerically. Finally, content analysis allows the researcher to create communication links and to examine critically the research design independent of the results of the research. This means that the methodology is separate from the success or failure of the results of the study; in fact there is no hypothesis to be tested so there is no sense of failure or success in the traditional sense of the term (Krippendorff, 1980; Van Maanen, Dabbs, Faulkner, 1982).

#### Data Sources

For the purposes of this study re-entry mature female graduates are defined as women thirty years of age or older who have interrupted their academic education for a period of five years following their receiving undergraduate degree and who have returned to earn a post-graduate or professional degree. Seven women who currently are registered or were registered at the initiation of this study in either Graduate or Professional Schools at the University of Manitoba are the sample selection. These women were selected partially because they represented different age

groups as well as different graduate and professional schools. The arbitrary number of interviewees was based on the availability of suitable interviewees from each Graduate or Professional School included in the study.

Only one woman was interviewed from each faculty. This is not considered to be problematic because each faculty represented recommended the interviewee or the contact person. Consequently the criteria for the selection of the sample was based on the knowledge of key staff in different faculties who listed a group of suitable female students in their faculty who fit the re-entry description. One woman from each of seven faculties was contacted by phone and asked if she would be interested in becoming part of the study. In some instances only one name was suggested and in other situations the woman chosen was the first who answered the phone and consented to be part of the study. At the time of the interviews these women were currently enrolled in the graduate sections of Medicine, Education, Science, Business Administration, Social Work and Human Ecology and the Faculty of Law, all at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.

#### Research questions

Three research questions form the basis for the interviews:

- a) Why do mature women graduates re-enroll in university?
- b) What, if any, people or events influenced their decisions to return?
- c) What barriers were encountered by the women when they re-entered university?

In recent literature (Gavin, 1981; Kaplan, 1981; Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Trussler, 1983), the two most common reasons given for returning to academe appear to be "intellectual interests" and vocational preparation. Different rationale motives were expressed in the Fisher-Thompson study (1980) which revealed that the decision to re-enter tended to be related to the desire to complete an otherwise unfinished task. Some wished to act as role models for their children while others sensed a desire for intellectual stimulation (Kimball, 1979). Although these perceptions will be explored further in the section on barriers they are mentioned here to clarify the reasons for asking the first question.

The second research question invites women to respond to the possibility that they were influenced by people or life change events in their decision to return to school. In one Canadian study, Kimball, (1979) found that a general dissatisfaction with the women's marriage or their lifestyle, was a significant life change event in deciding to return to study or to work. In other words these people needed to to be financially independent and they saw returning to study or to work as a means to that end. In the same study some indicated that the Womens' Movement literature had been a driving force behind their desire to return to school or to work.

Some re-entry women went through a traumatic period in their lives, such as the death of a spouse or the realization that they were not going to marry and be supported (Kaplan, 1981). The realization that they were going to be 'fully responsible for themselves for the rest of their lives', or as one woman said, 'to have to work for the rest of her life inspired her to do what

she had always wanted to do'. Others stated that they felt a sense of time "running out" on them (Kaplan, 1981).

The third research question explores the barriers and the problems encountered by re-entry mature female graduates when they enroll in university. The literature indicates that the obstacles identified by re-entry mature female graduates tend to be tradition created and implies that if mature female students are to be satisfactorily accommodated at university, certain changes are necessary. Registration policies which require letters of recommendation from former professors are an example of such changes. Many returning female graduates feel that graduate school entrance requirements are set up for the younger traditional student and that administrators are unaware of the difficulties encountered by those students who have been out of university for long periods. (Fisher-Thompson, 1980).

Researchers, (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Ekstrom, 1972) have classified into three groups the barriers and problems encountered by returning students: institutional, situational and dispositional. Institutional barriers include problems or difficulties which involve university admission policy or practices (Kaplan, 1981; Trussler, 1983). One example of such barriers is reflected by policies which ask that past educational documents be submitted as demonstration of academic excellence. Ironically, for many of the returning women, a mediocre undergraduate academic record had little or no bearing on the quality of work they did in graduate or professional school. Realizations such as this suggests that little credibility exists in the notion that undergraduate academic records are good indicators of success for this group of students and in fact may be detrimental to their being accepted by some faculties or universities (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Kaplan, 1981).

## Summary

Qualitative methodology is chosen for this study because it is the most appropriate method for collecting and analyzing data relating to perception research. The methods used include the semi-structured interview, which is used to collect the data, and content analysis which is used to examine and study the messages provided in the data.

Semi-structured interviews are appropriate in this study because the interviewer is permitted to become involved with the interviewees which advances the possibilities of higher level personal perceptions. Semi-structured interviews make allowances for variations in the interview approach, depending upon what best suits each individual. Consequently, each interview is uniquely different which results in high quality information for the study.

Content analysis is a suitable method for analyzing the data collected in this study because the researcher is interested in the 'emerging' themes found in the messages. The emerging themes are grounded in the data, in the interpretation by the interviewer and in the verification of the themes by the interviewees.

Reference was made at the beginning of this report to the notion that it was to be hoped that it would not be shelved and forgotten. The challenge and hope of the researcher is that the study will be well written and easily read so that the compelling story of these women will be used.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

There is a growing need for research which examines the perceptions of re-entry mature female graduates in university. This minority group of women is increasing in numbers as the general population increases (Gavin, 1981; Trussler, 1983). The literature reviewed for this study was written between 1972 and 1985.

Three themes emerge from related literature: motives, influences and barriers. The most striking differences between these graduate women and the traditional graduate student are their reasons for returning to graduate and professional schools. "Intellectual interest" or "self-development", which may be expressed as personal growth, is most often stated as a reason for returning to university. Another common reason is associated with the women's desire for career advancement or development.

Events which have influenced many of these women are critical life events. Death of a spouse, loss of a job, separation or divorce while they kept up with diverse career and familial responsibilities are often cited as having been instrumental in their decision to return to university. Frequently "disorientating dilemmas" coupled with other life processes such as the concept of "growing old", has caused them to make a critical examination of their life. Questions such as "Who am I?" and "What am I going to do with the rest of my life?" have culminated in a decision to return to university (Mezirow, 1978).

However, the transition from career, wife and/or mother to student can be frightening as new roles are being tried and unexpected barriers are often encountered (Kaplan, 1981). For example, misunderstandings between faculty and re-entry women due to academia's lack of pertinent and

available information regarding these untraditional students (Daniels, 1981) are noted by researchers. According to Daniels, faculty members, unaware of the perceptions of these women, may do little to encourage socialization, insights or participation in re-entry mature female graduate programs. Daniels' report suggests that research on this new "clientele" will improve understanding among academics and will promote a more positive atmosphere for learning.

Exploration of perceptions of mature female graduates enrolled in either professional or graduate faculties will promote the understanding of these perceptions. Consequently, the reasons for their decision to re-enter university; the influences which affected their decision, and the barriers which they encountered will be examined in six sections: Why Do Mature Female Graduates Re-enter University?, Influences, Barriers, Analysis, Observations, Summary.

#### Why do mature female graduates re-enter university?

In recent literature which has examined the motives of such women (Gavin, 1981; Kaplan, 1981; Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Trussler, 1983), the two most common reasons given for returning to academe appear to be to promote "intellectual interests" and vocational preparation. Motivational differences appear to differ depending upon the age of the re-entry women (Kaplan, 1981). Younger women tended to emphasize intellectual reasons for their decision to return, whereas the older graduates said that vocational training was the underlying motive for their decisions. Both younger and older graduates reported 'personal growth and development' as a primary reason for their re-entry decisions. Kaplan suggested that the desire for personal growth for these women was manifested in the establishment of

their personal identities which were closely tied to their desire to continue their education.

Different motives were expressed in the Fisher-Thompson study (1980). Because many of the women had interrupted their professional or graduate training for reasons of marriage, child-rearing, economics or moving from one location to another, the decision to re-enter tended to be the desire to complete an otherwise unfinished task. In other instances, the women expressed the wish to begin a new career and were currently earning a second degree in a new field of study (Trussler, 1983).

Two primary reasons for returning to university in the Kimball study (1979) were financial gain through vocational upgrading and the desire to change careers. It is significant that Kimball divided the women into two groups: those who were very definite about their decisions to re-enter and those who were very indefinite about their decisions. However, there are certain limitations to the usefulness of the information from this study because the responses of all mature female students, graduates and undergraduates, tended to be analyzed collectively, although there was some attempt to draw distinctions between graduate and undergraduate women. A further limitation to the Kimball study was that the research questions on returning to university were inter-woven with questions on returning to work which may have affected the analysis and information from the interviews as neither were clearly separated from the other.

Kaplan (1981) supported the idea that women return to university essentially to establish their personal identity. For some the return to school meant that they formed a new self-image while for others it meant forming a new identity. Other reasons reported for returning to school included those who wished to act as role models for their children. Some

sensed a desire for intellectual stimulation (Kimball,1979). These perceptions regarding why the women decided to return to school will be explored further in the section on barriers. Kaplan (1981) discussed the expected differences that might exist in the age cohorts' motivations to re-enter university. The study did suggest that women who were 30-40 years of age tend to return because of intellectual reasons whereas women who were over 40 years of age were more likely to return for vocational reasons. Although there was a trend it had only limited data support. Therefore, the expected differences did not emerge as strongly as suggested.

#### Influences

The second topic relating to this review is one which suggests that these women were influenced by people or life change events in their decision to return to school. In a Canadian study (Kimball, 1979) the women shared their perceptions of influences which had affected their decision. Their responses indicated general dissatisfaction with their marriages or their status in life. For example , several women said that their marriages were either bad or that they were separated or divorced and, therefore, they needed to to be financially independent. Others indicated that it was time for them to make a change in their lifestyle. In some instances, this change in lifestyle meant that they had stayed at home and raised a family and now it was time for them to change their focus to something outside the family.

Other influences were reported (Kimball, 1979). For example the Women's Movement literature was revealed as a driving force behind some women's desire to return to school. Others experienced a traumatic period in their lives, such as the death of a spouse or the realization that they

were not going to get married and be supported by a man (Kaplan, 1981) which caused them to re-evaluate their status. Benjamin and Levy state :

Life crisis points do, however, appear to encourage a return to school. Divorce or widowhood, may prompt a woman to seek further education because of emotional or financial needs. Even the fear of these changes in the marital life-cycle or the prospect of a husband's retirement may bring about a return. (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; p.32)

This realization that they were going to be fully responsible for themselves for the rest of their lives or as one woman said, "to have to work" for the rest of her life influenced her to do what she had always wanted to do. Others, especially those over 40 years of age, reported that they felt a sense of urgency (Kaplan, 1981). Again the decision was the result of a realization; in this instance, it was that if they were going to do something such as go back to school they had better get started before it was too late. There was a feeling that time was "running out" on them.

### Barriers

The barriers and problems encountered by re-entry mature female graduates when they enrolled in university is the third area to be explored. According to the women interviewed by Fisher-Thompson (1980), these obstacles tended to be tradition created. The women suggested that graduate school was set up for the younger traditional student and as such needed to make some changes in policy if mature female students were to be satisfactorily accommodated.

The barriers and problems reported by such women have been classified into three groups (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Ekstrom, 1972). The

three groups are: institutional, situational and dispositional. Institutional barriers were considered to be any problems or difficulties which involved university admission policy or practices (Kalpan, 1981; Trussler, 1983). An example of regulations which caused problems for re-entry women were the policies which ask for past educational documents which the university accepts as demonstration of their academic excellence and evidence of their commitment to their education. It was revealed in the interviews that poor academic record for these women in undergraduate study had little or no bearing on the quality of work done in graduate or professional school. In reality, re-entry women achieved excellent marks which appears to give little credibility to the notion that undergraduate marks are good indicators of success for this student group (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Kaplan, 1981).

Women in the Fisher-Thompson study (1980) reported other institutional problems such as "grade inflation". There was a sense that if their marks could be compared "fairly" with today's grades, their academic records would be more acceptable to the admissions office and the individual departments. However, the university tended to take their transcripts at face value, which, the women felt, put them at a disadvantage. In addition to these problems with marks, there were problems reported about credits being "too old". This means that the university had put an "age" on credits and that if the credits were too "aged" they were no longer considered "good". Related to the credit problem, was the problem women faced when attempting to fulfil the Graduate or Professional School entrance requirements. Because these requirements

changed from time to time, the re-entry women had difficulty completing them.

A bureaucratic policy which caused concern for these women was the need for letters of recommendation which are often required to gain entrance to graduate faculties or professional schools (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Fisher-Thompson, 1980). Because these letters tended to be acceptable only if they were written by former instructors in the field of study which the women wished to pursue, they were difficult to obtain. The difficulty arose as a result of the length of time that the women had been out of school. One woman said that her former teachers were either dead or would not remember her so that obtaining the required letter became a problem which was difficult or impossible to solve.

A third administrative regulation recognized as a difficulty for the women was the requirement for scores from standardized tests (Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Benjamin and Levy, 1979). These scores are valid for only five years and often the time from writing the tests to the date of re-entry was greater than five years. This situation demanded that some of the women be re-tested. The testing situation created feelings of anxiety and fear. Such feelings were at least partially responsible for poor test results and tended to give rise to negative feelings about returning to university. The interviews also revealed that many of the women had never taken standardized tests as undergraduates and were being exposed for the first time to this rigorous testing procedure.

Anxieties caused by testing situations were not the only source of concern for the women studied. The re-entry female graduates reported that finances were barriers to their entering university (Benjamin and Levy, (1979; Kaplan, 1981)). Fellowship monies were limited to the extent that

most of the women had to have a part-time job to assist in paying for their minimal living expenses. Kaplan (1981) reported that the women had four basic sources of finances: employment; spouse; fellowships and grants; loans. Single women received more aid from the universities than married women who tended to depend on three sources: employment, spouses and investments. Older women requested financial help less often than did younger women (Kaplan, 1981). For example, the women in the age agroup of thirty to thirty-four applied for more financial help than those who were over forty. Linked to this situation is the fact that more "younger" women received research assistance and grants than the "older" women received.

There are apt to be significant other barriers, such as marital status and gender, to gaining the financial assistance which is needed and given to female graduate students (Trussler, 1983; Kaplan, 1981). Trussler (1983) reported that married female students had more financial problems than married male students at University of Alberta. It appeared that the majority of part-time females were not eligible for assistance from the Canada Student Loans Program. However, the Alberta Government did offer assistance to a maximum of \$300 to cover the cost of books and tuition. Married women reported difficulty obtaining loans for educational purposes on their own signature and credentials.

The cost of housing was considered to be part of this classification (Benjamin and Levy, 1979). The problem of housing was recorded as a reason for some women to drop out of school. The problem of finances appeared to be a concern for both the lower and middle income returning female graduate.

Re-entry women in graduate and professional schools who were single parents tended to experience the greatest financial problems, while

married female students reported more financial problems than their male counterparts. Trussler (1983) suggests a partial explanation for some of the women's financial problems. Apparently at the time of the study the majority of the re-entry graduate women were part-time students and as such were not eligible for assistance under the Canada Student Loans Program because they are part-time rather than full time students.

Single re-entry female graduates received more research grants, assistantships, and loans than married women (Kaplan, 1981). Fellowships provide only minimal living expenses for some re-entry women (Benjamin & Levy). Consequently these women were often employed part-time in part-time paying jobs outside of their studies in order to continue their education. Married women report that they have difficulty obtaining loans if their request is not supported by their husband's signature. Kaplan (1981) found that medical and law students tended to be more likely supported by loans than re-entry women in other graduate and professional schools.

Class scheduling and non-uniform systems for the determination of advance standing credits were two other institutional barriers encountered by re-entry women (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Fisher-Thompson, 1980). Some institutions gave university credits for life-experience and other non-traditional learning experience. If they did grant such credits, however, the women were required to write a series of examinations which were designed to reveal the level of the women's knowledge. Fifty percent of the women reported that they had class scheduling difficulties with their courses while fifty percent did not (Benjamin and Levy, 1979). According to the women interviewed by Fisher-Thompson (1980), prerequisites were not offered every year and, as a result the required courses were not available in the year they were needed to enable the women to return to school. Some

women reported there were problems in course selection because there were few courses to choose from at graduate level in their area of study (Trussler, 1983).

Re-entry mature female graduates reported situations of staff attitude problems which were encountered at the department level (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Kaplan, 1981). There appeared to be a difference between the attitude of the university which welcomed these women according to the university calendar but when they got to the department in which they wished to study, eighty-six percent of the women faced negative or discouraging attitudes from the faculty staff. An explanation offered by Benjamin and Levy for this discrepancy was that although the university, Northwestern, welcomed the women and had accepted their credentials, it was the position of the individual departments to select only those students that they wanted. The acceptance of the women by the Graduate Faculty did not ensure that they were necessarily accepted in the department and it remained the responsibility of the graduate student to negotiate with the staff members of the department to obtain acceptance into the department. In other words, the department staff members might or might not reflect the university policy.

The university staff based their decision to reject applicants on four issues with respect to the women: the extent of their commitment, their age, their gender and their ability to handle multiple roles (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Kaplan, 1981). One woman reported that a staff member told her that 'women did not belong in the field that she wished to enter', while another recorded that a counsellor questioned her motives for returning to school so late in her life. Kaplan (1981) found that the older women were accepted less often than the younger ones. There

were some instances reported that suggested a lack of satisfactory communication between the returning graduates and their professors (Kaplan, 1981). Eighty-two percent of the women reported that there was no collegial relationship between themselves and their faculty staff.

This raises the issue of situational barriers. Situational barriers are the barriers that re-entry women encountered in their personal circumstances (Ekstrom, 1972). These tended to occur primarily in marital, child-care, financial resources and academic situations (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Trussler, 1983). The women expressed views on their husbands' and their children's attitudes about their return to school. It appeared that if the women were married their husbands overwhelmingly supported their decision to return but, coupled with statements of support, were suggestions that the husbands also expressed feelings of resentment and jealousy. Some of the female graduates reported that if their husbands did not have a similar level of education there were feelings of increased competition from their husbands. Some women returned to university in spite of their husbands wishes to the contrary.

Generally children were most supportive of their mother's return to school. However, women described situations where their children complained that their mothers were away a lot and that the children resented their mother's decision to return to university. In fact the majority of the women in the Benjamin and Levy study (1979) were mothers whose most common problem with the children was that the university had no facilities or support for child care. Some mothers needed surrogate mothers while others needed help when the children were ill. After school arrangements were also problematic. The women either paid for help or used the services of family, friends or neighbours to alleviate the situation. This

gives validity to the problem of stress brought about by the "motherhood" role and by the feeling of "not having enough" time. Trussler (1983) described the single women with children as having more "problems" than the married women with children.

Returning female graduates had difficulties with time management and role strain (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Trussler, 1983). Because of the changed priorities in their lives, many family activities had to be re-organized. For instance, more of the family members took part in household tasks such as cleaning and preparing meals. Consequently role changes had to take place in the family. Fathers and children had to share in meal preparation and other household tasks which they did not do previously. Married women described these situations as a "disruption of family life" (Trussler, 1983). There were changes in the levels of standards in the family too. For example, meal preparation became more simple and the house did not get cleaned as often. Women who had been working before their decision to return to school did not report the same problems with role strain as those who had not. In Trussler's study (1983) the women tended to come to university directly from employment and 'as a whole did not experience a great many problems' (p. 13).

Coupled with the role strain and the sense of "not having enough time" the women felt that their academic skills were "rusty" (Benjamin & Levy, 1979; Trussler, 1983). The feeling of having weak backgrounds or an inadequate preparation have been categorized as dispositional barriers by Ekstrom (1972). Ekstrom defined dispositional barriers as the barriers that re-entry women faced in their concepts of themselves and the world around them. Their self-concept may result in a sense of guilt, added role strain or academic anxiety depending on the individual. The older returning

graduates felt guilty about their academic ability. This was translated into concerns about their ability to do well academically. Single women expressed academic concern about having to write multiple choice exams. Although 32 percent of the married graduate women and 22 percent of the single women expressed a feeling of lack of confidence, women reported higher grade point averages than male graduates (Trussler, 1983).

Guilt was the most common dispositional barrier reported (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Kaplan, 1981). In these studies guilt took several forms but most often it was related to children. The women were especially concerned that they were leaving their children alone much of the time and that they were not spending time with the children as they grew up. Often the women said that they visited and shared in studies with their children as they cooked and cleaned or drove them to lessons. Money was another underlying reason for feelings of guilt. These women were concerned with the money that they were spending on their education and took out loans or used savings to pay for their schooling (Benjamin and Levy, 1979). A third area relating to feelings of guilt was to do with their perceived family responsibilities. Women expressed guilt feelings over their inability to accomplish the same family responsibilities they had before returning to university. However, this was largely self-induced as only a few women reported that other family members actually attempted to make them feel guilty. One study reported that twenty five percent of single women expressed that they had problems with their family and peers (Trussler, 1983).

The returning graduates spoke about the "personal cost" of their decision to return to study (Kaplan, 1981). One of the issues that appeared

in this topic was emotional exhaustion. The women felt tired and drained most of the time.

Finally, social isolation was an issue that was raised in several interviews (Benjamin and Levy, 1979; Kaplan, 1981; Trussler, 1983). Some women reported that they had not met re-entry mature female graduates other than the interviewer and felt isolated from society. More part-time female graduates said that they felt isolated than the full-time students (Trussler, 1983). Apparently the full-time graduates had "an age-peer group in place" which created the necessary support system for them.

Lack of socialization with the professionals in their fields of study are reported by mature women in graduate and professional schools (Kaplan, 1981). Women over forty years of age felt they were treated more like colleagues than those who were younger, however, the majority of them revealed feelings of isolation.

### Analysis

Some problems are encountered in reviewing the literature connected to re-entry mature female graduates in professional or graduate school. Reports of re-entry women who experience financial problems tend to be difficult to assess because the percentages of students who experience financial difficulties appear inconsistent. For example, Trussler (1983) reported that fifty percent of the women she interviewed had experienced some form of financial problems while others (Fisher-Thompson, 1980; Weinstein, 1980) only discuss the issue and do not refer to specific percentages in their reports.

The issue of financial barriers is confounded further. Trussler (1983), in Alberta, stated that re-entry women in graduate and professional

schools reported fewer financial problems than their counterparts in undergraduate schools. One possible explanation for this situation is that the women in graduate or professional programs may tend to be from higher income middle class families than those in undergraduate programs. However, Benjamin and Levy (1979) reported that their interviewees, who were from middle class families, had also experienced financial problems. Two questions arise from this information: Is the discrepancy due to differences between Canadian and American levels of income for middle class families; or are the differences due to the description of financial problems? The results of the present study describes finances from seven different points of view in chapter three and comments upon the women's perceptions in chapter four.

Connected to the first two concerns regarding financial barriers is marital status. Trussler (1983) reported that the greatest amount of financial difficulty was experienced by women who were single and had children. Women who were married but had no children, aired more examples of monetary difficulty than did their married male peers. Marital status was not explored as a financial barrier and so was not mentioned in the literature included in this review.

Another concern about the literature review is the differences which exist in the data sources which were found in the related literature. For example, the data source interviewed by Trussler (1983) was mature male and female students who were enrolled in either undergraduate, graduate, or professional schools. Others (Daniels, 1981; Kaplan, 1981) interviewed only mature female graduates, but Kimball (1979) combined women returning to work and returning to university in her interviews. Such wide diversity in the data sources may affect the information collected as in most instances

the analysis did not specifically separate the different groups interviewed. For instance, observations from such studies (Kimball, 1979; Trussler, 1983;) may be inappropriate for research on mature re-entry female graduates. Although, due to limited published documents on this topic, data has been selected with care and used where suitable, but analysis and observations must be approached with caution.

This study describes the perceptions of only mature re-entry female graduates who are registered in graduate or professional faculties at a Canadian university. Consequently, the analysis will only contain material related to this minority group.

#### Observations

Three themes appear to emerge from the literature: the motivations for the women to return; the influences which "triggered" their return; the barriers which they encountered. Although the studies reviewed show differences related to data sources and methodology, these three themes are consistent threads throughout the reviewed research. Common topics appear under these headings. For example, in each study the primary reasons reported for returning to university were "personal growth" and career development. The influences recorded in the literature were similar in nature. Women reported issues such as age, unsatisfactory marriages, a need for change in their lifestyle, or the death of a spouse as the influences which affected their decision. Barriers, as described in the literature, tend to be grouped under sub-headings such as institutional, situational and dispositional and appear in the reviewed literature. Such headings were found to be suitable for this study and a similar approach was adopted in Chapter four.

## Summary

The research reviewed is significant for re-entry female graduates in professional and graduate faculties, and for faculty, staff, and administration of higher education institutions. Understanding the perceptions of the minority group studied will, hopefully, promote a better quality of communication among the university groups who encounter re-entry women in their university careers. Although there is a limited number of North American studies of re-entry mature female graduates in graduate and professional schools, the study of re-entry women reported here seems timely because this student group is increasing in number. Consequently a major challenge faces higher educational institutions. If higher education wishes to be an effective part of the life of these "pioneering" women, new innovative courses and programs are necessary to produce prime opportunities which enhance academic success and intellectual stimulation. Finally, in order to facilitate enrollment and alleviate financial stress current administration policy needs to be adjusted to accommodate the diverse backgrounds and situations of re-entry females. Only time will tell if higher education can successfully meet the challenge. The results of this study are intended to assist in this process by providing perceptions of their experiences. The reports and analysis of their perceptions can, with careful consideration, provide clearer understanding of what and how these women feel toward those people with whom they come into contact. Consequently the challenge to understand this minority rests with higher education.

### Chapter 3 Profiles of Respondents

#### Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with the respondents. Descriptions of the perceptions of each woman interviewed aids recognition for each of the respondents as individuals and in the comprehension of their re-entry experiences.

To capture the essence of each respondent and to present sensitive personal profiles, the writing style of this chapter reflects each individual's novel vocabulary and speaking style. Unique words and phrasing, particular to each respondent, are used in this text to convey to the reader the individuality of each woman. Consequently, in this chapter there are noticeable changes from one profile to another in tone and verb tense as well as in writing style and sentence structures. Therefore, although the verb tense may not appear correct grammatically, the stated verb tense is critical to understanding the point at which each woman is at during her educational journey. Some feel they have completed a transition from one level to another, but others feel they are in transition.

Application of unacceptable or inappropriate words is one danger which lies in restating perceptions. In an effort to minimize such errors, each woman, during her first interview consented to read and correct any inaccuracies in her profile. Consequently, each was provided with a copy of her profile and was asked to make corrections where necessary. The respondents were asked to check other concerns: first, each was asked to confirm the legitimacy of key themes which the writer had identified or which had emerged from their personal interviews. Second, they were asked to examine the written copy of their personal profile for tone: the clarity

with which the writer expressed both the prevailing sentiments and respondent's traits, as well as, the emphases used. Finally they were asked to judge the authenticity of the recorded material. The profiles are the written results of careful consideration and interpretations of actual taped statements made by the respondents during their interviews and which they confirmed as accurate transcriptions.

The recorded respondents' views are identified by and are based upon actual quotes made by individuals during the interviews. Each profile is provided as a separate entity and has been accepted by each respondent as a factual statement describing their personal status and their views on the three research questions. The following elements are found in the profiles: age, educational background, work and related personal experiences as well as their responses to the three research questions.

## Profile #1

## Introduction

BA is a graduate registered nurse, who is 55 years of age and is registered in the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Business Management. She recalls first thinking of returning to school when she and her husband, who was retiring shortly, decided that she should go back to nursing in 1972. Their three daughters had expressed desires to go on with their education at university level and they "thought the extra money would be useful".

During the 1970's when there was pressure for Registered Nurses to turn their certificate into a Bachelor of Nursing degree, she inquired into the process. She had been out of formal schooling for 16 years and she discovered that her work experience and her nursing training were regarded as having little academic value. In order to earn a Bachelor of Nursing degree, she would have to return to university for three to four years. Consequently, BA decided that if she had to return to school and study for that length of time, she "may as well get another degree" which she felt would give her two options in the workplace.

BA registered in Administrative Studies at the University of Winnipeg as a regular student and graduated in 1980 with a degree in Administrative Studies. During this time she was part-time student, part-time general duty nurse, mother, wife, and nursing supervisor in one of the local hospitals.

In 1979 her husband became very ill with Alzheimer's Disease and was in a nursing home by July, 1980. During that time BA worked full time in a hospital, but by fall was feeling very restless and thought that she would see if she "could get into the M.B.A. (Master of Business Administration) Faculty at the University of Manitoba". Because her husband was "so very ill", she felt she needed something to keep her mind occupied

on weekends and in the evenings. In January, 1981, BA started the M.B.A. program. Although "this was not an easy time", once her "hand was to the plough (she) wanted to finish it".

From 1980 to 1983 many changes took place in BA's life: her position at the hospital changed to Director of Nursing; her husband died in 1983; she began working full time; studying part-time. In January, 1985, she felt the six year limit for obtaining her degree was running out and in order to finish, she "had better take a leave of absence from work". She set a schedule of sixty hours week for herself and graduated with a M.B.A. in May, 1986.

#### Reasons and Motives For Going Back To School

BA felt that she "needed a challenge" and that her "returning to school would be to advantage in administration which is where (she) was working." At that point in her life, BA recognized that she "needed something". Within three years she "went from having three daughters, a husband, a mother and sometimes a mother-in-law, living in the house to being alone". (She) "became a workaholic". BA recalls that she "was forced" to find something different because she found that things that she and her husband had always done together, she no longer could do. For example, they had always shared and done things together; he'd help her finish the dishes, then they would both go for a walk. She remembers feeling a drive "to find something different - something that was (hers)".

"Now I was all alone. I was nobody's wife, mother, daughter-in-law ... who expected this and that because of the title..... I guess, I .... wanted to do something for just me.....that was for me, rather than what others wanted me to do for them."

She assumes that she is not using education "to search for something" because she senses that she has already "arrived". The strong principles which are the basis for working, living and studying are demonstrated in all aspects of her life.

Going back to study was not a new task for BA - she says that she has been going to school for most of her life: "I hardly ever left school.....started at 17 with night school". This type of learning was an extension of what was natural to her - just more formalized!

BA has a history of working in nursing management so it is natural for her to think of studying Business Management. Her choice of program is applicable to nursing because her observations suggest that there is a "real shortage of capable administrative people" in hospitals. She believes that management in hospitals tends to be poor quality and she thinks that someone with nursing or clinical skills as well as management skills would improve the situation.

BA hopes that studying management at this level will free her from being tied to the Health Care field and perhaps open new areas of work for her. She anticipates that this area of study will broaden her scope, enhance her knowledge base and enlarge her working background. She views her studies as part of her personal professional development process as she senses that she is becoming better at what she was already working at - management.

### Influences

The life-change events experienced by BA may be legitimately accepted as the major influence in her decision to go on to university and complete her Masters work. These events which caused her to be alone and

to realize that she needed "something" which was her own was the trigger or spring which caused her to make the decision to continue her studying.

The other events which influenced her to change to another profession to continue her studying, was the attitude and refusal of the Nursing Faculty to credit her former training and experience as "valid knowledge".

### Institutional Barriers

Four entrance requirements that BA had to fulfil when she enrolled at the Faculty of Business Administration were: first, a letter which contained the reasons why she wanted to enter the M.B.A. program and a description of her experiential background; second, two letters of recommendation from places of employment which were not difficult to fulfil as she had worked several years in local hospitals; third, BA was required to write the General Mathematics Aptitude Test which is a general requirement for all students wishing to enroll in the M.B.A. program. She felt the test was a challenge and studied for it. BA says that she was nervous enough to be "really clicking" but not to panic when she wrote: "I never did panic in an exam ... I only can do the best I can". She achieved a score which was above average. The fourth requirement was a Grade Point Average of at least 3.5.

BA says: "I did not feel singled out in any way - no barriers at the institutional level" but thinks that having been a scholarship student for two years in her undergraduate program at the University of Winnipeg was a factor in her being accepted into the M.B.A. program. The Faculty of Business Administration granted her some credits for the basic Statistics course required at Graduate level because she already had taken statistics in her undergraduate program.

### Staff Attitudes

BA's preceptions of the professor's attitudes towards her being in class were "first of surprise that I was there..... and then of grudging admiration that I had made it through the courses .....and that I was there to work". One professor called her "Mother " in a class but she recalls that he only did that once!

### Instructional Methods

BA is annoyed with some of the instructional methods. The "games" approach had a limited degree of success for her as she felt she "knew before we started what was supposed to happen." Some times she didn't allow the outcome to take place or took it a step further than the professor expected or planned. When this happened it appeared to her that she threatened the professor. The results were that the professor almost taunted her for the rest of the course. "He seemed to pick topics or things to disagree with me on ..... I didn't let him away with it ..... if I didn't agree, I said so". She saw this course as a waste of her time, " something (else) would have been more valuable..... (it was) like having been in Grade 2 but having to do Grade 1 over again". Combinations of instructional methods were perceived as the best way for BA to learn. She especially enjoyed group discussions.

She felt that theories and experiences did not always match. She dealt with these situations by listening to the theory and then asking the professor to apply the theory to an example which she described. In this way she was able to place theory in an appropriate context which gave her greater insights but did not place the professor in an opposing position.

## Study Skills

Of the four new skills which BA had to learn the first was connected to her writing ability. She had to re-learn and refine her writing skills although she had been using these skills in the hospital to chart patients. Her writing was "concise, accurate and precise" and once she knew what she wanted to get across in her papers, she generally was "okay". But there were times when getting an initial start was difficult. Generally, she feels that her work experience was beneficial to her writing skills.

Second was learning to use the micro-computer. She had anticipated having to know how to use the computer so had taken courses in her undergraduate work but these were programming courses and were of little use to her in her Masters program:

"The micro-computers were foreign to me..... it took hours for me to do my assignments, but I wouldn't let anyone do them for me..... if I didn't do them myself I wasn't learning.... the professors didn't give a damn if you had the skills or not - the assignments had to be on time, and had to be presented in a professional manner".

Third, BA had to learn more effectively how to utilize the Library system. Initially she did not know how to use the microfiche, the catalogues, or computer search programs. She was unaware of the help she could receive from the Librarians.

The fourth area of concern for BA was related to doing research. She found that "just deciding what titles would help" in her research was a problem. For example, she was unused to checking the publishing dates on books for the relativity of reports. Because scanning techniques were unknown to her, going through ten to twelve books while looking for useful information was a big task as well as a new skill to learn.

Other skills had to be re-freshed: note-taking and listening skills were rusty. BA says that she was taking too many notes and did not understand them when she read them over later. In order to partially solve this problem she developed a new style of taking notes - writing less and listening to understand. Later, she filled in the bare places in her notes from textbooks. She discovered that she is an auditory learner who gets the most out of her classes if she re-writes her notes from class and goes over them before the next class.

In one class where the room was very large and the chalkboard was distant from the front row of students, visual problems arose for BA. She has to wear bifocals and due to the distance, she was unable to see the chalkboard. In this instance, class instruction depended primarily upon being able to see the equations on the chalkboard. Her listening skills were of little assistance as the lecturer spoke heavily accented English which she often did not understand.

#### Academic Counseling on Programs and Courses

There were times when BA says that she would have liked more information about the courses. For instance, she would have liked to know what the courses were about in order for her to more intelligently choose the options:

"Once into the second year when I had to choose 8 subjects as options, I felt there was too little information available for the student to make an intelligent decision.... by too little information, I mean with respect to the subject matter, the course material, where you are starting from, and where you are going to end up, the professor who's teaching it, and what his expectations are and how long he has taught it even ..... when you are choosing these courses, perhaps if you have dug around, scrounged and talked.... eventually you'd accumulate all this knowledge.... who has the time? It's

difficult to make an intelligent decision on what courses you want to take ... all too often you wind up taking courses that fit your timetable because of conflicts, instead of taking courses I wanted to. I had to take ..... because it fit my major... and the one I really wanted conflicted with the one I had to take (a compulsory course)..... Not the right reason for taking a course in Graduate Studies..... because it fits your timetable".

If BA had been able to see outlines of the courses either before registering or shortly thereafter, she believes that she would have been choosing her courses more wisely. She feels that the course outlines tended to arrive after the second or third class and that it was too late to change courses after two or three weeks into a course.

BA theorizes that there was less control over the consistency of the quality of information and the presentation method for electives than for compulsory courses. She substantiates this observation by pointing out that first year compulsory courses exhibited more consistency in the outlines and in the quality of information than her second year optional courses. As a result, she perceives her second academic year as less challenging than her first. BA reflects that her second year was "heavy" but without "control" as the professors appeared to be free to design courses as they wished. The freely designed courses appeared to lack "quality information" and "consistency".

During her time at university BA never saw an advisor ..... "didn't have one.....never actually spoke to anyone regarding my enrollment". In fact the only person BA ever spoke to about choosing her courses was the Administrative secretary who was very helpful. She says that the secretary knew the sequence of the courses and who was teaching them and gave her good advice: "I would ask ..... what I wanted to know about the courses and

the professors ..... I probably got better advice from her than if I had gone to the professors anyway".

### Situational Barriers

BA did not experience financial difficulties: "money was not a problem ... I was earning a good salary". After her husband died she moved to a different house where she realized she needed a cleaning lady. Consequently, during her last years at university she hired help which freed more time for her to study and participate in other activities.

### Time and Time Management

Time, for BA, is an element which appears to be in relatively short supply. She feels that as a student there was a lack of time to visit with friends and that contributed to the loss of some friends. When she was working, her supervisory position was time consuming - "not a 9-4 ...job". Supervisory tasks require a great deal of time and sometimes she worked from 6:45 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. This meant she had a "heavy load" because she was also taking academic courses: "At this time I was taking courses at the university which required studying and preparation".

Part of the "heavy load" was caused by class schedules. Scheduling courses at 4:00 P.M. was problematic as she got off work at 4:00 P.M. The result was that she was generally late for class. BA found that it was hard to get courses that she wanted because of conflicts in time either at work or at university. Classes which were scheduled from 7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M., often were difficult for her too. Because she had to be up at 5:00 A.M. and work a full day, these classes "seemed very long".

Although she had little doubt about her ability to finish the program, she was concerned about calendar time: could she finish in the time allowed? University regulations have a time limit of six years for the M.B.A. program which means that she must complete all 24 half courses of required academic work in the space of six years. (The program, since her enrollment, has been shortened to twenty courses for completion) She had already taken some of the courses that were dropped before the change took effect. This regulation put her, as a part-time student, in a situation which she felt was almost "impossible". She was forced to ask herself: "Should I quit my job to complete my program because I have to go to school full time?". The other problem which arose at the same time was: "Can I afford to quit my job?" She decided that she could.

BA maintains that she has always made time for herself. For many years she has "... needed time for myself" and has scheduled time in her busy schedule for this personal need. She recognizes the importance of outside interests by being involved in a hobby, Ballroom Dancing.

#### Changes in Standards

Once BA went back to study a few changes in her personal standards took place. Changes which affect the household are associated with food and meals. BA does not cook as often as she did before she went back to university and she says, "I don't cook!". Shopping is not scheduled into the week's activities but is "crammed in when I (get) hungry". However, she maintains that living alone contributes to this situation too.

## Age

Age is not a concern for BA. She does not feel out of place with the other students because out of thirty-four students, she thinks, over half were over thirty years of age. She suspects that the nature of the faculty is such that age is not an important factor. BA said that it was not unusual to have older people in the Masters program but generally they were not female.

BA observes that students who had been out in the workplace rather than going directly from an undergraduate degree and into the Masters program tended to demonstrate different foci than those students who entered directly from undergraduate programs. BA senses that the older more experienced students' focus is different. She feels that she did not share a common ground with these younger, inexperienced students as it appeared to her that their main focus was to get A's and B's and "to get through the courses". Very typical of the inexperienced student's mentality was that they did not seem to care how they got their grades and some tended to use "somewhat questionable means". Her own focus comes directly from her experience. She comments that "through experience I know there are things I lack. I want to learn what they are and learn better ways to approach problems!"

Connected to inexperienced students' foci is that BA perceives they seemed to think they had all the answers. This is contrary to her personal belief that it doesn't matter how many degrees a person has, one can always learn from another person - "whether they push a broom or have a Ph.D". They did not appear to appreciate the fact that decisions make a major influence on people - it was just a technique to them- they forgot the people in their quest for the right decision.

She also finds that younger students tend to have different approaches to problem-solving. Their attitude towards management is different and so is their motive for being in the program. According to BA, "They tended to come from a whole different direction than those who are experienced." In fact, "We had a different focus on overall approach and results - a different set of values". This is not to say that they did not have good ideas. Often they had solutions which the more experienced student would not think of because of his/her more traditional approach to solving problems. However, BA felt that their goal was to get the program finished and get the degree rather than to learn something so that they would be better managers and that bothered her.

#### Dispositional Barriers

BA says that most of her dispositional barriers were encountered and dealt with during her undergraduate years. She was well grounded during the 1970's; had survived her thirty's and forty's crises as well as graduating with her first degree so she felt reasonably confident about her ability to be successful. BA feels that any concerns she felt about being successful in her university courses were dealt with during her undergraduate years. She had found that she had to work very hard in her first class and when she was successful in it, formed the opinion that if she could do this course she should be able to be successful in any others. She has developed the habit of only competing with herself rather than watching and comparing her academic accomplishments with those of other students. After being evaluated, she would ask: "Can I do better next time?"

BA refuses to feel guilty about "what does not get done". She says that there's a difference between "clean dirt and dirty dirt". Routines had

always been a way of life for her and her husband; "necessary for my sanity and for me to have time with my husband". Consequently, guilt feelings about getting things done or having an untidy or dirty house do not exist for her. She explains that early in her married life, she had to develop a routine of having one day to do all the housework. Everyone from a very early age helped because she and her husband owned a store where both of them worked. Therefore, when she started back to school, everyone was used to being well organized and she was used to accepting help.

Socially, BA made new friends on campus. These people were generally younger but she feels that she "was just one of the gang". Even though she seldom attended the socials or the beer bashes she did not sense being left out. She admits the reason she did not attend many student socials is that the type of music played did not fit with Ballroom dancing. BA recalls that the communication between the professors and the students appeared limited. This situation was described as a matter of fact, not a concern.

### Support Systems

Perhaps the major support BA has is her personal attitude about life. She has strong convictions about the value of education and living life 'to the full'. She projects feelings of joy, enthusiasm and sensitivity covered with a liberal dose of 'good common sense'.

Her immediate family is helpful and supportive. The girls, (3 daughters) helped improve her writing skills for sometimes she had problems saying what she really meant in her papers. The girls would read them and ask "What are you trying to say here?" She'd respond, "Am I not

clear in what I'm saying?" Their answer would be, "We're not quite sure so we guess you're not!" The girls also proof read papers.

Her daughters were a source of encouragement. When BA was down and thought she'd never get all her assignments completed, they would cheer her with stories about her past achievements. They thought her going back to university was great and they are proud of her and like to boast of their mother's accomplishments to their friends.

Other reactions to BA's returning to university are less positive. Her husband's family ignores her going back to school totally and is viewed as a "not very good decision". She feels they see her going to school in a negative light because she is doing untraditional and unexpected things of which they do not understand and do not approve. However, this lack of support has not deterred BA's desire to continue her education. Family aunts and uncles view BA as "nuts". When she graduated for the fourth time one relative asked, "When is enough, enough?" These disapproving attitudes from other family members are not problematic.

Friends have exhibited a variety of feelings: some very good and some not. Apparently some friends did not understand why she was going to university or why she was pressed for time. They tended to see her as having a choice and that she deliberately chose to study rather than spend time with them. They were angered by her decision to study and felt they were no longer important to her. BA speculates on the loss of some friends: "we change as we study and some friends don't fit anymore".

BA feels that the professors are supportive generally but she did not socialize with them.

In May, 1986, BA graduated with a Master in Business Management from the University of Manitoba.

## Profile #2

### Introduction

ED is in the latter part of the first year of a two year Masters of Education Program at the University of Manitoba. She is thirty-eight years of age, a mother and a wife. Her chosen profession is nursing and she holds a degree in Nursing and a valid Registered Nursing Certificate.

### Reasons and Influences for Returning to University

ED says that her main reasons for returning to university were her age and her situation - she wanted to prove something to herself. Turning thirty-five years of age was a major turning point in her life. When she turned thirty-five she realized that she was a capable person and she could think, was intellectual and "had a capacity to think and feel intelligent" but she felt the need to prove it:

"I had to prove to myself that I still had a head and my intellectual ability was up to scratch and I was okay and I could think..."

Later ED says that she thought she had it all figured out but when she turned thirty-five, she knew that if she didn't learn "to like myself then I never would...". She feels that five years earlier she would not have had the self-confidence to enter a Masters program.

ED had a less than happy time in her undergraduate years of university and she has always felt that she did not get what she should have from her post high school education. To return to university was, in a sense to make up for those years, to show people and to prove to herself that she did have what it takes to be a good student and that she really is not "dumb".

In her undergraduate years at university she was timid and often felt afraid. So when she did go to a faculty member for help and was told that she was probably in the percentage group that shouldn't be there, she was devastated. She never went for help again and although she graduated, she felt that she hadn't achieved her degree with success - that somehow it was tarnished:

"you see, if you get your degree with minimum marks and you were really unhappy ..... like you really shouldn't be there.....and they might change their minds.....I felt like I got the degree... (but )... I didn't know enough...wasn't technically capable..... so if I got this other degree it was all right...?"

It took concentrated effort to overcome the fear of being rejected again by the university but she applied to the School of Nursing to take a Masters in Nursing. She was refused entrance to that faculty because of her low undergraduate gradepoint average. This did not stop her because she had decided that she might like to teach and with that idea in mind she says that it was natural for her to apply to Education.

ED was accepted into the Education Faculty's Pre-masters Program, but the enthusiasm of her interviewer almost overwhelmed her. The interviewer and she had different thoughts on what her course load might be:

" .....he said that 'You could take these two courses in six weeks and just knock those two off and then go on in the fall', do this do that and I thought: ..... 'he doesn't realize what my life is like to say that.....' ."

At this time she was working as an evening supervisor, keeping her household running as though she were there full time and taking an

undergraduate course on campus to prepare herself for entering the Masters program. She recalls feeling very pressured for time and wondering if she really was doing the right thing and how she would get it all done if this was what was expected of her.

ED had planned her return to university down to the last detail. She played the role of mother until she got the children off to school, then she studied until they returned for lunch. After lunch the children went back to school and she went to university for her classes. Following classes she went to the hospital where she worked as a supervisor. She thinks that she would have gone back sooner but she could not justify her leaving her youngest child in day-care facilities. It is important to ED that her time at university be without pangs of guilt and this she feels only could happen when her last child was ready to go to school. She recalls that the waiting was a difficult period of her life.

Her husband knew she needed to return to university and he suggested it to her.

#### Age

Age has played a large role in ED's determination to return to school. Her thirty-fifth birthday was a turning point which triggered her decision to return to university. However, when she got onto the campus, she felt her age was a hinderance to her feeling a part of the whole scene. She says that she felt old and did not fit into the campus scene.

Another aspect of age was that ED reasoned that if she could get her Masters soon, she would have time for a career outside the home:

"I had decided that probably between forty or fifty I would have at least ten or fifteen years where I would have a really active and productive chance to have a career for myself."

With these thoughts as a basis for her returning ED proceeded with her registration.

### Institutional Barriers

ED did not have any negative experiences when she decided to register for the Masters program in Education. She needed transcripts of her undergraduate courses but as they were from the University of Manitoba there were no problems.

However, ED underwent feelings of 'not belonging' in the university. She says that her roles as a mother and a wife were so different from that of returning to school that she found it "very difficult to feel a part of the class...". The younger members of the class seemed to be in a different space from her and were doing "such different" things that she did not think that she could begin to "fit in". She found even making small talk difficult.

The university library systems were a mystery to her when she started back. She says that for the longest time she did not know that the Education library extended back into the stacks and that the Dafoe Library was so different from the way it used to be, that she did not want to even go into it - "... (it) was a horrible experience.... I didn't know where anything was".

It took her a long time to get tuned into the physical environment and she feels that because she did not know her way around the campus she felt "very unsettled". She recalls that she looked at everyone and thought that they "all looked as though they knew where they were going" and she didn't. This notion was not helpful as she tried to "fit in".

Another thing that she did not know was where her department office was located. Although she knew where the main office was, she did not find

the department office until the second year of her program. She also had no idea that there was a graduate study room or carrels available upon request.

ED had little assistance in choosing her courses. She said that she saw a bulletin, read it and decided that it looked "pretty good" and "pretty straight forward". She "didn't know what to pick but (she) picked two courses for the summer" and registered. Later she was able to find someone to assist in her program design.

### Situational Barriers

The large campus crowds are scary to ED. She soon discovered that being alone with so many people that she did not know and who looked so different is "very threatening". She felt she "was old" and "wasn't dressed the way they were..". Things seemed "so foreign" to her that she perceived that she was "completely out of place..". These feelings caused her anxiety which she says is like being "socially isolated":

"... you don't fit in; your own sense of inadequacy makes you feel less than what you think other people are around you; so you feel socially isolated and anxious... you perceive yourself in light of other people who don't see you at all....".

Consequently her first term back at school was difficult and tough to manage. It was a struggle for her to meet people on campus as she was working as well as going to school. She had one friend who was already on campus but as this person was quite involved with her research and campus activities, ED says that seeing her friend made her feel even more alone:

"...it made me feel bad to be around her because I didn't feel like I was,.... hadn't really arrived yet. It made me feel kind of inadequate to be around her because she was really making a success of things .... I could see as a graduate student ... she

was involved... study space and friends who were working full time .... it was more of a downer to be around her too much."

ED recognizes that her friend as a full time student had gotten into interfaculty activities and was really having a "great time". She feels that knowing this made her feel even more lonely in her first year.

Part of ED's decision to return to university was her concern over what was going to happen when her children all left home and she was going to be alone. She says that as a mother she felt that she hardly ever had time to be alone and then after many years of always being with someone:

".. the door closes and the kids have gone to school at a quarter to nine, the whole day is yours and you are alone with yourself..... that's almost scary, you know. Do you like yourself enough to be alone for that long?"

This "unsettling" idea was not only thought provoking to ED but anxiety producing and an idea which she found that she had "to get used to".

Having a job was important to ED because it gave the family a financial cushion which "left us free to not have to worry about money at all...". But it created problems for her too. For example she found it difficult to budget time to study. She felt pressure from the various roles she was experiencing. Finally she and her husband worked out a budget which is satisfactory to all and they manage without her contribution to the family earnings.

At first ED felt that she had to continue to work at her job while she was studying. To her the job meant that she was justified in buying some of the things such as muffin mixes, ready baked foods and other convenience foods which in the past seemed like an extravagance. She felt

this type of buying was justified as her time was severely limited due to working and studying and she was contributing financially to the family's income.

Later in her Masters program, she realized that she would "burn out" if she kept up the "hectic pace" she had set for herself. So she and her husband decided that she ought to give up her job, go back to university full time, and re-assign some of the household tasks to other members of the family. This idea works well, as now everyone has a task which more evenly distributes the household duties. She says that the children are enjoying getting to know their father in a different light and he is getting to know the children better. A side benefit is that the children are learning about responsibility.

She says that having routines for everyone in the family is natural to her because in the past she generally "organized and plotted everything out" as this gave her a sense of accomplishment during the years she was at home. She has "always set out goals, .....never wasted time or sat and done nothing.." as time has always been "precious" to her. Now she says that "life at home revolves around me being a student ...because that's what we decided as a family..." and everyone has their job to do so that the household runs smoothly when she is not there. This situation gives her the freedom to go to school and not worry about her family.

ED says that her standards pertaining to the cleanliness of the house are "more relaxed" than when she was the main person who cleaned. She finds that she still can not leave the kitchen in a mess but "it doesn't bother me to walk out of the house and leave all the beds unmade upstairs...". She thinks that this is good because she no longer nags everybody!

Time and finances appear to be inter-related in ED's perception of returning to university. When she found that her time was severely limited due to job and classes she thought that she had to keep doing all the things she had been doing previously. Consequently, she felt she "didn't have enough time for anything". This she says "was becoming a very high price to pay for trying to maintain some kind of financial income". However, intertwined into these two notions was her sense of independence which was dependent on her having an outside job. Her job meant she could spend family money for clothes for herself or whatever she saw as appropriate but she felt that if she did not contribute financially then she did not have that right.

Socially ED feels that her priorities have changed since her return to university. For example she and her family used to attend church on a regular basis. But now she finds that "church is a luxury that I can't find the time for and it's something I don't want to do anymore..." . She says that she no longer feels "comfortable" in that situation mainly because she thinks she has to be sociable. "I don't feel sociable and I don't want to deal with other people because I am too busy with myself right now..." she states. She wonders if it is because she has used up her energy studying and the little she has left she would prefer to use with the important people in her life - her family. She anticipates that another part of the problem may be that she has limited amount of free time and she feels she is not using it well when she spends it with people other than her family.

ED suggests that being "fatigued" may have a lot to do with her feeling unsociable too. She comments:

"....when you have worked flat out all week and out late at night at class, when you come home on Friday you don't want to

do anything .... having to deal with people is .... something I am not interested in...".

She notices that often she has been so wrapped up in her studying during the week that she feels she cannot think of anything to say in social situations. However, she recognizes that she lacks motivation to search for things to say but adds that their friends do not understand where she is coming from either.

Free time is so precious to ED that she does not want this special time spent on people other than her family members. She says that she feels being sociable is like "giving it (time) to other people rather than them giving to me...". She senses that certain uses of her free time are more meaningful than others and could be labelled as "quality use". Therefore, the sense of satisfaction she receives from being with her husband and the children causes her to prefer to use her free time with her family over being "sociable" with friends or acquaintances.

ED mentioned that her study skills were never very good and that she found it difficult to study when she was in her undergraduate years. Her reading skills were under-developed when she returned and she found that she had to improve them. She says that she learned that reading something over once was not studying! She developed her own style of taking notes and doing research which was useful in improving her academic self-image.

When she returned to school she thought that she would not like it but she would endure what she had to in order to earn the degree so that she could get the job she wanted. What surprised her was that instead of disliking studying she enjoyed it. She works very hard but she does not resent the many hours she puts into her studies.

### Dispositional Barriers

ED started university feeling incompetent and "intellectually inferior". She said that she felt that she did not have "anything worthwhile to contribute" first term. Part of this feeling was due, she thinks, to her not knowing "a whole lot about education" and that she felt that she "really wasn't up to the level of the other people in the class...".

She believes that having so many males as her instructors was "intimidating". Up until then most of her life had been with female instructors and with the mothers of children who were the same age as hers. She says that she felt threatened by "these people who were out there working and had been doing a lot of things that I hadn't been doing .... made me feel somewhat inadequate...". therefore she was uncomfortable with these people as they seemed so sure of themselves compared to how she felt about herself.

Classroom participation is still difficult for her as she is easily embarrassed and finds it difficult to be the center of attention. Consequently when she found that she was expected to be an active student, partaking in discussions and being expected to give her opinions on readings, she was "very uncomfortable". She found asking questions, thinking critically and being herself in classes very hard. As her program progresses she is finding these activities easier.

She has experienced doubts about her being back in university for there were times when she says that she has felt "really dumb". She says that she wondered:

"... what am I doing here?..... realized all the work I had to do.... I didn't understand the textbook! .....what are you doing this for anyways? ....."

Passing for ED was not good enough ; she discovered that she wanted A's. When she got her first A, she says that it was the "biggest high (she) had ever had in a long time". Recalling that moment, she smiles, "I knew I was going to be all right because I had gotten that A... I was capable of doing what everybody else was".

However she has found that too much success can become "scary". She was "really devastated" when she got three A's last term. Suddenly, she recalls, she was getting marks which she thought only "brillant" people got and she did not see herself as brilliant:

"I look at myself as kind of average and really working very hard but not being brilliant and for me to get three A's was a terrible thing to deal with because ..... it meant that other people perceived me in a way that I didn't ..... I didn't know how to deal with it...".

She discovered that she would question the professors about the marks they assigned to her work. It was as though she needed to ascertain that they had not made errors and that they were not 'playing favourites' or "just being nice" to her. ED believes part of her reaction to earning high marks may be due to the difference in her roles. For instance, she recognizes a difference between the role of being mother and wife for many years and that of a successful university student, which is "such a completely different experience" from her former ones. Sometimes she wonders if she is becoming someone else when she looks at the ways academic people perceive her and her work. She feels that she has to "re-adjust my way of looking at myself".

As the eldest child in her family, ED has certain traditional social pressures placed on her by her parents. These pressures include "doing

things the 'right' way and the way that everyone thinks you should ....". So when she, all of a sudden (to the other family members), started doing things differently, she feels that they were "highly nervous". She thinks much of their nervousness is because what she is doing is radically different from what is familiar to them. ED suggests that they do not understand her behavior and are threatened in some way by it. Although she is aware of their lack of approval ED is not about to give in to their pressure to return to her former life style.

The future is "rather scary" to ED. She wonders whether with the degree to which she has changed, she will have any of her old life left. She worries about her relationship in her marriage and with her family because she is becoming so independent of them. She is afraid that she will grow away from them and is concerned as to whether or not she is on a direction that will take her "on a path divergent from where they are".

#### Support Systems

ED has a supportive husband who, when she needs encouragement to pursue her goal, gives her the extra support she requires. He does many supportive things related to household tasks which she used to do, such as baking bread, cleaning house and in general, taking responsibility for running the house as well as getting meals. She says that he is "my best friend" for he encourages her to get good marks, understands her need to be back at school and listens to her concerns.

Their children are pleased that their mother is in school and like to come out on the weekend to see where she works. ED is not certain they really understand her reasons for being back at university but that is all right.

Her sister and brother-in-law are supportive. They have several university degrees and are sympathetic to her situation. She says that they understand her drive to get good marks, her lack of time to socialize and her concerns over being truly successful.

On the other hand, ED has little support from her mother and father in her quest of her Masters. She says that they really do not understand why their daughter is doing this and why she is working so hard when they feel she doesn't need to study. They see her marital situation as next best thing to 'ideal' and they tend to put subtle pressures on her to return to the more traditional life of women. These pressures include comments such as: "... oh, poor little ....., now if .....". Statements such as this tend to be said when ED says that one of the children is unable to go to a social gathering because of her work and school commitments. She feels this type of comment is really saying to her: "if you were at home your child would be able to do these things". She finds these comments burdensome.

ED thinks that her in-laws feel she is not a dutiful wife to their son. She recalls conversations where she is exposed to statements which suggest she is not home much and has not been in touch with them recently: "... oh, a voice from the past .....". Other negative comments suggest that ED is not doing her wifely and motherly duties but leaving them to be fulfilled by her husband and children. She says that it makes her feel "... like I have taken off and left everyone all my responsibilities...".

"I believe in my heart that she probably thinks that I am really putting a lot of pressure on him to be picking up all the ends at home as well as keeping his own job going and I always feel this underlying guilt when I am around her because I know .... from the past this is probably what she is thinking about....".

These comments leave ED with feelings of guilt, where in fact the decision was a family one and each member knows and accepts his/her responsibility for running the household.

She feels that she has little support from friends either on campus or off-campus.

## Profile #3

## Introduction

MD is a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine from the University of Manitoba. She is thirty-two years of age, married, has one child and is pregnant.

MD received her medical degree in 1977. She entered a rotating Internship program and became a licenced physican in 1978. In 1979 she worked as an Emergency Officer, but in 1980, MD decided to go into a Medical Program where she remained for 2 1/2 years of Residency. A Resident is a physican in training towards a specialty qualification in a specified area of Medicine. After studying for two and a half years, she decided that she needed a break. The reasons for requiring a break were: it was "a lot of work" and she really needed a space of time "to be a doctor" and "think about things". At this time "family" was not in the picture - "I had to step out of the Residency and just do whatever within Medicine". Consequently in 1983, MD took a break from Residency.

During her break she worked some "locums", but she also worked intermittently in emergency departments and in a primary health care unit. This type of work gave her more time off and was less demanding than working as an Emergency Officer. During this period she met and married her husband but all the time she knew that she would go back and finish her graduate work.

MD feels that if she had not met her husband, she would have gone back sooner - the summer of 1984 probably. However, she feels that she had to wait until she was "ready" to go back and finish. The time and break from studying were for "family and home reasons". "I felt that I could not do the program justice and I would not be fair to myself". She wanted to do the

job "right" according to her standards and not just the ones set out for her by the Faculty of Medicine. She still "needed time".

This waiting period involved her getting ready to commit the time and to develop the necessary mental commitment required for finishing her graduate work:

"it's not like working at a job in emergency where at the end of twelve hours basically you can just leave it behind - unless you have had a very stressful event that tends to linger - it's not 'oh, I have to go home and try and open a book, or I have to go home and prepare this seminar or talk' - it's not that type of work, although it is stressful; it stops when you leave - so again that comes down to the mental component of the whole thing".

When these two things happened she felt it would be appropriate for her to return to graduate study.

#### Reasons and Motives for Returning to University

Reflections of MD reveals that she did not go into Medicine for the status aspect which comes with the term "doctor":

"I don't feel my identity is attained in my being a physician..... and I never went into Medicine because .....it is a profession which commands a lot of prestige in our society; ... I don't gain my identity from being a physician so therefore, my being at home is no big deal!"

MD feels that neither her personal identity nor her self-esteem is connected to being a "Doctor" and she knows she will complete her specialty training. Consequently her having to interrupt her studies, because of complications associated with her pregnancy, is not a major concern.

Another angle to MD's reasoning is that she firmly believes that people who are trained and have expertise in an area ought to use it if possible:

"Some women do just fine, but for many who have been professional women for various reasons, the money or whatever, I think most people.... like, it is very lonely sitting around the house and you have a lot of training and expertise albeit a bit rusty, it seems like a pity to put it to waste so....? I think about that..... there's a lot of things that have to be done in this world and I suppose that Medicine is the one area where..... well, I do my little part."

She also thinks that is important for people to contribute to others and being in Medicine is her way.

MD has definite notions as to why she is going back to Graduate school although she is aware that she may not practice Medicine full time. However, she is certain that she will always be part of the Medical profession:

"Sure I may end up working part-time, when I am finished, but that would be three days a week or so? ..... One gets satisfaction from going out and working and I couldn't give up Medicine ever entirely".

#### Influences

Timing appears to have been a trigger for MD to return to Graduate school: "it seemed a reasonable time to go back because ..... was 10 months old and she and her mother, (MD), were both able to cope with going back to school". MD's husband was finishing his Masters degree so there was an end in sight for him and he had more freedom and flexibility than she did in her schedule. For example the first year both she and her husband were students but he had shorter and more flexible hours than she.

She also recalls feeling that "... now was the time to do it - if I didn't do it then it would get more and more difficult to go back and do it." Other factors were her husband quietly supporting her; saying "go back" and her feelings about medicine. She comments that "working part-time in Medicine would likely not be satisfying for all my life" indicating that she wants to go back for professional reasons too.

Timing and finances appear to be linked as a readiness element for MD to return to study. She recalls: "financially, I could go back".

### Institutional Barriers

#### University and Faculty Regulations

MD had little difficulty with any of the regulations and policies which she had to fulfil. The entrance requirements were:

1. make an application - anyone who has been out for six months must re-apply for entrance.
2. have an interview and be considered along with all other applicants.

The Faculty granted her partial credits for the courses which she had earned three years earlier. There is no time limit in which she has to complete her graduate training - "the record is 11 years and three children"- however, she hopes to be finished in two years.

#### The Teaching Staff

The Staff men and women (Staff indicates that they are in teaching role) were anxious, "wary" about MD returning to study:

"They are anxious certainly.....the people who are in the teaching aspects of the program.....the Program Director..... because they want the Residents to do well and they want the program to continue to have the good reputation that it does

across Canada - so you know they have their programs to look out for ... the emphasis has always been on excellence but some are a little bit more giving - flexible than others. It is not that those who are less flexible do not have your best interests at heart - they do."

MD perceived that the Staff would have liked to say "you're married" - "you have a child" when she returned to Graduate School. They didn't say it overtly but basically she sensed that they were asking "if she could cut it". Instead they cautioned her with statements like "we'll watch you closely and see how you do". MD felt they were saying to her "Can you do it all to the standard required?"

The Staff's attitudes appear to vary according to their different personalities. MD comments: "I know some of them now as they are peers of mine - so the relationship is different than if they were ten years older than me".

#### Program of Study

MD considers that the way their programs are set-up is valid. The Program Director is in charge of what the Residents need in the refresher areas:

"... these are not courses; they are 13 four week periods and our work is designated into a certain number of months in each of the areas prescribed by the Program Director. For example, it may be internal medicine for one year."

She views these refresher courses as an important aspect of her training:

"It is not like you get the same lecture again....it's the same area of medicine but because every patient is different it's always different. Of course, there are advances in each field so that you are brought up to date on .... the pharmacology

that's available, new techniques, so though you are repeating ..... it's not the same as being so many grades ahead."

MD comprehends that these courses create learning environments where "You learn new things.....(and) it gives you an opportunity to relearn and re-new ...".

The graduate medical study programs are tailor-made for each student and may vary in length:

"We would all have specific programs made ..... it is assumed we would be finished in four years but if things happened along the way - you needed a break - took some time off - if it was just six months that wouldn't be significant - the majority do finish in four years.....".

MD has no time restraint regarding when she must complete her studying. However there are subtle ways which indicate 'the quicker the better':

"There isn't a time limit but the College can review what you have done and essentially decide the likely time of completion. They take into consideration what you have done, how you did it, how long you have been away, what you have done in the interm and then they decide with the Program Director how long they feel you need to be trained in order to be a safe practicing specialist .... there is a time limit if you don't want to have to repeat a lot. You have to fulfill the criteria and it depends how long it takes you. There are basics that you have to do to fulfill the requirements to write the exams but not everybody might finish that in four years, if they take the break".

Appropriate teaching methods are used in Medicine according to MD.

She describes the learning process as taking several forms:

"We do not work in the classroom but we work as physicians in each of the areas related to our specialty. There is a seminar for half a day once a week. We take turns

presenting material and conducting the seminar. This basically the literature which is most current on a specific topic".

Some teaching is done at rounds, other teaching is done in the Operating Room but this "depends upon who you are working with". Also it depends on:

"Do they like teaching? Are they academics or clinicians? How is the patient? And the case which is being dealt with that day... Ideally one is to talk about each case and in a sense be tutored but practically speaking it just can't work that way.....It does not work that way - unfortunately".

There are reasons for this situation: "Patients take priority". She accepts the personal responsibility of learning because she believes "it is also up to the Resident to be a bit pushy too,.... to be in the appropriate circumstance. She observes that some Staff are:

"... good at trying to teach and those who are, perhaps are oriented that way, will sit down will say, 'okay this is a problem tell me the answer to this question. I'll be back in twenty minutes'."

She concludes that in Graduate School "students in Graduate Medicine are responsible for their learning things while the faculty sees that they have the opportunity to practice.

Twice a year, the Staff have meetings with her to let her know how she is doing. Once she was told that she needed to study more:

"..... nothing that I didn't know .... I had not really lost my clinical skills....I had lost a bit of my book work skills.....I had read but..... they do give you two set interviews per year and sit down and talk with you but other than that on a day to day basis, there might be a little bit of feedback or 'good case' they'd say or 'good (this) or 'good (that).

Comments related to feedback, indicate that there are different degrees of feedback from Staff:

".....I think some of the ones that tend to do it more are the ones that I know better - my peers - just because we have been residents together - because they know it has taken four years and I am taking four plus.....so because we are friends it's much easier for them to be frank ....."

MD's reaction to examinations is that she had to have them twice a year (Fall and Spring), they were multiple choice exams and she had done them for many years. She accepts that they "have to be done" and they "don't bother me particularly much". She concludes "that is just part of the program and it's part of the evaluation process". She indicates some misgivings about the method of evaluation:

"I don't know how well they assess your learning because, because - like all multiple choice exams they are not always good representatives of knowledge.....sometimes you come out of them and ... think, 'if I hadn't studied it wouldn't have made any difference...'. But ... there has to be a way of grading residents ..... what they know, and that is one of the ways that always has been used to do that ....".

This statement implies that although MD is aware of the imperfections of the system she is not in a position to offer corrections or alternatives.

MD supports the examination system by saying that because these types of examinations are how they are assessed at the end of their program they are acceptable and appropriate; ".....that's how you ... get assessed in the end; ... a long multiple choice type exam - so.....?". (She is referring to the licensing exam.)

The residents pay a set fee for taking the Canadian Royal College Exams; "like any specialty and it covers one or two days". This is a National

Canadian exam that all Residents who are 'sitting' their fellowships that year write. "There are three chances to pass that without going back to do a repeat year". These written exams must be passed before permission is given for the Residents to take the oral part of the exam.

However, her opinions of oral examinations are in contrast to those on written exams: "... which I personally dislike because there is an art to taking an oral exam and most residents don't like them". She says that they are stressful as there are "2-3 people testing you about situations - you have to realize the questions are about organization". She credits the Staff with helping the residents by giving them "... a lot of practice. MD says that "How you present, organize, how well you answer the question decides whether you pass or fail. Therefore you have to learn the art as well as having the knowledge base."

A primary difficulty perceived by MD with these exams is that " the knowing how to take the exams is the important thing, along with the content and whether or not you know the material". She voices her concern that although the content and knowledge base are not minimized in the exams, knowing how to "take the exam" plays a major role in the degree of success that residents obtain. She recognizes that these National examiners make attempts to ease the situation. "Although they ( the examiners) try to be very fair, it is a stressful situation". She says that "Sometimes it is not a lack of knowledge just but a lack of ability to think quickly and verbalize it in an orderly fashion" that causes the Resident problems.

There are three chances to pass the oral exam and if the Resident is unsuccessful it is strongly recommended by the College that the person repeat another year of Residency before trying the oral exam again.

## Perception of Being a Resident

Being in graduate school meant several things for MD: long hours and days. For example, sometimes her days were from 6:45 AM to 7:00 PM:

" ... in some cases, I have been at work until midnight ... so there are incredibly stressful times ... even within eight hours it can be very stressful because you never know what is going to happen ... It is a long working day in which you don't get the chance to go and sit in the library for two or three hours ... It is a long time of concentrating and 'being on'."

Also concentrating can sometimes be difficult when the work is long and tedious. She concludes that it is easier to pay attention in a difficult case. MD expresses her thoughts about the "hard work" which is associated with graduate studying. "Hard work" appears to refer to the nature of the work being very high concentration ("thinking days") and long hours. MD believes that these hours occasionally interfere with family life. Nights may be spent away from home when she is "on call" (24 hour days).

## Situational Barriers

### Study Skills

Going back to school meant that MD had to repeat some things; for example she had to do "brush-ups" - she prefers that term rather than labelling the courses as being repeated. " We all need reminders - also it is never a waste to re-do some things" - "medicine progresses, patients are different - each case and situation is unique ..." - MD does not feel it is a punishment to have to repeat courses which she had taken previously.

Re-entry also meant "reading, reading, reading" according to MD. She says that she had gotten out of the habit - "rusty in the sense you haven't the discipline to sit down and pick out the points". She says that "this was

probably the hardest". She feels she needed a refresher to get her skills back up to par:

"Your mind has just lost its edge - that's probably the hardest. The physical .. 'it's not the work, the day's work' .... it's the studying and it is not easy. For example, 'for the next three hours I will try and work on .....'; that is the hardest thing, I think about going back - the long hours are hard but that is the hardest".

### Perceptions of being Female in Medicine's Graduate School

MD feels there are "no biases" against women. There are more males than females in her Residency but it seems to be a "cyclical thing". The women in the program tend to be married and at least half of them become mothers during their Residency.

A concern related to being female, is that MD is thirty-two years of age and as she says " the Biological clock ticks away". If she is going to have a family with the least amount of risk, she has to do it now even though it means prolonging the time she must spend getting her specialty degree. Originally, she planned on continuing to study though her second pregnancy, but her health has not allowed this. Instead she has been forced to take a Medical Leave and postpone any further studying. She accepts this situation and assumes that being pregnant and having to interrupt one's career because of it is "not an uncommon problem for many women who are professional".

MD discerns that in her area of study being female may make things more difficult than if she were male. She suspects that this is a situation which is not unnatural "but that I think is a situation which pops up in all areas where men and women work together. I am sure it has no specificity to my area or to Medicine in general." This situation is not considered

discrimination by MD: "... certainly, I have never been discriminated against because I am a woman".

However, MD wonders about some subtle instances in her studying environment where there are overtones of bias. She remarks: ".....but occasionally you get the little overtones of 'well, if you can't be one of the boys, then you know ....'. MD speculates that there may be a difference in finishing time for females and males:

".....it is the men - they go straight through - if they take six months off it is usually to travel and give themselves a break; but no male has taken six months off to have children - they tend to go straight through - it is the women who have the children who tend to take the breaks - so that does have a sexual bias."

It appears to MD that there is some degree of reluctance to let females temporarily exit from studying some areas of medicine. She bases this notion on the fact that there are indications of changes in Medicine which will more easily accommodate women now than in the past. Part-time residency was tried a few years ago but at present in this area of specialization this approach has been changed to a full time Residency position as the new director decided that part-time Residency was not appropriate for this area of medicine.

She states that there are still "some Staff who have a bias against women being in Medicine but there are definitely many women physicians graduating. This does not interfere with her being able to learn.

### Social Changes

There have been changes which have taken place in their social life since MD went back to school. At first residency meant "yes" or "no" to

specific invitations because of "I'm on call" or other things to do with school or studying. However, once their baby arrived the two circumstances together really changed their lifestyle: "All in all, having a child has changed my social life far more than returning to a Residency". She quickly learned to adjust and accept her new circumstances as "..... one learns what the priorities are .... people and work are more important than the dustballs in the corners ... that is just the way it is - there are priorities ...".

### Changes in Standards

MD has learned that one cannot be "superwoman and retain her sanity". She speaks of the challenge to do everything well and the dangers inherent in such an attitude. "There is the possibility of a "burn-out....., some women may be able to cope but I don't think there are very many that can. Eventually something gives in your life - you have to be careful."

There are measures which a person can employ if necessary. She believes that's:

"where having a spouse who sits and listens, well whatever, you know, ..... one feels the other is working too ridiculously hard.....someone who will sit down and listen and say "Okay, you know.....".

She says that this system works well for her and her husband and "if there is something that can be changed then well, we'll change it". Sometimes she finds that they both get into a situation where "you both have been working too hard and you sit down, and you say, 'hey, we've got to stop this -it's crazy".

Although MD compromises on things which "really do not matter", she will never give up medicine:

"one must realize that children grow up and it is important to keep up professionally so that one can return". She has learned to laugh. "It is not always easy (to) realize that some things just take lower priority - they aren't that important - but when you finally realize it, it is sometimes hard to do it - so what if the living room looks ... toys from one end to other - it really doesn't matter."

Both MD and her spouse are dedicated to their careers. However, there are times when "work has never been a source of contention but, oh, occasionally.....". This statement implies that continuing to study and to build a family is sometimes an arduous task.

Although the Staff did not tell her the statistics of the possibility of marriage breakdown which occurs frequently after Residency she is aware of the pitfalls related to Post-graduate work and marriage failures. "It is not an uncommon thing to find people splitting-up at the end of either Med School or Residency .....".

#### Finances

Financially MD is experiencing no problems. MD says that they are "lucky" because they are "always able to make ends meet". As Residents "we do get paid - approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 a year". There is not money for anything extravagant ... they have used their savings as they were planning for this when she was working full time. In other words, they "knew there would be a time when only one was working". She is pleased with their financial planning and independence; "What we have is ours"....."it was well thought out".

Her husband does not mind being supported while she is studying as this was a mutual agreement - that when he's working, he'll support her and she can study. With their both being in school there has been a lot of

expense (Medical School fees, his fees and their textbooks), they have noticed a considerable difference in the costs since they were in school before but they have no debts. They do not take holidays and there is no time to spend money.

### Time Management

Related to the notion of holidays is the topic of time and time management. MD finds that even with two people, 24 hours a day there is not enough time for just the basics, such as keeping the house clean and neat or shopping. She would like a day "just to catch up". She and her husband have a mutual agreement to do whatever has to be done - whoever has the time to do the job does the job. At this point in her life she finds that having a child is time consuming: ".....is time consuming at this stage". She also finds that another factor related to time has accompanied having a child. "With the little one, the flexibility is also gone unless you have a live-in nanny". Financially they cannot afford a live-in nanny or a full-time housekeeper.

### Dispositional barriers:

MD wants to finish her degree but it is a very demanding program. "there are times when you wonder if you will get it all done .... sure, absolutely". She wonders at times if she made the right decision (the one to return) especially when "the pictures on the walls don't hang straight ... and normally it wouldn't bother you". She wonders what she's doing at times in relationship to everything: "Are you giving everybody a fair shake?....."it's been hard at times .... it's not just the work, it is everything all put together". Sometimes she thinks that she will not get it all done and

although she is learning to keep everything in perspective she has moments of despair. However, MD recognizes that in order to achieve her personal standards in a number of things, she has to set priorities.

She speculates that it would be easier if she did not have children but she wouldn't change what has happened. MD has decided that having a child and being in Residency has more than doubled the work.

There are times when she asks: "Can I do a reasonable enough job?" She thinks that most times it is harder on the children than the spouses because the children do not understand and the spouses do.

Occasionally she feels guilty about returning to school: "Am I doing the right thing for my child?". There are times when she senses that her child is saying "I don't like you and resent you going". However she feels "... if the environment and the care-giver are consistent in approach with that of the home it doesn't make that much difference". She reasons that the time she spends with her child is "quality or better time" than if she were there all day every day. She "makes more time.....we do special things" such as coloring and drawing and taking outings together:

"I think that any working mother feels at times..... and we shouldn't.....50% or more of women are working mothers.....many by necessity.....I think that in the end having been at home for a while and feeling under the weather also (MD is at home all the time now because she is very ill with her pregnancy) .... having no energy .... you still make an effort to do the fun things and I think that when you have such little time, you probably do make sure you expend a little more....."

MD concludes her remarks regarding leaving her child to return to school and continue her studying:

"As long as it's the right thing for you by and large, and it's a positive thing for you, and you don't have equivocal

feelings, (this is what Mother always tells me.....) the child is fine. But if you have equivocal feelings the child has equivocal feelings."

### Support Systems

Support for MD 's returning to graduate school comes from several areas. Her husband is very supportive. She says that he is "my ultimate best friend". MD expresses her support from and relief about being able to go home after a hard day's work:

"I knew the stresses but strangely enough it (marriage) has made it easier for me to go back ... You don't have to worry about what you are going to do on an empty Friday night when you feel like: I maybe should be out there ... should be meeting people or..... . They(spouses) are supports when the bad times come along - 'hey, let's go for a walk and talk about it or go and get an ice cream.....'. It seems so much easier.... it makes it so much easier knowing that you are not going home to a stressful home situation".

Their child is a very good baby - easy to care for- very adaptable. Parents on both sides are extremely supportive both morally and spiritually. They help with baby-sitting and with any other tasks. The baby-sitter is excellent - " I couldn't have done it without her " - "she's very consistent... it never bothered me leaving her at the baby-sitters".

Friends are supportive, especially those who are associated with medicine including some who are not doctors. Friends who are in Medicine are supportive and they understand her lack of time to socialize:

"In my small network of friends I could count on anyone of them to come through if I really needed or we needed some type of support be it financial or... perhaps we just have to have half an afternoon away together; 'please - come and sit for us'. So in that sense it is the quality of the friends rather than the quantity".

Many of her best friends have left Winnipeg and therefore letter-writing is another part of her support system.

Her mother is a "role mother". She is a former professional herself and understands her daughter's wish to pursue her degree. Her sister is a professional woman and is working at this time so she is also understanding.

She finds that the support from the faculty is "not immediately obvious" but that "it is there more than you think". She found that she had to be in a critical situation (her second pregnancy which forced her to take a medical leave) "... which necessitates you finding out where the support is " before she was aware. In her case the Program Director was understanding and supportive.

MD has a scheme for her life, although it may not look like it at the moment for she "really (is) an organized person":

"I do have a scheme... quietly I like to have order in my life.....it may not seem like order to some people but to(my husband) and myself, I do. We do have our own order in things and I could never give up Medicine".

## Profile #4

## Introduction

LW is 36 years of age and is in third year of Law School. She is married and is the mother of five children.

Her undergraduate degree, B.A. (Hons.) is in Arts. In 1972, she began a Masters in French Literature but interrupted it to move with her family to Labrador for a year. They returned to the West to live in Winnipeg. Last year she re-entered the University of Manitoba.

Her youngest child was three years old when she started back to study. She has been back to school for two years.

## Reasons and Motives for Returning to University

LW has strong feelings about injustice. She has strong convictions about everyone having the right to a defense and she feels that they are not necessarily getting that defense. LW believes that "small" people get hurt by laws and that they have no way to fight back. They tend to "get trampled because they don't know the system and how to work it". According to LW "small" people are....."just like anybody.....not like the big corporate guys who manipulate the system for their own advantage and their own use". She sees legal aid and criminal law as a partial answer to aiding these "small" people.

LW does not remember ever thinking that she would not go back to university. She knew that eventually she would be back at university studying. ".....always knew I wouldn't be home for the rest of my life." She was aware that she was not the traditional wife and mother nor did she want to be.

LW feels that she wanted a challenge when she decided to enter Law. She certainly received it. However, she is enjoying the demand placed on her by the rigor in the School of Law.

### Influences

While her husband completed his course work for his Masters in Adult Education at Saskatoon, LW stayed in Manitoba to look after the family and their home. Although this was a joint decision, she was basically on her own with the five children and had the major responsibility of the children as well as the family home:

"I found it (looking after the children and the home on her own) very, very heavy and shortly after that I realized I wanted a chance to go back.....kind of burnt out after being at home".

She needed a change of scene and it was her turn to do something that she wanted to do.

When LW reasoned that her family had arrived at a stage where "they could manage without me being home fulltime", she decided the time was right for her to go back to university.

### Institutional Barriers

Registration at the University of Manitoba did not present any problems to LW. She says that Law is interested only in marks and her undergraduate marks were A's so there were no problems. She was requested to send in her Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) marks transcript from the University of Saskatchewan. When she wrote the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), her score was high in the top 20 to 30 applicants. This led to her early

admission. Her youngest child was two years of age at the time of writing the LSAT.

#### Academic Situations

Scheduling courses "could be better". LW thinks that it is done with the idea of accommodating the downtown practitioner, which meant "not messing up their practice". The concerns of the students are not of importance. She found that the 3:30 -5:30 P.M. classes were very difficult for her. It was 7:00 PM before she would "get home and then I would have to make supper". She refuses to take 8:30 classes because she would have to get up at 5:30 A.M. every day that she had that class .

LW says she worked hard in her first year of Law. She anticipates that if she had been in Arts and worked like that, her average would have been A, but because she was in Law, it was a C. She speculates that Law uses a Bell Curve for grading the students and the average mark is C: ".....the work I'd done would have given me an A in arts but in Law, they have mostly C's". The result of working "so hard and so long " and "only getting a C average" was that she was discouraged. She began to doubt - "I wasn't sure I still had it".

Another result of her working so hard and achieving a C average is that she decided to change her attitude towards the program: she would put time into courses that interested her and just enough time into the others so that she would pass them. In other words, LW said, "The Hell with it". Her rule was: no studying at night. She said, ".... when I left here at night, that was it". She resolved that she would do what she could at school and then she would go home: "I went home ..... to be with my family .... (to) do what has to be done at home and (to) not think about what has to be done at

university". Her second year marks were higher than her first year and she wonders about this situation:

"And here my marks went a way up.....I got an A, I got my first A.....finally.....I ended up with a B average..... like it jumped an entire grade which was nice - considering ..... the amount of work that I put in - which wasn't that much".

LW looks for adult or mature learning and teaching techniques in her courses but she says there aren't any to be found. She feels the faculty doesn't understand mature students and caters to the 20 year old crowd. She comments that the "profs think a 25 year old is the mature student" but she believes the average age of her class tends to be older, 26 -30 years of age. Perhaps one third of her class could be labelled mature.

Her husband is completing his Masters in Adult Education and she is keenly interested in the research in that area. In addition to her reading and discussion of the topic, she has experienced effective Adult Education Instruction and has "learned.....like I have done .....independent learning and I know how much more I learn and how much has stayed with me". Therefore she is aware of current knowledge regarding teaching adults which further annoys her because she "knows better". She sees little class participation and dislikes lecturing as the main teaching method in her courses:

"I don't think that lecture is the best way to do it ..... it's fine for twenty-two years olds. It is not the optimum method for teaching mature adults .....I feel very strongly about that.....".

LW does not agree with Law's evaluation practices for two reasons: the pass-fail aspect and the stress which accompanies this evaluation practice. She states: "...for example we have one of the poorest ways of

testing ... very stressful .....100% exams.....everything is pinned on those exams". She resents "the stress that is put on you ... the whole pass-fail thing" and believes that exams are "a poor indicator of what I've learned". Not only does she feel exams are a poor indication of what one knows, but she perceives that exams "are inconsistent with the skills they are teaching you ... research and presentation of cases". She suspects that a better evaluation method would be to examine her performance in a practical situation.

Another issue related to the examinations is the nature of the questions on Law exams which LW regards as problem-oriented. This focus she feels is very different from that in Arts exams. She does not have a problem with the way the questions are set-up but she foresees that a large part of succeeding at Law School is learning how to write exams. She questions this procedure: "Does this mean you'll be a good lawyer, just because you can write good exams? I feel it definitely does not". LW cites an example which illustrates her point: in preparing real cases "you have to argue both sides - your side and their side and what your response will be".

She questions the suitability of some classes. For example classes such as those on real estate are not useful because "lawyers do not do this - they have secretaries do it". In this instance she is referring to a one credit hour pass-fail course in the second half of first year.

### Attitudes of the Faculty

Generally LW has an "open and upfront attitude" which leads to an uneasy response from some of the professors. For example when she decided to take a holiday with her husband just before Christmas, she felt this decision "surprised" some of them and that they felt she should not. She

senses that some of the professors aren't used to this type of attitude but "there are some that are able to cope". LW says that some of the professors don't know what to do with her and "don't understand" where she is coming from. She feels that she is their contemporary and treats them accordingly. However, because of her contemporary treatment, they appear uneasy and seem not to know appropriate ways to treat her.

Some awkward situations between LW and some of the Faculty members arise regarding the use of names. Apparently there are some professors who do not call her by any name, first or last. Therefore when they "no-name" her, she "no-names" them. However, if they use her first name, she tends to first name them.

She detects that some professors "won't listen to mature students and why they want to do things". She cites a case where a professor refused to have his class taped when a student knew she could not attend it due to a snowstorm. Emphasizing her point, she re-stated, (the professors) "don't know how to deal with them (mature students)". In her final evaluation of this profile, LW confirms this point: "True ... this has been reinforced again this year".

#### Instructional Methods

LW suspects that the courses in Law are not geared towards adults. "University does not understand the mature learner; our learning techniques are different". With adults in class she thinks there needs to be a more practical approach to learning. She wonders if the practical learning attitude of the adult learner is not understood by most professors who tend to use what she labels as "a pedological approach" - "lots of content but few if any skills".

Although some Socratic techniques are used, lectures tend to be the main teaching method used. LW sees little "hands-on work" and she wishes that there was more. She bases this idea on her summer experiences. She had a job with Legal Aid where she feels that she "learned more working in Legal Aid than in (her) courses". LW believes that students need to learn how to learn more about areas which may not have been covered in classes at Law School. She maintains that students need an expansion of their knowledge - "skills to go out and learn what I need and want to learn about for..... "(my clients). The example she uses is that if she was involved in an insurance law case and she didn't know much about it, she wants the skills to be able to go out and find out the best sources of knowledge on that area of law.

LW views Law as a game which she must play if she wishes to be a lawyer. Her approach to law is: "I'll play it as well as I can but I'll not give up my principles". This statement implies that somehow she feels that she may be put in a position which forces her not only to give up her personal principles "... but more I believe having to give up my dignity as an adult". She intends to do the work necessary for passing and receiving her licence to practice law, but she will do this on her terms. In other words, she will not jeopardize the principles by which she lives in order to obtain good grades.

#### Situational Barriers

When LW started back to study her oldest child was only ten, and she had to make arrangements for the care of the children. Three separate arrangements had to be made during the day for the children:

1. one for the three year old child which had to be a full-time sitter

2. one for the five year old child which was a part-time sitter
3. one for all the children after school

LW has found Day Care costly in both time and money. For example, all the arrangements had to be done by LW involving private homes and the University Campus Day Care. These arrangements took "from September to September" to get into place.

She receives subsidy for one child who attends the University Day Care Center, but none for the others. However, this meant that she has had to transport him back and forth for the past two years. As there are no government sponsored or licensed day care services in the community where she lives she has had to pay full expenses. If there had been government Day Care services available, the expenses would have been completely subsidized. Instead LW finds Day Care difficult and costly to arrange and maintain.

Finances are a major concern for LW. They are "so in debt".... money? .... it's unreal". Her budget is "horrendous". She says: "It's ridiculous....we have had to borrow". She figures that she will have about \$8,000 in student loans when she is finished and adding her husband's loans, she estimates that they have about \$12,000 more. Changes which took place when LW re-entered university have affected their costs. For example, when she stayed at home she used to make most of the family's clothing and grow, preserve or bake most of the food for the family. Now she has no time to do any of these activities so the costs for the family have really shot up. Traveling costs have risen. LW says that travelling costs a great deal in terms of money and stress. She remarks that not only are their gas bills "out of sight" because of driving two hours a day to and from the University, but inclement weather can easily add to the stress of her day.

When her children are ill, she becomes anxious and her level of stress rises. LW thinks that part of her anxiety is due to her being away at school and not with them and the other part, naturally, is due to their being ill. As an illustration of what she means, she describes a situation which she experienced during the last two weeks of classes and her first set of exams. One of the children was critically ill at home and she had to write her exams knowing that any moment she might either be called to the hospital or that she might not make it to write the exam. The tension and stress made it very difficult for her to concentrate. She credits the Associate Dean at that time, who was a woman, as being "terrifically supportive" in this circumstance and helped her get through a difficult time.

#### Age

LW's age appears to be only a concern when professors do not treat her as an adult. "Only four or five out of 15 profs recognize me as an adult and treat me as such.....when I think it over". She thinks this is because "I'm their contemporary, my kids are the same age as theirs or older, I have more kids.....". Also she feels that their behavior may be because "I have lived in many places which results in a rich background and varied experiences - richer in some areas than they do".

Although she finds that she is friends with all ages of students she has "more friends who are older". She senses that the more mature student has a different approach to the program than the younger student.

This summer she has found that her age caused remarks from her Legal Aid clients. She has "gotten it from two clients now: 'You're the student?'..... both were men ..... (interesting) ..... that's what I thought too".

## Time

Time, for LW, is critical. Even though she has well-developed time management skills at home with five children, she finds that she needs different management skills at university. This summer she is aware of the differences between working at a summer job and going to school. When she is working, she is locked into a time-frame and comes home later than usual. This causes her to remark, "I can't skip court, but I can skip a class". LW has well developed management and organizational skills which she feels are basic to her success both at home and at university. LW thinks that third year at the university will be less demanding of her time because until Christmas she will have a four day week and afterwards, a two day week.

She finds that each change in her lifestyle takes some adapting. However, each time she adjusts to changes, she finds that she is "more organized.....". Accommodation often involves setting up "times to leave and arrive from work....." which makes running her home, working and studying "better now".

## Study Skills

LW perceives her study skills as having "atrophied" and she had to re-learn them. She has found going back "terribly difficult". The hours are long and it is "difficult to concentrate". She says that she "... spent hours doing something that just wouldn't have taken that long ..... (in undergraduate days)". She finds taking notes is "harder then I remembered" and the work is hard: "...really tough ... I had to work very, very hard ..... harder than I'd ever worked in Arts and I'd been an A student".

She wishes that she had had some skill on the word processor. Last year she got her son to teach her how to use it. She uses it for writing but she doesn't "have many papers" to write.

### Personal and Professorial Attitudes

LW has an non-traditional approach to learning. "If I like the course I work; if I don't, I don't work". This is unnerving to some of the profs. One time she was required to take a course which she really did not wish to take. She "was straight with the prof" and told him she would do enough to pass but that was all the effort she would put into his course:"..... like it was me who said, 'I don't give a damn' ... actually, he was a little non-plused by it and a little taken aback ..... but I .... thought in the long run he took it rather well ...". To LW it appeared that never before had he had such an experience: "like, I've never had anyone tell me that they didn't give a damn about my class". About four or five other profs are "nonplused" by LW's attitudes. When she tells them that she is not coming in today, she observes:

"... the profs don't want to make an issue out of it, they want to be nice to you but they are taken aback ... just a few - .... because there are the others who say, 'Oh that's fine' ... They do not cross me on the issue - I have never had anyone come out and tell me....".

One professor has a double dilemma having LW in his class. It appears that he has difficulty dealing with someone of both her age and sex. Apparently he demonstrates a chauvanistic attitude and never calls on a woman in class to answer a question or uses a female as an example.

Another area where LW senses Faculty unease is when both the staff and students are socializing over coffee. She notices that they may expect

to argue a point of law but not a current social topic. It appears that they are unused to a female or a student "taking them on" over issues such as "the hockey and girls topic".

And yet "out of that there are others who are just super in attitude.....men and women who are just great....". She cites examples of professors who have:

"changed exam times for me.....there are the other sides ..... some have been really nice to me..... some just treat me with indifference but ... there are easily five or six who have been really super.....".

On the whole LW believes that the faculty tend to think she is "amazing".

#### Social Aspects

LW says that she does not interact with the professors on a social basis because they belong to different social and economic levels. Having said that, she indicates that she feels that she is well off in a different way and perhaps is in a different but equal social level:

"For me, .....I think that because I have travelled so much - I bring a richer experience than many of the people who have done -who you know have spent their whole life in Manitoba and I have lived in different cultures and I have lived in different languages....".

#### Dispositional Barriers

LW believes that her being back at university is hard on her family - especially the five year old. However, her daughter is talking about going into law which reassures LW that she is doing 'the right thing'. Basically LW feels that her return to school has had a positive influence on the children. They have special responsibilities in the family which they would not have

had other wise. The result is that they are growing up to be independent and responsible human beings.

The children do much of the housework like vacuuming, washing the dishes, ironing, laundry and parts of the garden in the summer. Her eldest son and daughter bake, clean bathrooms, wash dishes, do the laundry and other household jobs. Because she can not afford a housekeeper, she hires her children to do especially difficult tasks such as washing the kitchen floor or defrosting the fridge. These jobs are added to their weekly tasks.

#### Perception of being in the Faculty of Law

At first LW felt vulnerable in the Faculty of Law. It seemed like a closed college and that the Faculty "called the shots and you did what they said". In her first year she had the sensation of "being weeded out". She believes her feelings of frustration and vulnerability in first year were related to her having worked so hard and seeing younger students doing less work, but she was not getting the "good" marks. This was a frustrating experience which she, as an adult, feels could have been eased by feedback early in the course. LW thinks that mature students need feedback so they are reassured that they "still have got it". Perhaps because second year allowed her some options in selection of her courses and her study skills were re-freshed, she is not experiencing those feelings. Now she realizes that "having good marks has very little to do with how good a lawyer I will be" and perhaps this also helps alleviate her feelings of vulnerability and frustration. It appears to LW that today's students have little power. She recalls that students had power in the '60s and the 70's but it is different now. She says that they have little power or control over their programs or how they are taught.

LW feels some younger female students do not recognize the significance of their being in Law, ie., the Women's Movement of the '60s and the '70s and are generally there to "find a man".

LW speaks of feeling angry because "it (studying) had to be so hard". She was not angry at anyone or anything in particular but just that she found studying so difficult. Most days she worked at home "every night, 3-4 hours per three page case" and tended to be up working until 1 AM. LW found it a struggle when younger students would say to her, "You work so hard". She says that she was working hard but not doing as well as they were " ... and yet I wasn't ahead of them, sometimes they were doing better than I". When she didn't get "good" marks ( C's and one B), she felt even more frustrated.

Added to her frustration at school was her feelings of guilt over not having the time to play with her children because she had to study: "...hard on my family 'cause I ..., the kids would come and hadn't seen me all day and wanted to play games and I couldn't. I had to study and I did". LW recalls the time when she couldn't go to her son's poetry contest .... that was when he won! But when she could go, it was the only time he lost! "I really have to fight guilt feelings - this year is better because I said 'that's it and we play games". LW realizes that she's "been there for years for them - I did my best, now I'm doing my best for me at university". She knows that she "can't hold their hands through life and be there for them for the rest of their lives ..... you do the best you can". The feelings of guilt affects her relationship with her husband at times as sometimes she catches herself doing things for her husband when he has already offered to do them for himself.

In a manner of speaking, LW has been able to split the difference. She has resolved that she "won't compromise (her) family because of law but the

other side of the coin is that (her) family must learn to be flexible and allow (her) to do law (her) way".

LW's self-esteem has shot up since she came back to university. She says that "being the housewife and cook is not great for self-esteem".

### Support Systems

LW has an personal inner support system based on her desire to be a lawyer and help people. In answer to the question "What kept you going?", LW replies: "I really like Law; helping people.....". She firmly believes in "the idea of everybody having the right to a defense.....people are victims of society, as much victims as those they have abused". An integral part of her personal support is that she enjoys "being so challenged, the studying and .....the demands" which are placed on her in Law.

Her husband is very supportive: " ... like my husband is so terrific ... ". Although he travels a lot in his work, he tries to schedule his work "so that he is home at least two days before" she has to write exams. This frees LW of her family responsibilities so that she is able to study.

The rest of her family is supportive too, and generally "fairly proud" of their mother's being at university. Her daughter speaks about going into Law when she gets older. However, they are looking forward to the time when their mother is working and they have "money from her studying".

LW's parents are "tremendously interested" in their daughter's return to university. They assist LW and her family in many ways: "Dad helps with tuition" and buoys them up "... emotionally, financially and morally". LW expresses some anxiety over her mother being concerned about the heavy load she has. She thinks that her mother would like to be closer so that she could help her daughter in more substantial ways.

LW does not know if her inlaws are even aware that she is back at university.

Friends of LW expected her to return to university sooner than she did. They are not surprised that she is in Law and are an encouraging influence in her struggle for her degree. They see her being back at school as "normal".

LW lives in a small rural community in Manitoba where women tend to not have university educations or go back to university when they are in their thirties. However in the past, the community has accepted her and her family as "outsiders" and "not like the rest of us". Consequently when LW went back to school, it was seen as "Okay for LW". LW suspects that "They don't understand me.....but ask about how I'm doing ..... but I don't discuss Law with them ..... ". One of the most recent changes in their relationship is that "people phone about problems". She makes an effort to ask the professors for information which she then passes on to her neighbours.

LW senses that her support from the Faculty is not the same as when she started. At that time the Associate Dean was a female (she is no longer in the position) and LW found her very supportive during her first year when she was under such feelings of stress.

On overall comment from LW with regard to her two years back at university is: "In spite of it all it's good.....I don't regret it.....". Her enthusiasm for the challenge is easily recognized when she exclaims: "It's great - in spite of it all it's great....The bottom line is that it is worth it!"

## Profile #5

### Introduction

SC is an American citizen who graduated from highschool in 1971. She enrolled at a small well-known private American women's college that fall but was forced by financial and personal reasons to leave after her second year. A year later with the aid of a scholarship, she was able to return to the same college where she received her undergraduate degree in "1975 and a half .... actually February, 1976".

Upon graduating, she was commissioned an officer ("Ensign") in the US Navy and remained with that organization for four years. During the latter part of that time she met a Canadian Armed Forces Officer; when they married, Aug. 1980, they moved to BC, Canada. In 1983, after they moved to Winnipeg, SC started back to university. At that time she was 31 years of age and had been out of university for about 8 years. She was admitted to Graduate School in the Faculty of Science at the University of Manitoba at Christmas, 1983. At the time of this interview she had been in Graduate School for three years.

### Motives and Reasons for Returning to University

SC has clear motives and reasons for returning to study. She believes there is a need for everyone to contribute to the well-being of society and is "..... very conscious about helping out". She views her work and goals, involving lab research, as the way for her to testify to her convictions: "I think I can contribute that way". Another reason for her desire to be active in helping make the world a better place is her liberal education background. The liberal arts "Ivy League" college she attended stressed more arts credits than most large universities and she feels her education opened up a

world to her as "you read about all these different things". However, it also brought a sense of "social obligations".

She finds returning to university has widened her perspective on world social affairs further as opposed to staying at home:

".....on the university campus you tend to become more aware of these things going on in the rest of the world - tend not to be so isolated in your own little house and in your own little problems like going shopping and things like that.....".

SC finds support on campus for her convictions about the 'things that really count such as "... what is going on in South Africa". She says that coming back to study re-opened her mind and she has met people who "... are not talking about the next party - they are talking about (about what) really ... (counts)." This enriching environment has challenged SC to become more knowledgeable and broaden her sources of information on her beliefs. She notices that:

".....(she) picks up the newspaper and starts reading and trying to find out what is going on and not trying to be a super political person but trying to be someone who is not totally out to lunch".

She has "always loved to study and learn" so for her to return to university is exciting and enjoyable. However, she does not want to become a professor but instead is "out to do research and work in a lab".

### Influences

The move to Wpg. opened the opportunity for SC to attend university. The other locations in which they had lived did not offer higher education courses in the area of science in which she was trained. Therefore when she

arrived in Winnipeg she found that there were possibilities presented to her that had not existed before.

SC was bored. She had a career before she was married and now that the children were independent, she had less duties about the house. SC experienced both the loneliness and feelings of uselessness which accompanies the youngest child leaving home. "My step-son at that time was turning 18 and he was ready to launch. He moved out six months after he left highschool and had his own place." She found that:

"... all of a sudden you didn't have well, this person there to cook for, to talk to; you know - all the school activities. So I was really beginning to really feel useless....."

She had time to donate to other interests but these interests were not challenging. SC started looking for something which would furnish the necessary challenge:

"I wanted to do something to fill up the days - I would send my husband off and then I would I wouldn't see anybody until five in the afternoon".

She seemed to have nothing in common with the other women on the military base so her husband suggested that she go back to school as she loves to learn and study.

Attending a politically active college in the 70's during the Vietnam War seems to have a lasting effect on SC's lifestyle. She recalls:

"I was a bra-burner... I mean I went to (college) at the time when Gloria Steinem and Betty Freidan", as well as other female activists were on campus speaking, urging students to get involved in human rights, the Vietnam War and women's rights ... A woman has the right to think, to do something for

herself, and when I see a return back to, well, making babies and staying at home and .....(I) get frustrated".

The Vietnam War played a major role in shaping SC's outlook on life. She says that the war "..... had a very deep influence on my life.. and lasting..." and stirred her desire to do something constructive with her life. During her stint with the US Navy she was exposed to some of the destructive forces and effects of the war and resolved to take an active part in work which she felt contributed to improving society.

Related to her feelings of needing to contribute to society, is her belief that:

"..... there is a world consciousness that you get as you get older.... for example this whole horrible thing in Africa..... to see it on television.....but you talk about it here (with the younger students) - 'it doesn't bother me'... and there's the insular but at eighteen or nineteen years old it is very hard to think about the rest of the world.....".

This notion in addition to her other experiences, led her to university and to further education with the hope that she would be able to help bring about improved situations in her field of science and therefore, make a contribution to society and "... be of value".

### Institutional Barriers

Some institutional regulations which caused SC frustration were that she had to repeat some undergraduate courses because the University of Manitoba would not accept her undergraduate degree from the USA as appropriate background for her Masters in Biochemistry:

"University of Manitoba want you to have these courses on your (transcript)..... you might be able to sneak in one or two English courses but at \_\_\_\_\_ half your courses were in your major and half were out, so that made you take an awful lot of history, art and music - so you had a very liberal education. But you were not so full of technical details as a graduate here". "I can go find something in a book but here they want you to KNOW it - good points for both but .....".

This refusal caused SC to state that her undergraduate college taught people to think, whereas the University of Manitoba was just interested in how many courses were in the major field chosen for the Masters program. According to SC, she would have had to have ninety percent of her undergraduate courses in one major in order to be accepted into Graduate School.

Another reason for having to repeat courses was that " science goes so fast" that her courses were "out of date". Although she recognized that the 1971 science courses were dated, she found:

"it annoying to have to repeat courses, when she "could have easily picked up a book, some formulas and go and study it ..... and that's the way ..... trained you".

She says that there is a difference in the teaching focus of the University of Manitoba and the college where she received her undergraduate degree:

".....here ... they want everything memorized and ..... you're a walking encyclopedia when you are finished". "... undergraduate is all rote; you memorize and you regurgitate it in your exams. You have essay questions but it is all regurgitating lecture notes."

In the small private women's college the professor to student ratio was very high. This meant that students received individual attention and education "emphasized not only learning but also the ability to communicate and extrapolate on what you had learned". Consequently, she strongly feels that if she had been given the necessary books and other relevant information she could have done the required work on her own and not had to attend undergraduate courses.

She maintains that the lack of having a liberal education is partially to blame for the difficulty science people have writing reports: "...that's why science writers have a very hard time writing a report- (they) don't have that kind of practice". SC is convinced that a liberal education is important to be an educated responsible person. She says that this sense of responsibility is:

"... all part of being educated in something other than science - you need to have a little bit of History, Art, Music for balance because sometimes you can be very cold and very oblivious to the rest of the world".

She follows up her theory by saying, "Science should have greater responsibility for what they do - they do some pretty horrible things... ". She is concerned about the cruelty to animals in labs but says that though they have to kill the animals in her lab, they try to be humane.

SC believes that her graduate program was messed up. She suspects that she should have been put into a Pre-Masters program which would have allowed her to take the necessary course work to get "up-dated" but not have the extra burden of doing research. She believes it was her enthusiasm and the fact that she "was so eager to work in a lab and I knew I liked my professor so he let me go" for getting into the Masters program too quickly.

However, when she enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate courses at the same time, she developed unhealthy symptoms of stress. The courses consumed most of her time and resulted in her feeling that "I was always in the process of catching up". The stress which resulted from this heavy timetable eventually ended in her becoming ill and forcing her to drop a course.

Some decisions of her department held back her progress. She feels that the department should have taken into consideration her academic transcripts, work experience, age and attitude and let her "... go into the upper level undergraduate updating courses" in stead of "plunking me down into second-year piddly courses". She speculates that the only reason for her having to take one required course was that the Department Head was a specialist in the area:

"I had to waste a whole year taking ..... I couldn't take anything else; I had taken all other ..... courses I wanted except for two -which were required ..... and its little prerequisite - but the ..... was so basic that anyone in their normal mind could have passed the course without spending a whole year taking (it); so I feel I had a whole year just wasted".

Apparently the head of her department thought their graduate science students should have a strong background in his speciality and were forced to comply. She feels that she had little power to change the decision.

Another required course was a cause for further frustration. It was a methods course where she had to work in the lab and was "graded on how precise and accurate you are". Because she had prior experience in labs with similar materials and is "very, very careful", being forced to take this course caused her to remark: "It was a total waste of time - I mean this course starts you off with what is a balance." She was annoyed and

presented her case to the department administration who allowed her to audit the course.

She understands why first year students need the course: "If you are 18 or 19 years old I guess it is not a waste of time..". However she considers that the experience which she has had in labs should have been valued by the Department and some more suitable arrangement made. She states, "..... in the meantime I have learned an awful lot and you learn from being on the job and .....it was annoying to have to take it." She also resented being lumped into classes with large groups of young students as well as the insinuation that her degree was inadequate:

"I guess it was annoying to be regarded as an 18 year old - you have to be an equivalent to one of our 18 year old graduates- 'oh, you don't have this course, you don't have that course. Okay you have got to take them'."

She would have respected the Department's attitude and accepted their decision more readily if they had been thinking "... what does that course really teach you? I mean is it really necessary? ". She had her textbooks from ..... College and would have appreciated the Department comparing the work she had covered with that which was being presented in the Manitoba course outlines. She anticipates that instead of thinking, they just looked at her courses and decided that she did not have enough sciences, so she must take more.

Added to this frustration was that the course in question was scheduled in the middle of the day. So not only did she find the course content of little value but she felt it also ruined her "research day".

Finances have created an unusual situation for SC. She had to take her undergraduate courses as a Masters Student which caused her undue stress

(described in a section on stress) but the other side to the coin, was that if she were pre-masters in a less stressful situation, she could not be paid. A masters Science student receives a universal stipend, about \$10,000 but to get this "you are required to demonstrate labs throughout the year and you are supposed to do two".

There was some effort to relax the pressure on SC as "I only had to do one because I had a G.I. Bill Scholarship - I still earn that same amount".

The money from the scholarship meant that SC arrived at the university with "ready money". In other words the professor does not have to pay her as much as those without. He has only to fill in the gap until the total amount reaches \$10,000:

"I arrived with money in hand, saying I have four hundred dollars anyway coming to me - so you don't have to pay me that you know....."

She feels that this was instrumental in her being accepted so quickly into Graduate School. The scholarship is "a four year benefit so it will end next year."

#### Situational Barriers

Financially there have been no problems for SC because the Military has given her a grant to continue her studies and her husband, who is securely employed willingly supports her. However having said that, she says:

".....money will always cause problems as long as..... we are not very rich but we are not hurting - we have come to that stage in life when we can have these little nice things and it is very hard to explain that to a nineteen year old woman -

well my husband has been in the service for twenty-two years and we can afford these things."

It is this kind of statement which SC finds difficult to handle for although she is not strapped for money, she is hurt by the resentment of some of the younger graduate students. She senses that they feel "you're in a different social bracket" and this is discomfoting.

#### Academic Situation

Associated to the above remarks about money made by the younger graduate students is their attitudes about SC not having children. They comment, "Oh, you don't have to worry about money or kids". She has learned to respond with "Just lucky I guess". However, in reality she would like to respond in a different fashion. She often feels like saying that "it is after all your choice". Their attitudes sting SC who retorts:

"I think that it is a choice to have children and children give you a lot of wonderful things but don't get back at women who don't have young children. We don't have them for a variety of reasons."

This stressful social situation in her department has brought about her being cautious about what ideas she voices and to whom she talks about certain topics:

"I have just learned to be very careful about what I say because - one last comment I at first did not realize that they were just nineteen or twenty - I just assumed tht they were just like me and it took me a while with these little instances were happening - I have to be very careful about my comments."

Interwoven through these uneasy social situations SC recognizes that "it is also the nature of what you are studying ..." which affects the way female graduate students act and think. She points out:

"....in science you have to keep on going.....you're 18 and you go through the undergraduate degree; you have to go to the graduate if you want to make anything of yourself; you have to get your PhD. Then you have to work and you are always desperate for grant money, always desperate to publish; you can't afford to get behind because once you get behind, well, why publish anything else that someone else has already done? You always have that behind you."

SC suspects that women find it more difficult than men to have a successful career in Science. ".....it is very, very hard for women to, infact, they are just starting now an international association.....you have to give up your career for two years if you are going to have children." She wonders about their deciding to have children:

"It is very hard for women, you are a woman, you have your PhD, you'd like to have children - what are you going to do? You have to give up your career for a while to have your children and it's a big.....(the employers) don't like to hire you if you are going off for two years because you are going to get behind". Consequently she comprehends their dilemma and their comments but feels she is powerless to help them understand either her position or to accept theirs.

The outgrowth of this dilemma of money and children is that SC perceives that she is isolated by her age and her lifestyle. Although chronologically there is not a large difference in age, the majority of the students are younger and are in "dating, pre-dating and rejection modes". SC says that "their weekends are filled with different things - they don't worry about family shopping". This means that she has few colleagues to whom she can relate on a personal basis and tends to be lonely.

SC views age as a further contributing factor to her sense of isolation owing to her notion that "there is a world consciousness which one acquires as one gets older". The example she relates is:

".....this whole horrible thing in Africa - yet you talk about it here: 'well, it doesn't bother me - it's not my problem' and there's that insular....and at eighteen and nineteen years old it's very hard to think about the rest of the world. First of all you think that you are never going to die; you are totally immortal because nobody in your family or usually nobody has died yet....when you get into your thirties or late twenties your parents are getting older and you can see a change in them and you realize.....other things take on more importance and you become a little bit more compassionate and less willing to be so critical....".

The effect of these attitudes is that SC gets "frustrated when they are more interested in the beer bash than watching the news...." which does not promote close relationships in the department. She guesses that she and her professors are the ones who are really closest in interests "..... how many people do watch the news in my lab? The professors and I."

Another thing she is thinking about is that there is a difference "... when you are ten years older: you don't have as much stamina. She says:

" I really feel there is a change - I cannot stay as late as these young people can.....sometimes there is no time - you have to stay up to get everything done. I can't do that, so you are even further behind 'cause I have to get my sleep. Otherwise I can't function and I wish I were sometimes like the young 18 year olds."

#### Teaching Methods

According to SC, the University of Manitoba wants their students to have too many courses in only one area:

"... you have all these courses and a science degree in ..... the majority of the courses are in science - you might be able to sneak one or two English courses in there but at ..... College half the courses were in your major and half were out and so that made you take awful lot of history and art and music and so you had a liberal education but you were not as full of technical details as the graduates here."

She is not convinced that the University of Manitoba has the best way to educate people. Her feelings are that it is necessary to educate the whole person, not just in one area. She speculates "that's why science writers have a very hard time writing a report because they don't have that kind of practice".

She is critical of the teaching methods used to teach in this manner since she does not like to waste her time which she feels is limited:

"At \_\_\_\_\_ College I could go and find something in a book, where here they want you to know it - there's good points for both - but it was frustrating for me to have to retake some courses such as ..... ; I could have very easily have picked up a book if I didn't understand some formulas, go study it.....here though, they want everything memorized and known - you are a walking encyclopedia when you graduate".

SC disapproves of the type of examinations she had to write for the required undergraduate courses at the University of Manitoba. She says: "... the undergraduate courses were all rote ... you memorize and regurgitate on the exam- you have essay questions but it is all regurgitating lecture notes...". SC prefers the evaluation system at ..... College where all exams were essay questions but books and notes were allowed: "... we could always look up the pertinent details.... so they were aimed at causing us to go beyond what we had been taught to formulate new ideas". She feels that the exams were opportunities to allow students to think for themselves.

She maintains that the only course she has taken at the University of Manitoba where she was required to think was a graduate course - "the graduate course was the only one where I thought."

#### Professorial Attitudes

SC perceives the attitudes of the professors in the department as open and cooperative. She theorizes that "My professors can relate to me because my husband can relate to me..... because they are the same age as my husband." It appears that again age is pointed out as an important element in her being able to form positive relationships.

Because SC has a military background she is an orderly person in her work and workplace. These habits produce order in the lab and the outcome is that she is responsible for much of the lab. She perceives an appropriate spot for herself and older students:

".....there is a special place for us - I find that my professor singles me out alot of times because he knows I will get something done. And I have a priority system and I function very efficiently."

The professors tend to see SC as more mature and responsible than the younger graduate students and give her more responsibilities in the lab which tends to secure her relationship with them.

#### Time

Time is a major source of stress for SC. Trying to keep household activities, wifely activites, student activities and teaching activities going smoothly became so tiring and stressful, she became ill last year.

Treatment has helped the condition which she developed but she was left questioning whether or not she could do it - "Can I really do this?".

Time is severely limited for SC because of the studying and marking during the school year. She says that she spends less time with her husband and sees less of her neighbours and other acquaintances than before starting school. Visiting is scheduled and she regularly uses the phone to keep in contact with people.

#### Changes in Standards and Roles

Many of the changes in her lifestyle are due to lack of time. For example, she is less meticulous about the housework..... "Oh definitely - you just can't keep it up".

She feels she has very little spare time and what little she has she wants to spend with her husband

"... now we take weekends together and last year at Christmas we took three weeks off and we went down to see my sister in ..... - had a lovely vacation - but I will admit the time up to that I hardly ever saw him - I'd come home get dinner and go studying; he'd watch his sports or do his homework so he was there but we weren't really doing things together."

She recalls that "we used to play a lot of board games or cards and.....go for walks; things like that which have got set aside". Apparently they had allowed her studying to take control of their lives for a while but they rectified the situation: "So what we do now plan for special weekends together. This coming weekend there will be no work; we are just having a break....".

She does not see him ".....all during exams I don't see him". She credits him with being:

"... marvelous to put up with that....because I have to go to bed at ten and I get up at five in the morning and work - and that is a little hard for a husband to put up with but he has been quite game. He knows that we just have to go through certain periods and then it is finite - it's over with".

This is a reversal of what their life once was. SC's husband shares household duties like cooking during the week:

"he does the housework - basically I am like a kid during the week - well, I do the cleaning up, but a lot of that time I can come straight home and have dinner which is so nice.....then he can get on to the homework he has".

She makes the observation that in summer it is easier to handle her work load - "now that it is summer the pace is more relaxed - but in the winter it was really difficult".

Another role change is that "he does a lot of the grocery shopping too." Sometimes this innovation does not turn out as planned: ".....unfortunately sometimes when he asks me what I want for supper and I say 'I don't care' we don't have a balanced diet". She is taking steps to remedy this situation for she plans ".... to make up a lot of meals which can go into the freezer and we now have a microwave so we'll use the microwave".

Since her illness she is very conscious of the need for her to maintain her health. She says that "I make sure I take my vitamins and eat the right things ....." . But like most busy people sometimes she forgets to eat.

### Dispositional Barriers

Guilt appears in many forms for SC. Sometimes it is caused by her not having time to volunteer to help needy people. "I feel guilty. I should be volunteering my time but I have no time....", so they make a compromise.....it is a monetary compromise ....." but as she says, "...frankly you just have no time."

There are other types of guilt which nag SC. For example: "..... in the back of my mind say, 'you are an awful wife because you are not giving your husband a balanced meal.'" This tends to happen when he has made dinner after she said that she didn't care what she had for supper, so she has a sense of guilt over imbalanced dinners.

"Space is also somewhat of a problem" which refers to SC littering the kitchen table with her papers and book. She reflects about the times when it is necessary to find the table by".....moving aside the papers from the kitchen table to create two little spaces so you can eat ....". This is not their usual dining room atmosphere.

### Loneliness

There are few women to talk to in Graduate Science and most of these are very young; she is one of the few older females registered at this time. She says that she is more isolated than before as her workload has increased and she has no time to visit with friends - academic or non-academic. Other professors have noted SC's extra workload and are according her "more respect ...but places me in in a strange position with respect to my fellow graduate students .... watching me attending to things

which their professors will not entrust to them and it has created quite a barrier".

SC has few friends on or off campus. Partly to blame for this set of circumstances is that there are few women who understand her field of study which is "very specialized". She indicates that she likes to talk to "interesting women about things that matter". As a partial solution to her loneliness, SC would like to form a Mature Women on Campus Group. She wants to meet other women of similar age and academic interests. As an outcome of this interest she wants to read this thesis when it is completed and to meet the other interviewees.

Socially, SC organizes events for the entire Department. She organizes events such as potluck suppers, birthdays cakes and champagne parties for special occasions.

SC wonders if it is the very nature of the program in Science which creates the sense of isolation from other Graduates on campus. Being in the lab to do her work keeps her separate from other graduates in her building. However, she has discovered another female who is a post-doctoral student and working in the same building. She feels that this person is more her age and is optimistic about making friends with her.

### Younger Students

SC senses that she is operating at a different level than the younger students are because they appear to have a different perspective on life than she:

"I am finding that there is a move towards great conservatism among the girls - my views on abortion - not that I'm pro or anti-abortion - it's just that I'm willing to talk about it and that seems to be something you don't do".

This attitude of the females with which she works is frustrating - "a move back to where women don't think for themselves". She has learned to keep her mouth shut except when she is talking to people who "I know will not be offended by what I say". She mentions several times in the interview that she is a "mother" figure to the younger students.

Academic success has caused SC to question her professors about their "being kind" to her. She thinks she was doing this to reassure herself as whether or not she really had earned those A's or were the profs being nice to her. She appears to lack self confidence:

"I am a very good student but have no confidence .....". At times she reverts to her conviction that she is ".....still very incompetent and very scared at times.....(when she asks) 'Can I really do this?'

Examinations generate feelings of terror when she has to write them in one of the big gyms on campus. She becomes very anxious. Once when this happened her professor reassured her and she went on to receive an A in her final. In spite of this success, she still questions her ability and feels that she is going to fail her exams. Her husband is now taking courses and is having to write examinations. This helps her to know that he now has a feeling of what it is like to have to write examinations.

### Stress

SC speaks about the times when she wants to give in because she has so much to do and "..... you get very tired and feel you can't possibly make it through and you can't compete with these 18 year olds". She recalls moments when she goes home and ..."your house is in a mess ... so cluttered - you don't have time every day to do the normal picking up..... all you want to

do is sleep..". This is when she asks, " Why am I going back to school? This is no place for you. You can't handle it".

SC wants to be "superwoman, superwife and superstudent". Trying to do well in all these different roles (step-mother, wife, student and teacher) is another reason which caused SC's illness.

Although scheduling of courses is governed by the University, because of the stress caused by these schedules it is discussed here under Dispositional Barriers. The situation SC faced was that her undergraduate courses were scheduled during the daytime and her graduate courses were during the evening. As these classes were slotted only for those times and she had to have them before she could take any other courses, she enrolled. The heavy toll on her time and energy was too much for her health and resulted in her becoming ill. This year she has made adjustments and she is taking two courses rather than five and has a better hold on what is happening to her. But lately, due to an increase in her overall lab tasks and her course work, she has become "very rundown" and has had to take some time away from studying to regain both her emotional and physical health.

#### Personal changes

SC observes that she is not careful about how she dresses (clothes) or looks because "it doesn't matter". She wears a lab coat all day long -"I'm not very proud of that but it is true". She feels she could be more up-to-date in her choice of clothing. It's one of the things in the back of her mind that she 'will get on to but some how getting your degree seems a bit more important. 'She notices that she no longer bothers with make-up either. This may be partially due to personal preferences.

She reflects that she is careful to get the correct food every day but every once in a while "you forget to eat and then you eat junk food." This is unusual for SC who before going back to study watched her food consumption with care.

SC has not been able to do any hand crafts in the two years that she has been studying. She used to do an enormous amount and misses that creative outlet, but she no longer has the time. She deduces that "everything has become streamlined".

### Support Systems

SC finds that the professors are supportive in personal ways - eg.) they "have an interest in you as a person". She feels that the reason they are supportive is because they have wives who are professional working women. These professors are "chauvinists but nice" and act as "fatherly" figures in SC's life. For example they phone SC at the lab when she is working late to see if everything is okay. She perceives this concern for her well-being as supportive.

Younger students, as well as professors, give her moral and academic support through phone calls and they tell her to "keep her spirits up". They "keep her going", "sit with her in class" and "joke with her" and help her "feel good".

There are times when she feels the competitive environment overshadows the positive and she "...feels they're all against you". This negative feeling does not last long for SC for she knows ".....that everybody else has confidence in me except me, so it is just something I have to work on".

Support comes mainly from her husband and step-sons plus her friend who is also back at school. Her youngest step-son is very supportive which SC believes is partially because "his wife-to-be" is going back for adult education classes to finish her highschool education.

Her husband is ".....an extremely supportive husband". He does little things for her like bringing supper to her when she has to work late at the lab. He is keen on her attending conferences where she gives papers. He enjoys her success and when he is able he goes shopping with the wives of the other speakers.

Her own family is supportive as her sisters are university trained and are keen on her work. She has one aunt who is very encouraging. However her father-in-law is not happy about her going back to school and he wonders why she is doing this as it appears to be so hard on her. He believes that women are "good for making babies and cookies". Her mother-in-law is "very very helpful; she doesn't understand why" SC is doing this but she appears during exam time now:

"... the last two years -all of a sudden I have a house, clean; I have.....everything is taken care of and it's, it's very nice. And she has done this twice.....and I think she has been asking ... when to come and they'll just arrive and be very helpful".

SC is especially grateful for this support because "it's very frustrating when your house is a disaster area because you're writing papers and getting all finished up for the semester and....., you have this little fairy godmother come in and help you out. So she is very helpful."The rest of her in-law family do not understand her reasons for going back to university. But on the whole SC feels she has great "backup family support".

## Profile # 6

## Introduction

EH is a graduate student in the Faculty of Human Ecology, University of Manitoba. She spent her undergraduate years at a large western university, where she received her degree in Science. When she graduated she worked in research for several years. After recognizing that the job in research was not going any place, she decided to go back to university where she took a professional degree. She has had a professional teaching certificate for nine years.

## Reasons, Motives and Influences for Returning to University

Due to the slow employment situation in BC, she moved to another province where she was able to find employment. Through exposure to Home Economics courses in the schools she became interested in studying and teaching Home Economics. In time she knew that she: "wanted a change and a challenge - it (the idea of a Masters degree) was building up and it persisted over quite a few years - like in the back of my mind". However for a while at this point in her life she found work teaching adults.

EH says that although she had always wanted to get a Masters Degree she was unsure of the area in which she wanted to study. Later when she was teaching adults "... I decided that I did not want my masters in Education" - "so then decided it was nutrition". She feels that at this point her goal of teaching high school changed to teaching at college level: "The Masters degree will let me teach at college level -- it will give me the piece of paper that will allow me to teach at college level." She also was aware of a need to change the direction of her career. When this decision was made, she started applying to several universities. The University of Manitoba

appeared to best suit her purposes. In preparation for her re-entry, EH enrolled in two university courses, Statistics and Biochemistry.

### Influences

EH needed the challenge and mental stimulation of returning to university. Also she had "always been interested in education" and she thought university and studying would be "interesting".

Besides these influences, there was the dissolving of a relationship. EH thinks that might have been a catalyst to thinking it was time to go back. She decided that it "was not good for her to stay and so she decided "I have to move". Upon reflection, she says: "I guess that is when everything started to get together and I decided to go back to school get those two courses ....".

EH had thought about going back for some time, then something triggered it - "if I didn't go back now, then I'd be going back at forty and changing careers". Age played a role in her decision:

"I thought if I wanted to change my career or at least get my masters, and you know, if I still wanted to teach then I should get my masters and get it as soon as I could and it seemed like a good time, because I wasn't tied to any permanent job .... .

### Institutional Barriers

EH had no trouble registering at the University of Manitoba. She needed her university transcripts and three references. However, EH had to take the Pre-masters program before she was allowed into the Masters program. This was unexpected as she had corresponded with the University and been lead to believe she would need only two courses for entrance into the Masters program. She took the courses before she changes universities

but the University told her that she did not have the required background for the masters which she wished to take:

"They (The Faculty) wrote back and said that I was lacking in Statistics and Biochemistry and so that is why I took those courses. And then they said, 'Well you have to have these other undergraduate courses for masters for background'."

Consequently she ended up in more undergraduate courses than she had expected.

EH found that there was little assistance to help acquaint her to the university or the faculty. As a graduate student she had her own designated desk in the H.E. Building but getting to know the library was different - "I just did it myself". She feels that she spent a lot of time "searching". The library services on campus are not used by EH often as her research is more closely tied to medicine and she feels its library is better organized for her type of work:

"I use the Medical Library because my research is medically orientated - it is very well organized compared to this one (Dafoe) - I really hated going into Dafoe because of the lineups for the copying and etc. - so I thought "well forget it - I can't be bothered here - although any time I have asked for help - for references and stuff - the people have been very helpful".

EH feels that services offered by the Bookstore are unsatisfactory. She is sure that there could be some way in which the lineups at the beginning of the year could be reduced and that charge cards should be used. She says that to write a check is a long drawn out process there, "... so I hardly ever go there unless it is 'off -times' ".

She spends little time using the other services on campus. Her one experience with the typing service was unsatisfactory and she has not used the service since.

Transportation and parking are concerns of EH as she has a car but she was too late to get a parking space on campus the first year and in second year, her dwindling finances meant she could not afford parking fees. This has resulted in minimizing her time on campus except when the parking is free. She finds having to have enough quarters for parking meters is not always convenient. Now in her final year, she has been able to afford a parking spot close to her faculty building and this has made parking less troublesome.

Courses schedules might be problematic if EH were a part-time student as there is little flexibility. One thing rigid class schedules prevent is part-time work. Now that she is finished her course work and is doing research for her thesis, she hopes to get a part-time job.

### Situational Barriers

#### Academic Situations

EH found that the pre-masters program consisted of undergraduate courses. In her first year she was required to take a course which she felt was a repeat of one she had taken previously in an undergraduate professional program. She discussed the situation with the professor who laughed and said: "You shouldn't be in this course anyway". She was allowed to drop the course and was given credit for the one she had taken earlier. Other instances where EH had to repeat courses for which she feels she had appropriate credits were "bothersome".

EH suspects that there is no set Pre-Masters program. Consequently everyone appears to be treated differently as there appears to be a lack of consistency in the numbers of credits which are required to take in Pre-Masters: "... no hard and fast rules there unless they decided to credit my Stats and Biochem...". However, EH states: "There are some courses that everyone has to take such as Advanced Human Nutrition ... there are a few that you have to take, but there are some others that you don't".

However, the practice which really bothered her most was the redundancy from one course to another within the faculty:

"What happened was that you would get one prof that would be teaching one course and if you took another course which the same prof was teaching you would get a repetition of the same material - maybe a lot was review but still..."

She found she needed discipline to complete these requirements:

"I found I had to discipline myself ..... (it was like ) getting materials ready for the next day's classes (when she was teaching) - 'this is what I am going to do - it has to be done in such and such a time' --- so at first it was kind of hard for me to do that."

This was the type of discipline which EH says allows for no choice and is number one priority.

### Evaluation

EH is concerned about the way in which the teaching assistants mark. She feels that they are "picky". She remembers one course where she had to write out menus and she lost marks because she had not underlined them in red or used a red pen to write them. Her concern was:

"we weren't told before hand that it should be in red pen otherwise I probably would have done it in red pen even though ... half a mark would not have mattered".

She says that she learned from the assignment "to be really specific when I was doing assignments ....". This treatment bothered her but it also taught her not to be as "picky when I am marking my students ...".

There are many students so EH feels that the profs can't spent much time on special students. She says that if she had been experiencing trouble in the undergraduate courses, she would have gone to the profs for help but only after trying first to understand the material on her own. She thinks this is because she felt there are so many students and she wouldn't want to appear to "suck-up" to the profs. Also she thinks that being a grad student she could have gone and talked to her advisor. But on reflection she admits that she doesn't "normally go to any profs about any of the troubles I'm having - except maybe to extend a deadline or something like that".

### Instructional Methods

EH describes most of her classes as being in the form of a lecture. This method of teaching, she says, allows no feedback and she finds this a difficult way to learn. EH likes discussions as she feels she learns more from questions and by being able to clarify ideas. EH notices differences between graduate classes and undergraduate classes. She feels that there is more variety in the teaching methods used in graduate courses than in undergraduate ones. She recalls especially one graduate course which she describes as a "hands-on" approach where she feels the community work leads to greater variety of learning situations than one would normally receive in the classroom. When she compared it to another graduate course

which was four hours of lecturing, she felt that discussions were "better ways to learn" and that seminars were "valuable".

### Course and Program Design

She recalls not liking the undergraduate courses she was required to take because there were so many students fresh out of high school. She found that she didn't want to associate with them and that it was hard to relate to them. She "... was uncomfortable with them" and she felt that she did "not fit, didn't belong and was ill at ease ...". She also was dissatisfied with the undergraduate course content and teaching methods:

"... and I found the courses themselves very mundane ... the profs just lectured. You take the notes; that's it, and it wasn't stimulating at all .... so the combination ..... I was dissatisfied basically".

### Staff Attitudes

Regarding the attitude of the profs, EH sees them as "basically okay". There have been times when she has felt that one might be condescending but her major observation is that they "don't realize where we (the mature students) are coming from". She dislikes being called a kid because she perceives these as "unsuitable, inappropriate tags" and as evidence of the professors making "... unaware, unthinking statements, (and) showing a general lack of sensitivity to older students".

She says that everyone is lumped all together - "subordinates, lacking experience - right from high school" but she feels that graduate students have a definite place and role in the university and this is not recognized. She remarks that it is almost "as though you did not have a prior life before

coming to be graduate student" and "... so you are just treated as a student, ... you don't have another other skills".

#### Academic Skills

Computer skills are not perceived by EH as essential to her studies: "... I am still intimidated by the computer but I have decided I am not going to overcome it". She deals with the situation by saying that for her statistical analysis she will hire a Statistician and he/she can do that part. She has no guilt regarding this decision and she feels she will further eliminate the frustration she feels when she is typing.

When EH started her research she discovered that she had let her "writing essays ... skill ... get rusty". The courses that she had taken in preparation for her full time return to university had helped sharpen these skills but she felt it was not enough. She found that it was quite a job trying to get everything together to write the essay. She needed to hone her research skills again so that she could do that.

EH recalls her level of academic skills when she came back to university as needing some "brushing up". She says that her reading skills have improved since she returned to university, but she still feels that she does not know how to read an article correctly. She says that she has to make more notes than necessary and she has more information than she really needs, but this does not worry her.

#### Time

Time is not a major concern for EH. She says: "I don't have much social life" and thinks that this is one of the reasons why she has ample time. She finds that she has time to do all things she needs to do but she views

time as a potential difficulty; "... time can be a problem, but it is a motivational factor rather than not having the time to complete assignments". She refers to the fact that she is "not working on my thesis as much as I should". EH explains that is the discipline factor which concerns her:

"... like I find I have to set goals for myself to - now that it is not structured - like there are no deadlines for essays or anything like that - set the goals so that certain things will be done at certain times - so then I could get motivated and the discipline is there.

EH states that she thinks being single also helps in not having problems with time.

Due to EH having worked as a TA and Lab Instructor she is aware of how to use her time wisely. Teaching for several years has helped her organize her workload and time and to use organizational skills.

Regarding extensions for assignments EH has found that most profs are good at giving extensions.

#### Age

EH has not noticed any sexual biases at the university and is unaware of any social biases. However when it came to age prejudices, she is uncertain. Her reason is that "I'm more sensitive to age but that's my problem rather than the profs." A second comment regarding this topic has EH saying:

"I don't know ... I think that it just might be me - I'm over sensitive or something - I just feel - well, I have had quite a long life before being a student and I just feel I should be recognized more for that life...".

EH feels that most of the graduate students are quite a bit younger than she; the average age being about twenty-five, although she knows that there is an older woman in her doctoral program.

### Loneliness

When EH started her Pre-masters in 1984, first term was "pretty sparse for mature students". She says that she "looked for mature students but there were few". Second term when she found another mature student, she found support knowing another student who was her age. She did not feel so alone second term and she thinks that she was getting more settled:

"... the year was kind of hard because I was here without any friends and not knowing anybody; I thought, well if I could find someone that I could relate to, which I couldn't, among the graduate students or the other students ...".

EH feels that she is not treated as a colleague by most of the professors in her faculty but her advisor is an exception. Her advisor has asked her over to her home and has asked her to go out for lunch. However, EH says that she is the only one. Once in a while the graduate students go out but EH says that they never go to the movies or nightclubs. She says that "I will do that occasionally with my roommate" (another graduate student).

EH has difficulty with some of the younger graduate's attitudes and ethics regarding their assignments. She says that they do every assignment together and "that's just not my philosophy". She feels that all they are interested in are the high marks; "they want to get A++'s and they do which is fine, but I just ..... that's just not what I would do." She finds that that bothers her.

## Stress

When EH first arrived back at university she experienced stress feelings which were related to the sense of competition she was feeling: "...at first I was competitive, then I do the best I can". Once she took that attitude there was no longer a problem. This attitude leads to few if any problems in that regard. However, she readily acknowledges the stress she feels over other things such as finances and not having close friends.

An additional worry was her car - she had 106,000 miles on it and it became unreliable. The older car was a certain amount of stress:

"... because I was not sure it would get me to where I wanted to go. I wanted to go and explore and get to know the area but I thought 'No, I cannot do that because if it breaks down, there's major repairs and that's such a hassle so ... one reason for getting my other car was that last year the mechanics recommended that I couldn't drive it out West anyway...".

She got a new car for transportation from the Medical library out to the campus and to travel west to her home. She feels that was a major expense but necessary under the circumstances.

Financial stress was the primary one and not having friends was rated as second in the first interview. However, in the second interview EH changed her mind as to the order of these stresses: "financial and not having my friends would be pretty close ... I would almost see them ... not having my support group would be number one. Later she decides for sure that "The hardest thing was not having my friends".

## Finances

"My money is gone". Her savings were used up during her first year and the fact that her personal money is gone is a great concern of EH:

"It gives you a sinking feeling right here and I just - when I start thinking about finances too much, I say, 'forget it - I'm not going to think about it. There's something else'. It ... is still a major concern".

If anything caused EH problems it was lack of finances. Most of her financial support comes from the Canada Student Loans people. She had good credit and was able to get several thousand dollars her first year and about the same the second year. Although she did not have any trouble getting money from this group, she did not receive the amount that she requested.

She also works as a TA in the faculty and teaches first year biology labs all year which helps her financial position. She is working on a project and will receive some monies from the grant for it.

When she is in graduate courses, EH feels competent academically and "all right" in these classes. However, even though the younger graduate students are fewer in number and are not as overpowering in class as the undergraduates, she has no "good" friends in these classes. EH feels some personal support and interest from the other graduate students but still has not made any close friends.

## Dispositional Barriers

EH wondered how she would fit in when she first arrived at university. She says that she felt that the rest of the students looked as though they belonged and she didn't. She still appears to not fit as well as she would like. But now it is her choice as she does not care for the

complaining nature of the graduate students: "that goes on and I really don't like (it)... maybe that is one reason that I don't associate with them ..... they ... talk .... behind (peoples' backs) ... ". This gives her uneasy feelings and causes her to shy away from close contact with other graduate students.

EH says that she experienced some feelings of apprehension and loss of self-confidence when she stared back to university:

" I was a bit apprehensive and I am unsure of myself and I don't know whether that was just being a student again ... and my confidence kind of decreased you know, from ... having a good job, say to no job ..... but that is how it felt some times".

EH felt apprehensive about: "not knowing how it (the university) worked", "trying to fit in", "being a graduate student" and obtaining "appropriate marks for graduate school". However, she feels that she was never overly concerned about her marks.

Sometimes she wonders why she is there. This concern became reality for her the first time with the computers:

"I told my friend \_\_\_\_\_, (I had time on the computers and I didn't even know how to turn them on) - so I will just turn and ask this guy if he knew how to turn it on. But even, you know, being apprehensive about that too ... it is silly but, ... I see young students who do everything...".

### Support Systems

EH's support is really an inner support system. She had left her friends and found the first year really hard. She has a few friends in the city now with common interests such as courses that they are taking together. However none of these ladies are in school now. EH's main support comes from long distance - "long distance phone calls, letters and family too".

She has found some friendly support in relationships with some of the technical staff which may have to do with their being closer to her age and that she was once in research herself: "I feel more comfortable or relate better with the technical staff ... like ... the ones who work in the labs. Pretty well all of them are over thirty; I can talk to them...". However, she feels that they are only friendly up to a point: "... but again nobody's friends really - like you are not invited out - we are not demonstrative...".

EH thinks that there is faculty support for graduate students but only as graduate students - not as peers: "They are supportive to you as a student". She believes that their support would be more meaningful if the graduates were perceived more as colleagues but this would be difficult because "... how can a twenty-two year old, just coming in, be treated like a peer".

Reaction of people to her going back to school varies. Her friends who are far away are really supportive and they come to visit her. However, she feels that perhaps this province would not appear so unfriendly if she were working:

"Manitoba is okay - I don't feel sorry for myself but I would like to have friends here - people seem to really be into family here. Although ..... if I were working, it would be different."

Her family wondered why she decided to return to study but they "came around in the end because it was what I wanted to do".

## Profile #7

## Introduction

SW is forty-eight years of age, divorced and enrolled in the Faculty of Social Work, Masters Program. Her educational and work background is comprised of a variety of experiences: After grade eleven she obtained an Arts degree. SW has had many years of work experience: working at a social agency as Program Developer with children; teaching pre-school Nursery School for Disabled Children, worked with Maturation Program Planning; teaching at university levels in recreation; planning and implimenting workshops for the elderly. During this period she continued to take evening courses through Continuing Education where she completed a Gerontology Certificate Program.

## Motives and Reasons for Returning to University

Her reasons for returning to University are mainly monetary. She wanted to be able to support herself and her family; she was alone and was solely responsible for supporting her family. At the time she enrolled she felt locked into low paying social service jobs and she wished to qualify for social work positions with the government but was unable to do so without a Social Work Degree.

At this point she realized that she could not qualify for government social work positions unless she had more education. She decided to take a Masters in Social Work. Because she had an undergraduate degree in Arts, she was required to take a pre-masters which upon completion, enabled her to qualify for the Masters Program. Due to her being part-time at school, the Pre-masters Program became two and a half years and the one year Masters Program appears to be five years.

SW has several reasons for going back: first she "probably would have gone back to university and got some kind of (degree).....". whether or not she separated from her husband because she was already taking some courses. She feels she was "always education hungry" and when she got a new job she tended to take courses related to it. Her separation meant that it was much harder for her to continue her quest for education. It also meant much more stress for her because she was going back for economic reasons (trapped in a situation) rather than voluntarily (for her own personal development).

A second motivating force was to break out of her economic situation: "..... I would have probably have gone back with a different motivation ... had I not been in that situation".

Third, because SW had such a desire for education, "..... I love learning.....I suppose that in a sense my desire for education was stress reducing in that it held me in there when things got rough .... and it would have been relatively easy to quit". There were periods when she debated about quitting mainly because of the long stretch required to finish. SW has been back to university for five years at the time of this interview. She had a break of 2 years and prior to that she worked three years for her Gerontology Certificate.

### Influences

SW's father influenced his daughter, stressing the importance of education. Her mother had gone to university at a very very young age and education was of high importance in her family. Her friends were well educated and all her working life she had associated with professional people. Therefore it was not unusual for her to announce that she was going

back to school. Neither her friends nor her family were surprised when she said she wanted to return to university.

### Institutional Barriers

SW experienced some institutional barriers. For example before evening registrations were established practice, she found that "Registration caused me to take a day off work". She blames her lack of "knowing the system, not knowing where the buildings are, and the running back and forth between buildings ...to get this done and that done.....". She says "... a lot of that stress could be eliminated had things like registration and ID cards been available on a Saturday". But she thinks this may vary from faculty to faculty because in Social Work students have to be interviewed to get course approval and these are done during the day. However, it is the only way in which Social Work students may have their over-all program approved.

SW is experiencing difficulty scheduling courses in the Masters program. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that the courses are offered only during the day. The required time to pursue her education is not always available. SW is reluctant to "push" her new employers, even though they agreed to grant her time to attend classes as she has recently moved to a new job. Another reason for difficulties with scheduling classes is that the "Masters courses are not timetabled to meet the needs of part-time students who hold full-time jobs". In other words, "It was not an ideal timetabling" for returning mature females working full-time.

A five year completion requirement applicable to students taking a Masters in Social Work causes SW concern because there is little offered in Social Work in either inter-session or summer sessions. This means that she is restricted to fall and winter day classes which leads to problems for part-

time students like herself. Her dilemma is: how will she get the program completed in five years as she has only 2 1/2 years left? Elective courses have been helpful to her because they have tended to be Faculty of Education evening classes.

Originally SW hoped to obtain an Education Degree after she was separated and working part-time. Although she completed three full education courses, she had to drop the Undergraduate Education program because she could not do the practice teaching segment of the program as she had to work part-time to support her family and herself. Also her employer was unwilling give her blocks of time off for practice teaching. When she entered the Pre-masters Program in Social Work, she was given credit for two of the Education courses as none had been used to obtain a degree.

SW complains about organization in the Dafoe Library. When she is doing Graduate level research all the journals are upstairs on the third floor and all the copying machines are on the first floor:

"You ended up carrying two journals ... can't carry any more than two - downstairs where you photocopy them and then you leave them down there - nobody carries them back upstairs and then you go back up and get two more. It's time consuming and as a result half the journals are never back on the shelves.....I just think that Dafoe is a.....shoddy service in terms of that".

She is aware that the Dafoe Library issue by itself could be perceived as a 'petty issue' but when she views it as one of a number of incidences experienced within a short time-frame such as: "... having to arrange for a baby-sitter, scrounging to pay the babysitter, dealing with a 'dead' battery upon leaving the house, she feels the incident at Dafoe Library gains new

significance. As well, SW says that it produces a stress level that may not be incurred by "younger, unmarried full-time university students". Although doing research in Education's library is easier, she feels there are still not enough copy machines. According to SW, "when your time is limited, you can't come back in half an hour."

The Social Work library is a real problem to SW because it only runs for a couple of hours about three days a week. According to SW not all of the materials she wants is filed at Dafoe and "that is frustrating".

SW has problems with the bookstore hours: "Bookstore hours are a real nightmare. The one night a week is just useless." She finds that she is seldom there when it is open and as a result feels rather negative about its services.

#### Age

"I felt a sense of age difference in Social Work", says SW. The students there tend to be younger in graduate school and it seems that they were much closer to the Faculty; apparently a number of them had gone through undergraduate school together so it was a continuation of that experience. SW feels that it was quite a mixed age group but a much younger age group on the whole than in Education Faculty Graduate classes. One of the things that she finds as a result of this is that students in the School of Social Work seemed to be more concerned about: "how do I get my A's - what do I have to put in my papers to get an A... I found game playing and manipulation frustrating".

SW finds there is a difference in the degree of comfort she feels between Education courses and in Social Work courses. She thinks that it is because the students in Social Work tend to be younger than those found in

Education so she finds that she was more at ease with the Education Graduates who are closer in age to her.

SW experienced a negative situation related to her age. ".....the word that I got was that Social Work did not look favourably on anyone over forty". She thinks that the average age of graduates in the Masters program in Social Work is "probably twenty-six". "In some cases we are looking at graduation at twenty-one - two years out - you could be twenty-four, twenty-five coming back ... in Education we (the older - over 35 ) are the norm not the exception".

SW has the feeling that her age has had an effect on her educational choices:

I wonder if it did not have an effect on the types of projects I choose to do, the papers I chose to write on. And I remember going through this decision-making process -because there were certain areas that were specialities through my work experience. One was the field of aging and one was working with groups - now initially I choose those kinds of topics to write on. I would make sure I was the first one to choose that particular topic because I was very comfortable with it and I knew I could shine. It took me some time to be able to say 'okay this is my learning - if I want to learn ..... ' ... and that was what lead me into taking the education courses, I was willing to feel uncomfortable and to risk exploring unfamiliar areas so that I could expand my learning."

### Teaching Methods

Group projects are "a big thing in terms of time". She tries to stay away from them because it is difficult to get the group members together because of the diversity of people's schedules. She appreciated assignments "like individual presentations rather than group ones, especially when you are talking about groups of four or five people trying to coordinate times, when you don't have the day time available to you". Part-time students

appeared to be at a disadvantage when group assignments were assigned. Related to these feelings was a sense of day-time people versus part-time people. For example she believes that day-time people resented their having to be on campus in the evening and consequently were difficult for part-time students to work with ..... "those are not good dynamics for working on group projects".

SW recalls a classroom situation when she asked a straight forward question: 'what is the definition of this?'. The professor kept saying to her: 'well, what do you think is the answer?' Finally SW said "in frustration":

"If I knew what the answer was I wouldn't have asked the question". And he said, "Give me what you think". And I said, "Why should I sit here and look ignorant. I am asking you a straight forward question for which I 'd like an answer". He said, "You have the answer". Then he turned to someone else and asked, "What do you think?" He had done the same thing to other older woman and caused her embarrassment..... I thought she'd never speak again - he as much as told her the answer she gave was really, really stupid. I could see how shaky she was and we went and had coffee later - and then we got to talking ..... that was our protection against that feeling of being lost. I would think that certainly our age was a factor and it was a professor's lack of sensitivity to .....older women in this class - adult education principles in general are pretty unknown to most professors ....from my experience. It is true that this particular professor tried to use our life experiences and to help us formulate the answer to the question which is a basic adult education principle but his motivation for doing so was not ethical. He appeared to do this so that he could make the student appear ignorant and himself clever".

SW has not run into a lot of insensitivity on the part of the profs. "I would say it is the exception rather than the rule". But when she received a good mark in the course, which she found difficult, SW felt it was "sweet revenge". Receiving that mark was motivating because it happened to be the first course in her Pre-masters. After her Pre-masters experience she thought: "My god, is this what it is going to be like - course after course? .....I

sort of knew.... but there was that doubt.....and so that when I did do well; then I thought if I could master this, I can master basically any other course that comes along."

SW thinks that the younger graduates tend to want to talk from a theoretical base whereas the older graduate because of their life experience or work experience are talking from their experiential base. She says that often the professor is talking from a theoretical base too because he/she has not practiced in the field or at least not for a long time, tending to create some tension. However, where the professor has remained active in the field, then she finds that this didn't happen. She feels that students who had a number of years of experience were perhaps a direct threat to the professors who do not remain active in the field and consequently, they have difficulties speaking to field based students .

SW comments that graduate students' teaching-learning relationships with professors in Social Work are not based on the inquiry process: " I would say that about 50% did not set up the climate for it to be an inquiry process where one could question, one could ask, one could explore..." She knows that this process "supports the adult learning principle of the teacher as being a learner - it is a reciprocal process.." and for her that is how she functions best. She believes that this type of format builds a strong relationship between the student and professor and allows for an expanded type of learning to take place. SW thinks there is a defensiveness on the part of some of professors to protect themselves because they are not open to being able to say 'I don't know - here is my feeling on it but let's look at three or four other people's ideas on it'. She suspects that probably the university as an institution promotes that in the faculty.

Often SW feels that teaching at university is not based on adult education principles, "rather it is based on traditional elementary teacher" of 'teacher to child' and she finds "that is a very hard role to play when you are a mature forty-eight year old". She thinks that at least part of the difficulty in the Social Work Faculty is because young graduates are more comfortable in the traditional role. When the older graduate tries to establish a different kind of rapport or climate, SW observes that it "puts a strain on the group situation".

SW says that availability of professors for individual student meetings is a problem. She has not seen office hours listed on course outlines handed out at the beginning of courses - "so you didn't have any sense of when the professor might be available." To SW, it is difficult to "get hold of them".

#### Part-time versus Full-time Students

SW felt a sense of "not belonging" in a couple of courses. At the end of one course she took, she suggested that they all go out and have a drink together. "Oh, yeah what a great idea - when it came right down to it two of us went with the prof - so there wasn't that same sense of togetherness ... that might have been the case with the full-time people...".

She feels that there is a definite difference between the part-time students and full time ones:

"... you see, it is hard to be part of that (the group) if you are part-time - and it is hard to take advantage of those kinds of things ... I had been in that situation when my kids were younger, - like always having to say - I have got to get home - I have got the baby-sitter .... puts a limit on those things."

## Academic Skills

In the 1950's, when SW wrote her undergraduate assignments, she tended to write as an extension of her journalistic Grade Eleven style. When she "hit Graduate School and suddenly there was this thing called research", in the 1980's, she felt she was not doing research or writing at the level expected. She was shocked. At the time SW was unaware of courses on campus which would improve her writing skills.

Another perceived difficulty was that her learning style was being affected by her age. This was a major revelation to SW although theoretically she knew that the ageing process affects how a person learns, she had not applied it to herself and her situation. In other words, she had not adapted her study and learning techniques:

"One of the things that hit me was realizing my learning process was changing as I was aging and having to come to deal with that - and the realization that I was going to have to read the textbook four times when other people might only have to read it twice for my comprehension. That was scary because I was into it before I knew it was to be so difficult..... and I had done a lot of pre-reading ..... I had read it and simply didn't understand it - and then by the end of the course - I ended up getting a B+ which was considered an extremely good mark in this particular course - so that was a whole new process for me."

SW would like to see the professors have "more knowledge in terms of adult education ... and adult learning principles ... then they might be more sensitive... to the older adult learner."

When SW thinks of her years of study she readily admits "Yes, it was difficult, yes it was stressful....". But she has trouble trying to decide if it was undue stress or if it was "Yes it was difficult but I expected it to be difficult..".

## Situational Barriers

### Finances

SW has experienced financial difficulties. In the beginning she was unable to qualify for student aid because part-time students were not eligible. Each time course payment was due she had to "squeeze" an already tight budget and occasionally had to borrow money to pay for her courses. At times she feels she was "literally begging and borrowing money to pay for my courses". She went "course to course because there was no other way" but feels that "Ideally, I would have quit working and gotten student aid but that wasn't possible with children to support." At the time of this interview a raise in salary with her new job has made her financial situation much easier.

Running her house was a problem which she quickly solved by "just stopped doing certain things ... I learned how to make priority lists very quickly" and "many housekeeping things were low on the priority list". After the change in jobs she has extra money which allows for ".....a housekeeper in once a week or every two weeks now, you know, to do those kinds of things".

Also the children are older now (both over 15 years of age) so she does not have to worry about the kind of logistics that she once did, such as "babysitters, baby-sitters not showing up and a car which wasn't reliable, ... it would break down". Transportation was just another problem ... "just an additional thing ... if it wasn't one thing, it was another". Now the children are older there are fewer problems regarding time. She is "driving them here or there and everywhere".

Finding study time at home was difficult for a while because of the ages of her children and was costly because she "had to get a sitter and to go

out and study". "I used to go out to a local restaurant and order a coffee and study there.... the sitter looked after the kids." Study time is no longer as big a problem, but it is difficult when she is working full time, but not because of needing babysitters. Now she "can jump into the car and go out to the library when I want". Study time and working full time can lead to difficulties but she has developed a system: "basically time management - what I do is cut out the social things and community involvement such as church, that I used to do".

### Dispositional Barriers

#### Stress

SW thinks that her stress level was high because of her feelings of incompetence in academic writing. She describes one instance when she felt she had written a particularly good paper, the evaluation was "scathing". She felt threatened, confused and frustrated:

"journalistically ... not writing academically"..... "if I wished to proceed in Graduate School I had to learn how to write academically but in no way did he indicate where I was writing journalistically; what parts were good, what parts were bad ..... or in what ways they were good or in what ways they were..... I didn't know what he was referring to ... whether it was the way I had expressed it .... or my choice of words. It was a very frustrating experience".

SW asked for help with her writing from a friend but she had real fears - "the professor had said if you continued to write at this level you will not get through ...". She was able to talk to another professor about her writing problem and he said, "Great - that's what we're going to work on in (our) course - writing problems". She feels that going through that course

helped her grow " academically and was almost therapeutic.....". SW looks back now and thinks:

"MY GOD! By taking the right courses and being careful ..... I could have slid through Graduate School, but always knowing, I really wasn't mastering ..... the writing skills ... So probably for me there has been more personal achievement in this, ... these last two courses.... I just feel a 100% more confident in terms of other course material ... I knew when I was writing my last paper that I was writing very, very specifically - to work on specific skill and errors which I tended to make to see if I could break those patterns ..... I could see quite an improvement ..... and then I used the writing systems and techniques... it felt so good,..... I was not writing for the mark..... I was really writing for (myself), my focus was to improve my writing skills so that I could express myself in an academic manner... I could see myself improving ... and I was thrilled....."

A postscript to this story is that she has been asked to publish some of her writing.

She has always had confidence that somehow she would get around the difficulties and say " The heck with rest of the world and get on with it". She feels that she decided that she'd make it work and part of that is a personality thing - sort of a mind set:

"It is an attitudinal ... thing. So it wasn't a big surprise in a sense..... it was frustrating when those barriers came up but I perceived that it was part of the system.....I anticipated that there were going to be stupid kinds of things ....to overcome...."

SW has been experiencing feelings of guilt now that study time is Saturday and Sunday which had previously been devoted to social and church related activities:

"I found that it was necessary to drop theses activities to a large degree in order to complete the courses. But this has

created additional stress due to the guilt feelings that I experienced when confronted by Church members who would make comments such as: 'Don't you belong to our Church anymore' or 'we never see you in Church anymore'. It took me a year before I could comfortably say: 'I am unable to attend' and not feel any further explanation was required."

Asking for a place to work at the university is difficult because SW feels guilty for the few times she needs it: she would be there only in the evenings but in fact, tying up a carrel all day long. "They called me the second year and asked me if I wanted one. I said that I don't think I could live with myself if there is a full time student who needs it". But at the same time she needs and wants "a home - some place to hang my hat and put my books and things".

### Support Systems

SW has support systems ready and willing to assist her whenever she needs them. Her family and friends tend to be very supportive. Several friends are taking or have completed their Masters and are able to keep her going when she wants to quit. Her children like the idea of their mother studying and being back in school. She says that they were "really young" when she was studying for the Gerontology program and "really weren't aware of the ramifications ..." but are old enough to understand now.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis

#### Introduction

The data analyzed in this perception study is the recorded information obtained from seven mature female graduates who returned to study at the University of Manitoba. Their diverse thoughts, unique experiences and deep-seated feelings create difficult and, sometimes, complex analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to sift the less important from the more important information and to add new insights as well as compare the descriptions of their personal circumstances to those found in current research. The themes which are identified or which emerge from the semi-structured interviews are supported by transcribed conversations.

In order to facilitate analysis, the matched themes are organized in the same manner as those from research literature in Chapter 2, Literature Review. The complexity of some themes goes beyond the literature and reveals extensions which cannot be adequately analyzed in isolation. In these situations the respondents' thoughts and feelings cause themes to overlap. For example, although finances are a concern for several, in reality, that concern may cause guilt feelings for one, but for another, a worry about how to pay her fees. Other themes such as age, time, and stress constantly weave into other themes much as water will trickle by many routes into different streams. Findings which go beyond the literature are discussed as new areas of study, support systems, age and personal health.

#### Reasons and Motives for Returning to University

The motives and reasons for returning to university are complicated because no clearly defined reason appears. Instead, each woman feels her

decision to begin university again follows from a combination of many situations. Consequently, the following analysis, although appearing to have clearly defined limits, in reality, is an intricate pattern of several reasons and motives, each depending exclusively upon the individual.

For respondents who wish to improve their status, career development is a common reason for returning to school. One woman was locked into a level of work because of her education and realized that she couldn't break into government circles without her Masters. She decided to take a Master in Social Work. Others comment: "... I don't want to become a professor... (I) am out to do research and work in a lab... (I) want to be of value..."; "... I knew that I needed the degree to be able to make something of myself professionally and so it was a means to an end..."; and "... (I) may as well get another degree as it will give me two options in the work place...".

Another motive is to contribute to a personal career interest. For instance, one respondent says that studying management gives her knowledge which may contribute to improving hospital management. Her past experience in a medical profession leads her to believe that administrators with management skills as well as clinical skills are rare in hospitals and that her example may promote more medical professionals to seek management training.

Commonly associated with women in science related professions is their desire to "keep up professionally". These women are keenly aware that their professions are changing radically and that they have a responsibility to remain up to date.

Although few respondents indicate monetary reasons as their sole motive, one says that with three daughters in university "the money would

be useful". Combinations of monetary and other reasons are revealed by this woman who has to support herself and her children:

"..... (the) motivating force to go back was to break out of that economic situation but I would have probably ..... gone back with a different motivation ..... had I not been in that situation..."

Respondents indicate interest in education and in its relationship to their personal development are motives for re-entering university. One feels that she has been going to school for most of her life: "...I hardly ever left school... started at 17 with night school...". She always "loves to study and learn". Another "always wanted a Masters" and finds education a mental stimulation - it is "interesting". Another motive is the desire of some to improve their self-images. One woman says that doing housework did nothing for her self-image but going to university has changed her personal perception. Another echoes that idea: she no longer feels "dumb", now that she is successful at graduate school.

However, not all feel their drive for education is related to their personal development. One respondent comments: "(I am)... not using education to search for something" because she feels she had already "arrived". She feels confident and successful.

A complex desire to do something "different" which would be personally benefiting rather than to do something for someone else, is expressed as one reason for returning to university. She "was alone and needed to do something different":

"... to find something different- something that was mine.... I was nobody's wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, who expected this and that because of the title ... I guess I wanted to do

something just for me... that was for me, rather than what others wanted me to do for them".

A respondent, who was widowed, said that returning to university was a way to deal with her feelings of "restlessness" and the need for "something that was hers".

#### Influences or Events Triggering Re-entry

An analysis of the influences illustrates the individuality of the respondents. Personal experiences such as war, death of a spouse, recognition of personal ethics, or a need for personal development trigger their desire to return to university. These events or influences are closely related to other factors in the women's lives and need to be studied with care because their re-entry decision is a combination.

Some respondents express their desires to contribute to society and these desires vary considerably, from one who says that doing her part was continuing to practice her chosen profession even though she had children and found it difficult at times to get everything done; to another, who sees education and research work as a constructive means of helping society: "I think I can contribute that way... I am very conscious about helping out... ". Another says that she is "very much" aware of social obligations :

"I think it comes from being educated because all of a sudden your whole world opens up and you read about all these different things. On the university campus you tend to become more aware of these things going on in the rest of the world ... not so isolated in your own little house and in your own little problems, like going shopping and things like that- it was a real mind opener to come to university and people are not talking about the next party; they are talking about what is going on in .....; you pick up the newspaper and start reading and trying to find out what is going on ... trying to be someone who is not 'totally out to lunch'...".

Another refers to her ambition and personal ethics to aid "little people" who are "hurt by unfair laws" as her way of contributing. Personal ethics are the basis for one of the returning women. She feels that small people get hurt by laws and they have no way to fight back. She says that they get trampled because they don't know the system and how to work it. She sees legal aid and criminal law as a partial answer to aiding these unfortunate people and feels that "everyone is entitled to a defense".

Both age and a sense of lack of fulfilment are recognized as important influences. Often the statement and question "Here you are, age \_\_\_\_, and what have you done?" becomes a major trigger. One woman commented that if she "was going to get the job (she) wanted, (she) had to get (her) education now, as employers would not want to hire someone who was older".

Timing is a critical influence as some feel that "if they were going to do it, it had better be now" as their "time was running out on them".

A personal development factor involving the improvement of their self-concept appears in many decisions to re-enter university: " (I felt) a need to prove something to myself" or "(I) wanted" or "needed" a challenge. One comments that she "enjoyed the challenge" and demands of academic rigor. Related to the ideas of change and challenge was the feeling that some "wanted a change from being at home". Another recalls that she "wanted a chance to go back .... (I felt) burnt out from being home with the major responsibility of the children and my husband away most of the time". These thoughts appear as constructive ideas which are seen as ways in which they are able to handle an otherwise difficult personal situation.

Separation, the end of a relationship, illness and death of a spouse are other influences. One woman, whose husband had died from Alzheimer's

Disease, says: "... this was not an easy time.... now I was alone... (I) needed a challenge...". She had taken care of her husband at home but when he was transferred to hospital, she returned to study. In the past she had enjoyed studying, and now it appeared to be right for her to continue.

Another respondent sees herself as a non-traditional wife and going back to study as "inevitable": "... I was not cut out to be the traditional wife .... (I) knew that I would return to university at some time". She comments that her friends thought she would have been back sooner.

Critical in their decision-making is their sense of time which appears connected to many different aspects of their lives. The circumstances have to feel "right" for them to pursue their educational goals. Situations directly or indirectly related to the respondents' personal lives cause them to feel that "the time was right", "(now)... seemed like the time to do it" or that it is "... a reasonable time to do this". "Reasonable time" has many connotations: changed family situations, appropriate financial situations, suitable ages of their children and the "right position" of their husband's career. Changed family situations such as when one woman's "stepson left home" and she was alone, she recalls being "bored... (needing) something to fill up my days". Others remember "now was the time" as they were "needing something to do". One younger respondent states that the age of her children is "right" because they can manage without her being home fulltime.

Another woman describes the changes she experienced in one year: "... I went from having three daughters, a husband, a mother, and sometimes a mother-in-law, to being alone. I became a workaholic". So many traumatic events had taken place in one year she feels she was forced to find something different as she needed to keep her mind busy.

Married respondents are concerned with their husband's position in his career because his position is related to how free he is to assist more with the children and the running of the house.

Related to their partner's career position is the feeling that "finances were right". Although the respondents with partners do not have financial difficulties, they are aware of their planning so the family would not suffer financially while they are studying.

There also appears to be a readiness moment for some of the women. One student recalls, "Now was the time to do it - if I didn't do it then, it would get more and more difficult to go back and do it".

The feelings of "not being tied to one place of residence" were instrumental in allowing one woman to leave her friends and job to travel to another province to continue her education. For her to leave her place of residence, go to another province and re-enter university was not a major step.

People influenced many women to return to university. Several indicate that their husbands influenced their decisions. Another woman credits her father's influence as being responsible for her returning to study. In their home, he had always stressed the importance of education and had associated with education-oriented people. Aware that her mother had a university education, she has always wanted to return.

Planning for the future affected some decisions to return to university. One respondent says that she is going back to school so that she will "have a life after the children leave home".

In spite of how clear-cut the above influences appear, it is important to recognize that a combination of events and influences mixed with a

variety of motives and reasons culminate in the final decision of the respondents to return to university.

### Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are related to institutional regulations, programs and courses, instructional practices and procedures, Staff and Faculty attitudes. Each of these topics is discussed separately in the following section under the appropriate headings.

#### Bureaucratic Policies

Registration appears to be reasonable for most respondents. However, a commonly related comment regarding "running from one building to another" to complete the required forms appears in several interviews. Specific requirements such as compulsory examinations like the General Mathematics Aptitude Test and Law School Admissions Test, and character reference letters are required by some faculties. Minimum grade point averages are necessary for all respondents and their undergraduate marks must be transferred officially to the University Admissions Office.

A part-time respondent who works full days off campus describes a registration barrier encountered when she first registered. This student, unfamiliar to the campus and the system, was unable to get her library card and ID card on a Saturday; therefore, she required a working day off to register as her faculty interviews each student "to get course approval...". This procedure was "... all done in the day time ... so to have your overall program approved.....???" she had little choice but to ask her employer for the day off.

## Programs and Courses

Programs and courses are organized into three topics: prerequisite and credit problems, program design and course selection, and scheduling classes.

Respondents report difficulties receiving credit or recognition for courses completed at an earlier time. Failure in gaining credit means the respondents must repeat courses which they feel were already part of their undergraduate transcripts. These difficulties appear as both complaints to, and as unfair treatment by, the university administration. Although the respondents seldom speak about being given credits for past courses, it appears that they are more likely given credits if the courses are taken recently and if taken within the province of Manitoba. One respondent says that the university mis-led her by sending her incorrect information. The university evaluated her transcripts and officially notified her about two courses which she required for a sufficient academic background. Because she was not living in Manitoba at the time, she enrolled in similar courses at a nearby Canadian university. She successfully completed the two courses but upon her arrival at the faculty in the University of Manitoba, she was informed that she would not receive credit for the courses. Instead she was required to enroll in similar courses on the Manitoba campus: "I thought 'what's the point of taking some of these courses' ... I felt I wasn't learning ... much...". Later she found out that another graduate student refused to take some undergraduate courses and the faculty permitted the student to continue. She feels that she should have fought harder: "... perhaps if I had been more adamant.....".

Some respondents challenged the administration of different faculties and refused to take undergraduate courses. One says: "...I

challenged a course that covered the topic of the services in which I had spent twenty-two years working". The compromise offered to her by the professor was for her to audit the course, which meant she paid tuition but she was not required to hand in assignments. The reason given for her needing to be in the class was that the professor found her knowledge and experience on the course topic "helpful" in class. She countered the offer by asking "... helpful for whom?". She was allowed to drop the course and received the credit.

Another aspect of credit problems is related to the work in which some of the respondents were involved prior to re-entering university. One woman was required to enroll in a laboratory methods course even though she had been employed as a research assistant for several years in a similar government laboratory. Another was required by administration to complete a basic psychology course as part of her prerequisites although she had completed a similar course several years earlier as part of her professional training for her teaching certificate. When the professor of the course discovered the situation, he was able to obtain permission for her to drop it but she does not know if she was given credit for her previous course, or if it was dropped from her program.

Most respondents were enrolled in undergraduate courses as part of their pre-masters program or as necessary background courses before entering a masters program. Generally, this practice is seen in a negative light and a waste of their time:

"I had to waste a whole year taking.....I couldn't take anything else .....it was so basic that anyone in (her) normal mind could have passed the course without spending a whole year.....so I feel I had a whole year just wasted....."

Another student recalls how she felt about being put into an undergraduate class because her transcript did not have enough required background courses:

"I guess it was annoying to be regarded as an 18 year old - 'you have to be an equivalent to one of our 18 year old graduates- 'oh, you don't have this course? you don't have that course? Then you have got to take them' - instead of thinking: What does that course really teach you? I mean, is it really necessary?"

One student feels there was a lack of direction when her Graduate program was designed and as a result it was "messed up". She contributes the problem to being "so keen" and her "professor let her go". This means that she ended up with a too heavy work load and she had to drop a course.

Assistance in selecting courses, not mentioned often, tends to be negative. One respondent who did not see an advisor during her whole time in graduate studies, states: "(I)...didn't have one... (I) never actually spoke to anyone regarding my enrollment". She maintains that the most useful course assistance was from the secretary: "I would ask ...what I wanted to know about the courses and the professors.... I probably got better advice from her than if I had gone to the professors anyway".

Selection of courses is seen often as difficult because there is not enough information available to students. One respondent wishes she had more information about courses which would have allowed her to make selections more wisely:

"...once into second year and I had to chose eight subjects as options, I felt I had too little information available for the student to make an intelligent decision... by too little information I mean with respect to the subject matter, the course material, where you start from, and where you are going to end up, the professor who is teaching it, and what his

expectations are, and how long he has taught it even... when you are choosing these courses perhaps if you dug around, scrounged and talked, eventually you'd accumulate all this knowledge... who has the time?"

A concern of one respondent is the lack of consistent quality in her program courses. She enrolled in a "mundane course" which to her "was a waste of time" and of little use: "...something would have been more valuable ... (it was) ... like having been in Grade Two and having to do Grade One over again". As this was an optional course in her second and final year of the Masters Program she is disappointed. She insists that overall, the quality of the second year classes is not as good as in first year. She contributes this situation to the notion that first year courses are more closely monitored and controlled by the administration and in the second year of the program, instructors are given more freedom to do as they please. The respondent believes this freedom results in less control over presentation methods, and inconsistent quality of information and course outlines.

Scheduling courses has many short-comings according to the respondents. They cite inconveniences and unsuitable hours which part-time students attempt to fit when taking courses on campus. Respondents say that off-campus working hours and responsibilities of caring for children are not compatible with most class schedules. Some feel that university administration show little concern for working students. One woman comments: "...scheduling could be better" as most scheduling accommodates instructors from practices downtown rather than those of students. She does not take the 3:30 classes because it is 7:00P.M. before she gets home and then "I would have to make supper". Her reason for not taking 8:30's is

that she would have to be up in the morning at 5:30 A.M. in order to care for her children and daily household routines before leaving for university.

Another student's full-time job makes her late for her four o'clock classes. She states: " (It is) hard to get the courses I wanted because of conflicts in time either at work or at university. Classes scheduled from 7:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. were difficult...". She finds that "after being up at 5:00 A.M. and working a full day these (evening) classes seemed very long".

Class schedules cause overloading for some respondents. One contends: "I was always in the process of catching up" due to her class schedule. She was required to take an undergraduate course in the afternoon but her required graduate courses were held at night. This schedule caused increasing amounts of stress as time progressed. Because these were the only slots in which the classes were scheduled and she had to complete them before she could take any other courses, she had little choice but to enroll. Further to her stress, the afternoon undergraduate classes cut up her research time and she was left with the feeling of not accomplishing any research.

Another respondent maintains that she was forced to take courses because of convenience rather than because they were the most appropriate courses for her program:

"...it's difficult to make an intelligent decision on what courses you want to take... too often you wind up taking courses that fit your timetable because of conflicts, instead of taking courses (you) wanted to. I had to take..... because it fit my major and the one I really wanted conflicted with the one I had to take...not the right reason for taking a course in Graduate Studies - because it fits your timetable."

Time constraints for post-graduate programs are part of institutional regulations. The time allowed by most faculties for a student to earn a Masters degree is five years, but for some respondents this is difficult, especially "when you are working full time".

University services such as Student Aid, Library services, Parking, University Typing Services, the Bookstore, Counseling Services and Day Care are described as part of institutional barriers. Although several respondents consider the library services on campus as inadequate, only one describes the Dafoe Library as having "shoddy service":

"You ended up carrying two journals, can't carry any more than two, downstairs where you photocopy them and then you leave them down there (nobody carries them back upstairs), then you go back up stairs and get two more - it's time consuming and as a result half the journals are never back on the shelves....."

She says that "doing research in Dafoe ... (is) ... hard physical work". The journals she uses are on the third floor and all the copy machines are on the first. When she asked about this inconvenience, she was told that the copy machines were on the first floor for the convenience of the repair men - which, to her, is an unacceptable reason.

Parking Services on the University of Manitoba campus are too far from faculty buildings and metered parking is inconvenient complains one respondent who is a graduate from another Canadian university. When she first arrived on campus, she was too late to receive an assigned parking space and had to use meter parking. She says that because the meters use only quarters, a full days parking worth of quarters is difficult to have ready everyday.

## Instructional Practices

Perceptions on this theme are discussed as instructional and teaching methods, evaluation procedures, and staff and student attitudes.

Teaching and instructional methods are described as both good and poor by respondents. Generally they feel that professors do not appreciate the position of older students and tend to treat them as if they were "right out of high school". Several are frustrated and annoyed by this treatment: "... only four out of 15 profs. recognize me as an adult and treat me as such...". Another observes:

"so often I feel that it is not adult to adult, it is adult to child and I find that a very hard role to play when you are a mature forty-eight year old.... part of the difficulty is because they are still with the young graduates and are more comfortable with that role.....".

There seems to be a consensus that "adult education principles in general are pretty unknown to most professors...." and because of this, mature students are not treated as adults in most classrooms.

Teaching methods used in classrooms are examined. Respondents wonder about the effectiveness of some teaching methods. Others question whether or not professors want students to participate in class: "I would say that about 50% did not set up the climate for it (the class) to be an inquiry process where one could question, one could ask, one could explore". Although this respondent feels questions were not invited by the instructor, another contends that an instructor, who appeared to invite questions, refused to answer straight forward questions. This practice resulted in feelings of frustration and wondering about the answer: "If I knew what the answer was, I wouldn't have asked the question".

"I still think a lot of professors won't take the time or the pedagogical attitude that's student centered but it's with teacher here and getting down with the knowledge... so I think there is defensiveness on the part of some of the professors ... it is to protect themselves because they are not open to knowing or being able to say 'I don't know; here is my feeling on it but let's look at three or four other peoples' ideas on it'. And I think that probably the institution as an institution promotes that in the faculty to a degree.

She maintains that university scholarship and society, in general, do not readily accept people who admit that they do not know or understand "everything" and tend to judge these people as "stupid". She feels discouraging students' questions is one way professors protect themselves from situations where they may not have appropriate answers.

Another instruction technique, games, is unsuccessful for some students. A respondent notes that situations arise when she knows the outcomes of the game and knowing this, she is able to take the group either further than it was to go in class time or she does not allow to take place what was supposed to happen. She feels that she and her fellow classmates are learning but the professor appears to be threatened by her behavior: "He seemed to pick topics or things to disagree with me on...I didn't let him get away with it.. if I didn't agree, I said so...". The result is that she feels that the professor "almost taunted" her for the remainder of the course.

Rote learning and lecturing are instruction methods which trouble respondents. One woman, who was required to take several undergraduate courses, makes this observation:

"... undergraduate courses were all rote; you memorize and regurgitate on the exam; you have essay questions but it is all regurgitating notes ... the graduate course was the only one where I thought ... here (University of Manitoba) they want everything memorized and known ... you are a walking encyclopedia when you are finished...".

Another comments on the learning value of lecturing for mature students:

"I know better... (as) I have done...independent learning and I know how much more I learn and how much has stayed with me.....I don't think that (lecturing) is the best way to do it and ...it is fine for twenty-two year olds. It is not the optimum method for teaching mature adults."

For mature students physical problems such as visual and auditory problems appear to be caused by two things; large rooms and chalkboards far from the front row of seats. Some respondents described auditory problems related to the professor's English pronounced with unfamiliar accents.

Psychological problems of respondents in classrooms are related to the number and the ages of students in their classes. At first some respondents were uneasy about expressing their thoughts and actively participating in their classes. Women concerned with these problems cite instances where they find it difficult to ask questions, think, or answer orally in large groups.

Evaluation practices are organized into two kinds of examinations, oral and written, and marking and feedback. The perceptions of university evaluation practices vary from one faculty to another. Some feel oral examinations are stressful and although there is "a great deal of practice" given to candidates and the examiners try to reduce the stress factor, the stress level is still "very high". One respondent believes that some people "fail, not because they do not know their work, but because of their presentation". This practice seems unfair to her but she does not know what would be a successful alternative.

Respondents express differing points of view on written examinations but remark on the high stress level caused by this form of evaluation. One

respondent says that they are "stressful but fair" and that written examinations are a traditional method of evaluation in her profession. She believes that until there is a better way, students have to be evaluated by this method. On the other hand, another woman from a different faculty and profession says that written examinations are a poor way of testing:

"for example we have one of the poorest ways of testing..... very stressful...100% exams... everything is pinned on those exams... a poor indicator of what I have learned .... (they) are inconsistent with the skills they are teaching you...".

She thinks a better way would be to put students in a practical situation and examine their performance.

Marking procedures for assignments are evaluated by some respondents. One says that some Teaching Assistants have a quality of "pickiness" in their marking habits. Because she is completing her masters in a faculty which is not the same as her undergraduate faculty, she recognizes that she does not know all the "little details". However, she says that she has "not necessarily learned the little details" through the evaluation methods but she has learned "how not to treat students".

Feedback is important to the respondents. One says, (1) "worked so hard and got a C average in first year". She was not certain that she would be successful in the program: "I wasn't sure I still had it". She feels that feedback is necessary to reassure adults that they still are able to do academic work. Another would like more feedback from her faculty:

"they (the staff) give you two set interviews a year and sit down and talk with you but other than that, on a day to day basis there might be a little bit of feedback or good (work).....".

She feels more feedback would give her greater confidence about her ability before she writes the exams.

### Staff Attitudes

Respondents describe their observations of Staff and Faculty's attitudes towards them as: "wariness"; rather "un-nerving"; "surprise that I was there" and one of admiration or "amazing". One woman who describes one of her professors as reacting to her with "surprise", continues: "... and then of grudging admiration that I had made it through the courses... and that I was there to work". The respondent who describes her professors' reactions as "wariness", feels this caution is justified for three reasons: one, she has children, and two, they have to consider the success of their program, as well as her academic and personal welfare.

A combination of sexual and age biases are described by one respondent. In one of her classes, a professor has difficulty dealing with females and with older persons. She contends that he has a chauvinistic attitude and never questions a woman in class or uses a female in teaching examples. Another says that although there is no overt sexual discrimination in her faculty, some older staff members dislike females in the faculty. She feels that as a female she cannot "be one of the boys" and consequently, her studies are "different" and "more difficult" than if she were male.

Although different types of discrimination are described by respondents, the most common is age-related. One respondent recalls when a professor called her "Mother". She insists that he did not do it twice! She says that although it is unusual to have older females in class, the faculty has more non-traditional students (older) than traditional (younger)

students. Respondents cite examples demonstrating the insensitivity of some instructors: "I would think certainly the age thing in that (referring to a particular incident) was again, a professor's lack of sensitivity ... to treat the older women in class .....". Another says that her professors tend to be "condescending" to mature female students:

"don't realize where we are coming from... you are not a peer.. you are a student...one professor called us kids (these are) unsuitable, inappropriate tags ..... unaware unthinking statements showing a general lack of sensitivity to older students".

When a professor refused to allow his class to be taped for a mature female student who could not attend due to a snowstorm, one respondent suggests that professors "won't listen to mature students and why they may want to do things". She says that they basically "... don't know how to deal with (mature students)". Another student remarks that professors are "ill at ease" when she informs them: "I am not coming in today". She suggests that professors "don't want to make an issue out (of her) not being in class and want to be nice ... but they are taken aback". The professors who react like this are "just a few, because there are the others who say 'oh, that's fine".

Respondents are quick to describe situations where professors are helpful and willing to listen to mature female students:

"... (there) are others who are just super in attitude...men and women who are just great... changed exam times for me. There are the other sides... there are a lot of professors that I haven't had...some have been really nice to me... some just treat me with in difference but ..... for the five who, you know, there are easily five or six who have been really super and that includes the Dean too".

Other positive attitudes are expressed. For example one respondent says that she is singled out for especially difficult tasks because the staff knows that she will get them done.

### Communication

Respondents feel communication is limited between mature students and professors. For example, one had never seen professors' hours posted on course outlines until she chose an optional course from another faculty:

"Certainly (posting of the professor's hours) one of the things (that) was never done, at least I never saw it - office hours were never put on the papers, so you didn't have any sense of when the professor might be available. So it seemed to be much more difficult to ever get a hold of them..."

Instances of oral communication appear to be limited too. One of the students observes that her faculty members seem uneasy when they are socializing with mature female students over coffee. They appear to be quite willing to express their views on professional topics but are unwilling to talk about current issues. They seem unaccustomed to a female or a student "taking them on" over a current issue. There is no social interaction with her Staff as "they are on a different social and economic level". Although another respondent recalls that her advisor takes her to lunch and has taken her home for meals, she concedes that other staff members treat her as a student and not as a peer.

Some part-time respondents are concerned about rapport between mature part-time students and their professors. One concerned woman reports:

"...at the end of one of the first courses I took, I said, 'Let's all go out and have a drink together'. Oh yeah, what a keen idea. But when it came right down to it, two of us went out with the prof. ... there wasn't that togetherness. Now, I got the feeling that (the togetherness) might have been .... with full-time people.... but you see, it is hard to be part of that if you are part-time.. and it is hard to take advantage of those kinds of things .... like, I had been in that situation when my kids were younger.... I (had) to get home, I (had) a baby-sitter... (it) puts a limit on those things".

However, recently she has been a part of classes in another faculty where she has established "good" rapport with her class professor. Consequently, she thinks that being a part-time student is not the only reason for a lack of rapport in her own faculty:

"... I guess ... that one of the ways to indicate that you want to be able to have that kind of relationship is to indicate your availability, ... so that when it isn't indicated in a way ...one distrusts that. ....some other younger graduates seemed to have (rapport in) some ways ... but it didn't seem to be encouraged in any way ....".

Some respondents observe that technical and clerical staff are more friendly than are the faculty members of their departments. Sometimes a respondent makes a decision which accounts for limited communication in her department. One respondent says that she does not associate with her fellow graduate students because they complain and gossip about the professors behind their backs. She does not like this activity and is uncomfortable when she is with her gossiping colleagues; consequently she seldom socializes with them.

### Situational Barriers

This section organizes and describes situational barriers under the following headings: academic skills, age, personal health, stress, time, familial attitudes, and finances. The complexity of this section is partially due to the stress theme weaving throughout this whole section.

#### Academic Skills

Respondents describe their study skills as "rusty", "new", lacking discipline or a certain mental attitude. "Rusty" skills are skills which are required to read and "to do research"; to write and to take notes, and the ability to concentrate and to discipline one's self. Several respondents had to "re-learn" and "refine" their writing skills. Another says that at first she took too many notes which did not make sense later, but she discovered a new style of taking notes which helped. Often listening skills were rusty which affected some women's ability to take notes. One says that note-taking is more difficult now than when she was previously in university: "Harder than I remembered".

Some women say that their reading skills have improved since they returned. For example one explains: "my reading skills, I think since I came, have improved, although I still ...have to make more notes than necessary.....I have more information than I really need.....". Reading and doing research is hard work. One woman, in a professional faculty, says: "... I had not really lost my clinical skills; I had lost a bit of my book work skills. I had read but ... ". In other words, although she had kept up to date professionally, she no longer had all the skills needed for academic work: "Your mind has just lost its edge ... that's probably the hardest ... it's not the

physical work ... to do the studying ... the long hours are hard but that (the studying ) is the hardest".

Several women describe academic work as "hard"; "...really tough, I had to work very, very hard - harder than I'd ever worked in Arts and I had been an A student." Sometimes occupational conditions make it difficult to continue, as the working hours appear "very long" and the work "very hard". One respondent says that working and going to school is time consuming; sometimes she "worked and studied from 6:45 A.M. to late at night" when her classes ended on campus.

Research methods have to be "re-learned". One woman says that "just finding titles which were appropriate to a topic" was a problem. When she did find them, it did not occur to her to check their dates for relevance to topics she was researching. Another thing which was foreign to her was going through ten to twelve books for information and she "did not know about scanning". These were skills which she had not used for a long time and she feels that she had to learn them all over again. Most respondents comment on reading and doing research as "hard".

Research writing is a major concern to many respondents. These former academic skills have become lax:

"writing essays was a skill that I had let get rusty - courses in \_\_\_\_\_ helped sharpen these skills up ...it is a matter of trying to get everything together to write essays - (Get) the research skills up again, so I could do that....."

One woman entered university thinking that she knew how to write and she was surprised when she found out her writing was unacceptable:

"When I wrote ... undergraduate assignments, I tended to write as an extension of how I wrote in Grade Eleven; ... it was

much more journalistic ... it was a shock when I hit Graduate School and suddenly there was this thing called research. I had real confusion over that...I perceived I wasn't doing research ...".

Closely tied to her confusion is a situation described by another respondent who did not know how to find suitable research materials, use scanning techniques, or sort the useful from nonuseful information. She was unaware of university services available to help her learn these techniques.

Lack of discipline and concentration causes anxiety: "this was probably the hardest". For some, re-entry means "reading, reading reading", for others re-entry means their academic skills were "rusty in the sense that (they) haven't the discipline to sit down and pick out the points". Another feels that her study skills had "atrophied". All respondents had to re-learn them.

Several respondents describe the stress involved in keeping up the necessary mental readiness and discipline required for their academic work. This discipline is labelled "commitment" for some, and for others, "sticking to the workload". One woman, who found going back "terribly difficult", says that re-learning to "concentrate" is especially difficult. She "...spent hours doing something that wouldn't have taken that long" in undergraduate days. Another describes "being on": "It's a long time of concentrating". She describes her work as "very high concentration" work and her days studying at university are "thinking days".

New skills are important in the respondents' efforts to be successful. Most are learning to use word processors, computers, the libraries' facilities, to write in an appropriate research style and to study effectively. Learning these new skills involves feelings as well as learning skills. One describes learning to use micro-computers:

"The micro computers were foreign to me... it took hours for me to do my assignments but I wouldn't let anyone do them for me...if I didn't do them myself I wasn't learning - the professor didn't give a d\_\_\_ if you had the skills or not; the assignments had to be in on time and had to be presented in a professional manner".

Others learned to use the facilities offered by the libraries on campus. In the beginning, they were unused to microfiche and the microfiche machines and the catalogues. They learned to use other resources in the libraries for researching their projects. One woman recalls her fears:

"even to go to the library ... that was a horrible experience, because I could remember the way it was before and I was so confused. Everything was so different and I really did not know where anything was."

#### Age

Although age works into many themes, in this instance, it affects how one respondent learns. She had worked with the aging but the fact that her own aging process might have a bearing on her learning process, did not enter her mind. Age was a factor for which she had not prepared when she decided to return to university:

"I didn't know how to study - certainly one of the things that hit me was realizing my learning process was changing as I was aging and having to deal with that..... I had read it and simply didn't understand it, and then by the end of the course I ended up getting a B+ which was considered extremely good mark in this particular course - so that was a whole new process for me."

#### Personal Health

Although a discussion of the personal health of the respondents seldom appears in literature related to mature female graduates returning

to university, the topic is of interest to this study. Combinations of time, age and personal health of respondents affect their study plans. One respondent decided part way through her degree that if she was to have a family, the time had come. She is approaching the age where pregnancy may become a risk factor for both herself and her unborn child. Consequently, she became pregnant and planned to continue to study. However, her pregnancy has resulted in health complications which have forced her to postpone her studying. The respondent feels her pregnancy and postponing her studies are natural courses of events. She accepts the situation and assumes she will finish her specialty training when she is a mother and well again.

### Stress

Stress, like age and time, weaves through experiences of feeling short of friends or money, and feeling they do not have the mental readiness and self-discipline or the skills required to continue successfully: "I think that my stress level has to do with the writing and my inability to write at an academic level.....".

Changes in respondents' approaches to staff members and to learning is reaction to stress. One woman, who feels particularly under stress by a course which she did not wish to take and felt was a waste of her time, told the professor. Although she had to complete the course, she decided that she would put in enough time only to pass it: "...it was me who said, 'I don't give a damn.'" Respondents want to be successful because they find learning a challenge and "... an extension of what is natural to me - just more formalized ...", but sometimes stress and other feelings take priority: "if I like the course I work; if I don't, I don't work." Non-traditional approaches spring from feelings of stress.

Feelings of too much academic stress resulted in women developing less positive attitudes towards their programs, the faculty staff and their learning. For instance one respondent, who feels under stress by the volume of required studying, has decided that she will do "only so much school work and that is that". Also she has decided not to take studying home, as this, she feels, allows her time to play and to be with her children.

One respondent has developed emotional and physical health problems caused by too much academic pressure and stress. Academic pressures are increased workloads and laboratory duties, a shortage of graduate students to share department work, her thesis research and her classwork. This predicament translates into little time away from university or to socialize with friends or her husband. She is "very run down", "fatigued", and has developed a history of physical illness since she returned to university. Emotionally, she feels in a "very strange frame of mind" and finds "just making it to class a difficult task". Although her husband and professors support her, she feels more isolated than when she first enrolled. Part of her feelings of isolation is due to the manner in which Staff support is given. Most departmental support is inappropriate because it is viewed negatively by other graduates and adds to her stress level rather than easing it. Often she fights the "urge to run away" and feels "It is hard being a mature student".

Others use the positive side of stress to stay in academic programs: "... as I love learning ...I suppose that in a sense it was stress reducing - in that it held me in there when ... it would have been relatively easy to quit." Another questions the validity of her level of stress:

"Yes it was difficult; yes it was stressful; and then I want to cushion it with 'Was it more difficult? Was it more

stressful? Or is it just what I expected it to be stressful.....because I had knowledge about myself that some how I would cope with that , being the personality that I am ? So I have trouble trying to decide if it was undue stress.....".

## Time

Six of the seven women interviewed feel they are short of time. These feelings range from not having time to cook, or to play with their children, or to be with their husbands, to those who feel they do not have enough calendar time to complete their academic programs and work full time. Another aspect of time, related to women's biological age, is their recognition of "time running out" for them if they are to have a family.

Respondents with small children say that they lack time to be with them and, in most situations, this results in pangs of guilt. One asks: "Am I doing the right thing for my child?" She is especially aware of these feelings when " .... my child is saying 'I don't like you and resent your going'" but she consoles herself with: " .....if the environment and the caregiver are consistent in approach with that of the mother.....(then it is okay)?" On the other hand one woman with older children refuses to feel guilty. She maintains that children need to have responsibility in order to learn and her being away from home allows them that opportunity.

To find time to study either at home or away from home, for most respondents is a challenging problem. For instance a respondent with children says: "finding study time at home was difficult" as well as costly. She "had to get a sitter and go out and study. I used to go out to ....., order a coffee and study there...the sitter looked after the kids". Now she finds it is not the kids which interfere with her study time but her full-time job. Others lack research time, often due to circumstances beyond their control.

One woman is troubled by the limited hours posted for Dafoe Library. These hours are inadequate for part-time students who are working full-time and the hours are a "poor setup for doing research".

Holidays and visiting with friends are listed as items which are victims of having little free time. Respondents seldom see friends and often explain "... what I do is cut out the social things that I used to do". They have little time to give to people other than their families. Some describe the small amount of time they feel they have to be with their husbands, or for hobbies. Others lack time to cook or to eat properly: "I make sure I take my vitamins and eat the right things .....then you forget to eat, and then you eat junk food".

In spite of these feelings of guilt, stress and fatigue, most have designed mechanisms for coping with the time they have. According to one respondent, learning to prioritize all the things which need to be done was one answer. Another learned to prioritize early in her married life and is carrying on the same ideas as she studies. One woman, unused to doing this, says: "(I) learned how to make priority lists very quickly". Routines are used to help run their homes.

Time management skills are essential for going back to study. Some respondents learned new and different ones from those used previously to keep a house and several children "running smoothly". Each describes ways which are successful for her individual household. Most have routines developed for all members of the family; some have hired help; some just stopped doing some things. Routines for their children varied from vacuuming, dusting, ironing, laundry, gardening, baking, bathrooms, to doing the dishes. One mother hires her children to do especially difficult jobs such as washing the kitchen floor and defrosting the fridge.

Changing their personal standards and learning to compromise are two other methods they use to cope with their busy schedules. Several respondents are less meticulous about their housework now: "oh, ... you just can't keep it up".

Another change which appears to take place is in who takes the various family roles. One of the women explains what it is like for her during the week at her house:

"basically I am like a kid during the week- well, I do the cleaning up but a lot of the time I can come straight home and have dinner which is so nice and then he can get on to the homework he has."

In this situation her husband looks after keeping the house running smoothly, makes meal and does the grocery shopping.

The respondents note the changes in their personal lives since they started back to university. One mentions her personal appearance and the change in her standards. She is not as careful about how she dresses now but she thinks "it doesn't matter" because she wears a lab coat all day. Lately, she also notices that she does not bother with make-up, but she thinks, perhaps this may be partially due to a personal preference. Her clothing could be more up-to-date but, she says: "somehow .... getting my degree is more important".

Other changes include not making the family's clothing or baking everything from 'scratch' as they did previously. One respondent says that running the house was a problem she soon solved: "... (I) just stopped doing things...".

One respondent has enough time but she is single, childless and has few friends in the province. Her concern with time is different from that of

others. She has difficulty with "the motivational aspect of time". This has more relation to self-discipline than the concerns of the other women. The other respondents have children, family, friends and spouses or "significant other persons" as intricate parts of their lives.

### Finances

Finances tends to cause stress in several direct or indirect ways. One direct way is transportation. Some respondents describe stressful experiences due to unreliable cars which needed costly repairs but because of their financial situations, they cannot afford. One woman, who lives a considerable distance from the university, finds transportation costly; in fact, she describes her costs as "out of sight". Another states that even parking on campus is "costly when you have no money".

A respondent was ineligible for student aid when she first started back to university because she was a part-time student. This meant she was: "literally begging and borrowing ... money to pay for my courses... sort of went from course to course because there was no other way". She thinks: "Ideally, I would have quit working and gotten student aid, but that wasn't possible then". Student aid is available to part-time students now.

Because of their personal financial situations many respondents need to work outside the home while they are studying. Often they are involved in full time work or at the least in summer jobs. They speak of employer and job-related problems such as being unable to obtain a block of time necessary to take certain courses. Others believe that their employers would fire them if they knew they were going to school. On the other side of the coin are supportive employers who change work schedules to fit with the academic schedules of their employees. New jobs generally raised

"touchy" problems such as occasions when women did not like to ask for time off to continue their education because they had a new position with a new company. Sometimes new employers did not perceive the importance of their employees' education and their need to be free to continue.

Graduate Student Pay is another way used by some of respondents to relieve financial pressures. Examples are flat pay rates paid to graduate students in both Medicine and Science, and grant monies which may be connected to a specific project. One respondent had a military grant which was useful. Most women receive monies from their faculty departments either through research grants or as pay for services such as teaching or supervising labs.

Several women speak about using their savings for financing their studying and paying their Student Fees and textbooks. These are general comments, but one single respondent is fearful now that her "money is gone". She says that she is "scared".

One woman describes her loans and debts which are in the thousands of dollars while others relate them to the fact that they are not eligible or that the amounts received are not what they need. Some do not need loans as they are part-time students who work full-time and pay for their education as part of their living expenses. For others, family living costs seem to have risen because the women no longer are able to do the work they did prior to going back to school. Activities such as making the family's clothing, baking bread, having big gardens and preserving food for the winter are impossible for these women now.

### Familial Attitudes

Familial attitudes related to the respondents' returning to university, range from "highly supportive" to "being ignored". Some familial attitudes are traditionally based. For example, one woman describes the subtle pressures "put on" her by other members of her family such as her aunts and uncles who either will not or do not understand her desire to learn and to be educated. She receives no support from her husband's family either as they perceive her as doing untraditional things and prefer to ignore her. Another woman feels social pressures, related to traditional female roles, from other family females who view her activities as less than desirable.

Husbands of respondents are highly supportive and in some cases are the ones who encouraged their wives to resume their education. Some believe that returning to school has a positive influence on the family, such as the children getting to know their father better. Difficulties which children face when their mother returns to university, mainly center on "how hard" it is for their children but are counter-balanced by benefits such as the children learning new skills, becoming independent and learning responsibility because their mother is away from home.

Suitable day care services are sometimes difficult to find. It can be costly and arrangements may be complicated. For instance, one woman spent a full year arranging the sitters which would free her to go back to university. When their children are sick, the women find it difficult to leave them, even if it is to write exams.

## Dispositional Barriers

Dispositional barriers are organized into five themes: doubts, guilt, finances, academic confidence, and personal changes. Stress runs throughout this section as an undercurrent, rising to the surface occasionally.

### Doubts

Respondents tend to question their decision to return to university. Generally these comments are linked to pressure situations and negative experiences which they are either facing or have faced at university. One woman wonders "Why am I really here?" and how does she "fit in?" She feels other students look as though they belong but she does not. Another says that she needs "more hours in the day" and doubts surface especially when "the pictures on the wall don't quite hang straight and normally it wouldn't bother you". During these busy times she asks: "Are you giving everybody a fair shake?". She says: "It is not just the work, it is everything all put together". Another with her thesis to complete has doubts: "... I still wonder why I am doing this. Really?... but I think when it is all over, it will be okay."

When one respondent thinks about all she has to do to be successful, her doubts become fears: "... (I am) very scared at times... about 'Can I really do this?' but I know that everybody else has confidence in me except me. So, it's just something I have to work on."

Closely tied to these thoughts are concerns related to institutional regulations which require their masters degree to be completed in five years. Although all graduates are given five years to complete the Master degree, some feel it is an "impossible" task while working full time. One of them is able, financially, to quit her job and continue full time to meet the regulations but the other is uncertain about what will happen.

Some respondents have come close to quitting. One woman with small children says: "... there are times when you wonder if you will get it all done... sure absolutely, but I couldn't give up ever entirely... just because I enjoy doing it...". One acknowledges times when "it would be relatively easy to quit" but this is mainly because of the long period of time it has already taken and will take her to complete her program. Another remembers:

"... there are times when you do want to give in, you have so much work to do and you go home and your house is a mess and it isn't that it is filthy, it is just that it is so cluttered because you don't have time everyday to do the normal picking up..."

In spite of these combinations of conflicting emotions these women have not quit their studying and continue to pursue their education.

Some respondents have a "Superwoman" complex. Although they know they "cannot keep up the pace", generally, at some point in their university career, they have attempted to do several roles: wife, mother, student, employee, housekeeper, planner and maker of meals, and various other roles full-time housewives fill. A respondent recalls: "... one also learns that one cannot be superwoman and retain her sanity; there is the possibility of a 'burn-out' .... eventually something gives in (one's) life - (one) has to be careful". Although she has learned to keep all these things in perspective, she still has moments of despair. Another with three children recalls:

"I think that last fall I realized I was really killing myself by working and being a student and it wasn't being fair to me ... in what I was trying to do here, and that ... I was beginning to hate my job and I was beginning to resent a lot of things ....it was really destroying my perspective, plus it was wearing me out..."

During this time, she was attempting to do everything at home that she had done prior to going back, plus she had just begun a full-time job.

One respondent questions the quality of the work she is doing in her current situation: "Can I do a reasonable enough job?". She is troubled by three problems: can she finish her program of studies? can she complete the necessary academic work to the required standards? and can she do it at the level of quality that is acceptable to her personal standards.

### Guilt

Feelings of guilt emerge in themes related to money, children, husbands, running the house, lacking time for socializing, and lacking energy to do things once done by respondents. One respondent feels guilty when she does not have time to act as a volunteer for various charities: "I feel guilty ... I should be volunteering my time....". She feels that she should be doing something to help better society but she does not have free time now.

Other causes for guilt are combinations of lack of time and childcare. One woman with several children feels guilty about lacking time to play with her children even though she knows she must study. Another aspect of this combination is the guilt she feels when she missed all her child's poetry contests but the last one in which he lost: "I never saw him win".

Some feel guilty when they no longer have time to iron or make meals. Even though their husbands understand and often take on these responsibilities, these feeling persist: "...I have to fight guilt feelings...".

Some respondents work for financial reassurance which permits them to buy convenience foods, school clothes and pay for other educational costs. One recognizes that she works so she doesn't feel guilty about buying foods which she would previously have made from "scratch".

Lacking energy to plan meals is another reason for one respondent to feel guilty. When her husband asks what she would like for dinner, and she is tired, she answers "I don't care". When dinner arrives and it is not nutritionally balanced, she feels guilty because she lacked the energy to make decisions for a nutritionally balanced dinner. She is troubled because if she weren't studying, these situations would not happen.

Parents of one respondent are responsible for another guilt producing situation. Her parents make comments such as "Oh, those poor little kids!" or "They are sick and they are home alone..." which she feels are designed to make her "feel so awful". Her defense is to recall that the children are fine and in fact, "they are better for (my) not being there, because sometimes I wasn't good to be around when I was so frustrated".

Linked with guilt feelings are pressures felt by some respondents because they no longer take an active role in their Church or community. Former associates meet these mature students and comment: "We never see you anymore" or "Do you still belong to our church?"

Other causes of guilt include fatigue and stress, which appear to be tightly woven together. For example, one woman talks about the stress she feels due to her academic program and how tired she feels when she gets home: "... you come home and all you want to do is sleep ...and ... you get very tired and feel you can't possibly make it through.....". Another respondent reflects on her situation and wonders if she is giving "everyone a fair shake". She says that there is "the possibility of burnout .... eventually something gives in your life - you have to be careful". She says that most pangs of guilt occur when she is tired and has feelings of stress. Others respond to the situation differently. One respondent refuses to feel guilty about returning to study. She knows she: "needed time for myself" and that

she had "... always made time for myself...(and) refused to feel guilty about things which did not get done". She says: "there's a difference between clean dirt and dirty dirt..."

Finances are concerns for the mature female graduate returning to university. Reports of financial difficulties and concerns about payments result in feelings of guilt which may lead to feelings of stress. Some describe the lack of finances on their family: "the children would like to have more money" but the family "is very much in debt".

Connected to jobs in which the women are employed, are long hours such as one describes when she works as a night or evening supervisor. Others have had to quit their part-time jobs due to stress factors. Some have removed part of the guilt and the stress of financial pressures by accepting Teaching Assistants' positions which are available:

"...since I have been out there, getting this teaching assistant's position and now (I) have another position teaching in the Intercession....I'm not even thinking about that anymore because I am not worried about next year because I know I probably will have a teaching assistants job....."

### Academic Confidence

Respondents attribute their academic confidence and security to combinations of personal experiences, situations and feelings of self-confidence. They refer to individual feelings about their ability to write and to control their learning environment, their feelings of frustration and confidence, as well as their experiences of competition and loneliness. Age is a contributing factor which affects many of the elements listed.

Many respondents lack self-confidence in their ability to write academically. One woman has a high stress level because she is uncertain of

her "... ability to write at an academic level". This notion of the lack of ability to write well originally stems from an event which occurred several years ago when she first entered Graduate School. She received a "scathing" evaluation on one of her written papers which threatened her: "if you wish to proceed in Graduate School you have to learn how to write academically". There was no indication of where she was:

"writing journalistically, what parts were good, what parts were bad.... or in what ways they were good or in what ways they weren't .... like I didn't know quite what he was referring to and .... whether it was the way I expressed it...".

She recalls her concern but did not know what to do. She wanted to improve her skills but was unaware of any resources. A friend, who wrote well, decided a partial answer might be for them to go over her paper together. Although it did help, she is afraid even now that she is an incompetent writer.

Others relate instances of insecurity and feelings of low self-esteem. One respondent says that at first, due to her personal insecurity, she was academically incompetent and afraid when she returned to university. She recalls having "to be part of the crowd - the undergraduate crowd... I was scared to walk through the UMSU especially on Fridays if there was a band there ....". She also says that she was afraid to go to the bookstore because she did not know "what to do". Even the hallways and the classrooms were uncomfortable because she "did not fit " and did not like to "feel how old (she) felt".

On the more positive side, one woman says that her self-esteem has "shot up" since she came back to study because she finds: "... being the housewife and cook is not great for self-esteem...". Another supports the

notion that studying is good for self-esteem; she says: "... for the first time I feel really good about who I am... all my life I felt so inadequate... it's exciting to feel you are something worthwhile...". She is referring to trying to fit into the scene on campus, attaining the marks she feels are appropriate for graduate study, learning how the system works and being a student again.

One respondent recalls feeling vulnerable when she first entered her faculty: "the faculty calls the shots ... you do as they say". She had last been in university in the early seventies and believes today's students have "little power" as compared to then. Similar to feelings of vulnerability, are feelings of apprehension about being a student. A loss of confidence due to no longer having a job is experienced by one respondent:

"...I was a bit apprehensive and unsure of myself and I didn't know whether that was just being a student again - I am not sure - and my confidence kind of decreased, you know, from... I don't know, having a good job to - to kind of - I don't want to say... but that is how it felt at times...".

Another says that although she is almost finished writing exams she "still feels she is going to fail exams" and is "...very scared at times"... and feels "...very incompetent". Another says that she felt "out of place" in undergraduate courses but "competent in the graduate courses".

One respondent recalls the frustration and anger she felt when she first went back to university. Her BA degree was an honors degree and she had straight A's. Now in her post-graduate courses she is finding the work "hard" and even though she works "very long hours," she is not receiving high marks, or the kind of results that others get who do not study as diligently

as she does. This kind of frustration tends to make her feel that she is "being weeded out" through the use of the marking system.

However, some respondents had confidence that whatever happened, they would survive. One states: "The Hell with the rest of the world and get on with it!" This woman, who decided that she would make her return to university work, thinks:

"personality thing ... sort of a mind set. It is an attitudinal kind of thing. So it wasn't that big a surprise in a sense; it was frustrating when those barriers came up but I almost perceived that it was part of the system...I anticipated that there were going to be stupid kinds of things ...".

In spite of the competitiveness and the feelings of vulnerability and apprehensiveness which made them feel that they were being "weeded out", certain feelings of competence did prevail:

"...I found that there is a special place for us - I find that my professor singles me out a lot of times because he knows I will get something done. And I have a priority system and I function very efficiently.."

Although some respondents are competitive, a variety of different factors seems involved in their idea of competition. For example, one says: "... at first I was competitive- now I do the best that I can..."; another: "... you can't compete with those 18 year olds - you don't have as much stamina..."; while another says: " I ask 'Can I do better next time?'...". This woman does not compare herself to others in the class. Others concerned with competition connect it to younger students in their course or in their programs and generally feel they are unable to compete successfully with younger students. Sometimes feelings of isolation and loneliness result.

Specifically respondents tend to relate their loneliness to age. One direct result of having in their classes only a few people near their age is that many seem to lack friends to whom they can talk. Generally other students tend to be younger than those interviewed in this study and because of age differences some misunderstandings occur:

"I have just learned to be very careful about what I say ... at first I did not realize they were just nineteen or twenty.. I just assumed that they were like me and it took me a while ..... I have to be very careful about my comments"

One woman recalls that the hardest thing for her at university is being so far away from her group of close friends. She says that "...not having my support group would be number one... the hardest thing was not having my friends..". However, apparently being a part-time student adds complications to not having friends because she found it "difficult to meet people", she "didn't know this office existed" and "I didn't know there were other graduate students around here or that there was a study room". This woman recalls feeling very alone and not being aware of many of the facilities which exist for graduate students. She says:

"I didn't think I had any support out here and none from friends really... I didn't have any friends that I knew well enough to know that this was something very common..."

Another graduate students recalls:

"... the year was kind of hard because I was here without my friends and not knowing anybody I thought, well if I could find someone that I could relate to.... which I couldn't ....".

This student is finding it difficult without her friends and has little to do with the graduate students in her department because of their differences in both ages and perceptions of university.

### Personal Changes

Personal changes and growth, such as dealing with academic success at university, identity crises, role changes and conflicts affect the respondents in many ways. Some are able to deal with the changes in constructive ways and others are afraid and wonder what the future will bring for them.

Success at university has caused some of the women to experience identity crises. One woman describes her reaction when she received three A's for one term's work:

"I was so upset that I really didn't know who I was. I thought...it was like a real identity crisis, you know, ... that I had thought I was doing so bad in some courses and I didn't feel organized and .... I had tried really hard but I didn't feel good about a lot of things I had done over the term and yet I worked really as hard as I could. So I guess after a while it just kind of settled down. I thought: 'well, let's go through this and we'll see what happens the next time'. So I didn't put a lot of weight on it. I thought: 'it makes my average look very nice and we'll see what happens the next time.' But I haven't changed my perception of how I see myself. I still look at myself as being ordinary but able to work very hard and organized but not as being intelligent."

One respondent is troubled by the changes she observes in herself and wonders about her future. She worries about whether or not there will still be a place for her in her family when she finishes her masters:

"You know, being full time at something other than being a mother and wife and homemaker, it's such a completely different experience that I am becoming somebody else and I

am not who I thought I was at all. I don't know who I am any more and so this all adds to this whole mis-conception of who I thought I was. I have to re-adjust my ways of looking at myself. My whole self-image is in a big state of flux and it's really scary. Because I wonder where I am going, what this will all end up and who I will end up?"

Conflicting roles in several respondents' lives are causing unease and discomfort. Some family members are unable to understand the changes and they make life difficult for the students in the study. One woman says:

"...all these people perceiving who I am, what I should be doing, plus my own perceptions of my culture and my family and my own thoughts of what and who I am; that to fit what I am becoming into their expectations, creates a lot of turmoil".

Consequently the personal growth she has experienced means she has to teach the new perceptions to her family and friends.

### New Findings

Neither support systems nor age factors appear frequently in related research literature. Both themes, however, emerged in this study. The support systems described by the respondents, appear to be fundamental to success at university. Age factors are included here as new findings because information from the interviews indicates that age is particularly important to women who return to university. The third theme reported in this section is personal health. Current research has not explored this personal health aspect of re-entry. In this study respondents reveal that personal experiences and emotions actively affect not only their physical and mental well-being but also their academic work.

### Support Systems

During the interviews the following questions were raised: "Why do you continue?" and "How do you continue to study when the odds appear heavily against your success?" Respondents readily reply that they have their own individual support systems. Support systems may originate in their immediate family with their children, husbands, parents, and in some cases aunts and mothers-in-laws, alternately, supporting individuals may be friends who live either near or far away. In some instances combinations of several groups of people and the respondent's own "inner strength" compose individual support systems.

Husbands or "significant other persons" are helpful to respondents. They assume new family roles, accepting responsibilities which were initially those of the respondents. Male partners shop for groceries, plan and

make meals, and some take meals to the university when their mate has to stay late.

According to some women the most important aspect for respondents is that her partner is willing to listen:

"..... that's where having a spouse who sits and listens.... one feels the other is working too ridiculously hard....someone will sit down and listen and say "okay, you know'..... and if there is something that can be changed, .... we'll change it."

Some respondents feel that their partners make returning to university an easier task. One woman was single when she first started back to university but married part way through her graduate program. She feels that having a partner at home waiting for her at the end of a busy week is more relaxing than when one is single. If a person is single, she feels she ought to go out to socialize. But when one has an understanding partner, the re-entry female student feels :

".....(It) makes it so much easier.... knowing that you are not going home to a stressful home situation.....it has made it easier for me to go back.....you don't have to worry what you are going to do on a Friday night.....it makes it so much easier."

One woman, concerned about wanting to go back to school was assisted in her decision by her husband's finding an appropriate way to help her understand her desire to go back. He made "it all right" for her: "...he's the one who pushed me to do it because he's really a very terrific person .... he made me understand that it was okay .... an insurance against anything happening to him.....".

Other supports are their parents: "Dad helps with tuition ..... emotionally, financially and morally". Some have mothers who would like to be closer to help more with their daughter's heavy load of running the house and looking after the children while they are studying.

Some respondents are uneasy about their children's perception of their returning to study. One child, concerned about his mother being in school, asked, "Is it because you want a better job?". Another respondent says that her family is untroubled by her going to university: "(It)... is accepted.....this is our way of life". One respondent is at university at the same time as her children. They introduce her to their friends by her given name and most students do not know she is their mother. When their friends find out who she is, they think it is great. Her children read her papers and ask questions about her written work. Questions such as, "What are you trying to say here?" help her write more clearly. These supportive young people encourage their mother through their lively sense of humour.

Some families misunderstand the respondents' desire for education. One group of in-laws regard one woman's return to university as a "not very good decision" and totally ignore her. Other women are uncertain if their in-laws are aware of their return to study. Some in-laws make comments designed to create guilty feelings. One mother-in-law feels that her daughter-in-law is doing a dis-service to her son even though he was the one who encouraged his wife to go back to university.

However, one respondent describes her personal "Fairy godmother " who appears each time she has to study for and write exams. This is her mother-in-law, who arrives while she is away at school, cleans and tidies the house, and leaves the kitchen counter filled with baking. The respondent

arrives home and, "... all of a sudden I have a clean house, everything is taken care of and it's very nice.....so she is very helpful....".

Most friends are supportive and helpful. Often friends are well educated and are not surprised when the respondents decide to re-enter university. Friends help with school work, baby-sitting, and understand that time is limited and often the respondents are unable to socialize. One woman whose friends tend to be in the same profession, are supportive. They are sensitive to the fatigue which accompanies her long hours.

Some respondents have the majority of their friends living in other parts of Canada. Thus their letters and phone calls encourage them and remind them that they are not alone. One respondent says that she is supported in her decision to return to university by her friends even though they are many hundreds of miles away.

Several respondents feel lonely because they do not have many friends and feel their age is an isolating factor. They tend to rely on their husbands and distant family members for support but they wish for friends to whom they could talk about their studies and frustrations.

Babysitters are also considered as important factors in support systems. One woman with a young baby says that she has always felt confidence in her baby sitter, and because of her confidence, she has little difficulty leaving her child and going to study.

Other people who support the women in their quest for education are faculty members and staff who encourage them through casual comments like "good work" and by taking them out to lunch or inviting them to their homes for dinner. When they stay late to complete work on campus, other respondents report that they receive concerned friendly phone calls from their faculty advisors or staff.

Sometimes the community in which they live, or the church to which they belong gives support to respondents. In another instance, however, the community and church communications leave one woman feeling guilty because neither group understands why she no longer participates in their activities.

Other forms of support are roommates and personal inner strength. For one respondent roommates are a source of support because often they are involved in studying too. Their schedules and interests are similar and help subdue feelings of loneliness. Several respondents have inner support systems which keep them going when they would like to quit. Their inner support systems are built on past experiences and their desire to finish their formal education. Each has developed a personal style and method of handling stress, which she feels helps when she faces pressure from school work or life experiences.

Although three categories of support tend emerge from the interviews, their structure and purpose vary considerably from one individual to another. For example some support systems are family members such as husbands and partners, children and parents who accept new roles in their lives. The roles changes free the respondents to pursue their educational goals. Others describe support people who are friends, baby-sitters and faculty staff members who help to encourage, to cajole and to build confidence in individual respondents. All respondents acknowledge an inner support system which assists in their ability to look at problems, see the more positive side of situations and "get on with it". Their support systems appears to be the keystone to the success of all of the respondents.

## Age

Age is a multi-faceted theme which intertwines with other themes in this study. For some respondents, age is a "trigger" to begin studying; for others it is an isolating factor, causing loneliness. Some are unaware of their age and it is of little importance to them; but for others, it is of prime importance. Perceptions of age vary from "a biological clock" to "being the right time to do something" for themselves. The "biological clock keeps ticking" and women are aware that their "time is running out" to have a family as they are growing older. These difficulties, particularly related to women who want to stop studying the sciences and have a family, or just take a break for a year studying, are a serious concern:

"In science you have to keep on going- you're 18, you go through the undergraduate degree, you have to go on to the graduate. If you want to make anything of yourself you have to get your PhD ... then you have to work and you are always desperate for grant money, always desperate to publish; you can't afford to get behind...".

Some respondents are at the age when they have to decide about a family or they are in a situation where this topic is forced upon them. For one, the decision to have children within a certain timeframe is important because she is aware of the "high risks" and maybe "it is too late".

A different aspect to having children is seen by another respondent:

"it is very very hard for women in fact.....you have to give up your career for two years if you are going to have children.....once you get behind, well, why publish anything else that someone else has already done....you always have that behind you.....".

Under these circumstances women feel they face difficult circumstances.

Another aspect of age is that some respondents are old enough to be in a position where their children are away from home all day. They recall feeling:

"...all of a sudden you didn't.. have this person there to cook for, to talk to ..... so I was really beginning to feel useless... I wanted something to do - something to fill up my days - I would send my husband off and then I wouldn't see anybody until five in the afternoon at least, when ..... came home; then there was some diversion - someone to talk to".

Respondents experience a variety of reactions to their age from professors, other students, and in some cases, clients. Generally these people do not expect to see older women on campus. Respondents who would like to fit in, feel that they cannot because of the differences in their ages. Differences in codes of dress, work principles and general ethics tend to isolate the older student.

For one respondent social difficulties arise in her department because of her novel financial situation. Younger students make stinging remarks about things that she and her husband, who is close to early retirement, are able to do or buy. She says: "... because of our ages we can afford these things" and endeavours to understand their financial positions and personal attitudes, but their remarks cause her to feel lonely and apart.

Finances and age are factors one woman considered when deciding whether or not to quit her job. She was trying to complete her program under the five year regulation and she asked "Can I afford to quit my job? Money was not a problem - I was earning a good salary" but "was it wise to quit a good job at this time of (her) career and life"?

Several women tend to regard their loneliness, feelings of isolation, and lack of friends as related to their age. Many work and study with

younger students and one calls herself a "mother figure" because the younger women come to her about their personal problems. She says that the majority of students she is in contact with are in a "dating, pre-dating, or rejection mode...".

One respondent wonders if the ages of the class members have made a difference in her feeling more comfortable in some classes than in others. For example, she was in one class with predominately older or more mature students. In classes with students closer to her own age, she felt more at ease than in the classes where the students tended to be younger:

"I wonder if it did not have an effect on the types of projects I chose to do, the papers I chose to write on. I remember going through this decision-making process because there were certain areas that I came to in terms of speciality through my work experience and one was the field of ageing and one was working with groups - now initially I chose those kinds of topics right off the bat because I knew ... I could shine. It took me some time to be able to say 'okay, this is my learning, if I want to learn.....?' and that was what lead me to ....., because I was willing to feel uncomfortable... in a sense it limited my learning...".

Another aspect to age is expressed as a concern about the world situations which one respondent feels that younger students do not share:

"There is a world consciousness which one acquires as one gets older. For example this whole horrible thing in Africa, yet you talk about it here- 'well, it doesn't bother me, it's not my problem' and there's that insular.....and at eighteen and nineteen years old it's very hard to think about the rest of the world...".

The respondents have a variety of perceptions of younger students. For example they say that the young student have different foci, attitudes and values to theirs:

"I am finding that there is a move towards great conservatism among the girls....my views on abortion, not that I am pro or anti-abortion- it's just that I'm willing to talk about it and that seems to be something you don't do"

A variety of positive and negative feelings and attitudes are experienced by one women who says: "(I am)...frustrated when they are more interested in the beer bash than watching the news..."; while another feels that the females in her department do not recognize the significance of their being at university and are generally there to "find a man". Another connects her disliking undergraduate courses to their being so many "fresh out of high school students.....I was uncomfortable with them.... I just couldn't relate to them". Apparently these younger students were talking about dating and the boys they were meeting and the older graduate did not feel part of the group. There is no common ground with younger students says one respondent. She says that "they did not care how they got their grades" as long as the grades were high. She maintains that "...the older, more experienced students' foci were different". Later she describes younger students as tending "...to come from a whole different direction than those who are experienced" whereas "we have a different focus on overall approach and results - a different set of values".

Another respondent wonders about the effects of age on mature female students. She believes that age does have a decided effect and wishes that it didn't:

"another thing I was thinking about: there is a difference that when you are ten years older you don't have as much stamina- I really feel there is change; I cannot stay as late as these young people can .....sometimes there is no time, you have to stay up to get every thing done. I can't do that. So you are even further behind because I have to get my sleep

otherwise I can't function....I wish I were sometimes like the young.....".

Although others express similar thoughts about being older than traditional students, they wonder if it really does make a difference. For another, age is not a concern. She believes that the nature of a faculty has more to do with the feelings generated towards students than the age of students. Age, to her, is unimportant.

In summary, the theme on age has contradicting elements which tend to create limits for some respondents, while opening doors for others. The age of the respondents tends to create personal physical problems as well as cause feelings of loneliness and isolation when they return to university. Most respondents described negative feelings and experiences, encountered personally on campus and in the classrooms, which they felt were related to their age. The respondents seemed to feel that their age affected some aspects of their academic lives such as the rate and the way in which they learned and the manner in which they were perceived by faculty members and other students. Elements of age appear to have touch other themes such as personal health, finances and feelings of loneliness.

#### Personal Health

Research literature reveals little information regarding the significance of the personal health of mature female graduates who return to university. Conditions such as fatigue, lack of energy, illness due to pregnancy and Post Menstrual Syndrome are referred to by the respondents. Their state of physical well being is perceived as the result of their personal situations and not as barriers to completing their education. For

example, one woman says that although she has had to postpone her studies for a period of time due to her poor health, the barrier is the high level of personal stress caused by a heavy academic workload, the strain of working in her faculty department and endeavouring to continue her usual home and family activities. Others relate their fatigue and lack of energy to barriers such as lack of time and feelings of personal inadequacies.

Although the literature supports the findings about respondents who describe "personal costs" as emotional exhaustion, this study reports personal costs as combinations of physical and mental energy expenditures which result in emotions such as guilt, weariness, frustration and loneliness. Their emotional well-being appears to be associated with their feeling deficient in both time and personal accomplishments. Isolation is considered by several respondents as a "personal cost".

### Conclusions

The motives and reasons for mature female graduates to re-enter university are complex because various combinations of reasons and motives appear to be responsible for their decisions. Career related reasons for re-entry include the development of personal career interests and a desire to up-date their knowledge. Some are satisfying their need for an intellectual challenge and others are following their life-long interest in education. Some respondents wish to improve their self-concept and to contribute to society through further education.

Some influences and events which affect the respondents' decisions are war, death of a spouse and recognition of their life cycle changes. Some have "nothing to do" once their children leave home and they feel a lack of fulfilment and are suddenly aware of their ageing. They want to contribute

to society before it is "too late" for them. Often the most influential persons in married women's decisions were their husbands.

Institutional barriers are bureaucratic policies which relate to registration; programs and courses which involve prerequisite and credit difficulties, program design and course selection; instructional practices which reflect teaching methods, evaluation and feedback, faculty members' attitudes and communication between students and faculty members. Although few barriers appear in registration at the University of Manitoba, individual faculties tend to create difficulties such as disallowing credits for courses taken previously and causing respondents to retake courses as part of either Pre-Masters Programs or as required background courses. Faculty scheduling practices tend to produce graduate programs based on selection of courses which best fit the respondents' personal and work day.

Respondents believe most teaching practices that they experienced on campus could improve and recommend that more professors take adult education courses. They feel that many professors are insensitive to adults and make few attempts to listen or understand them. According to respondents less traditional evaluation procedures are likely to be more useful, fair and less threatening to mature students than traditional oral and written examinations. Respondents observe that the attitudes of individual faculties toward mature female graduate students are closely linked to faculty feelings about instructional methods. Respondents believe that as more adult education principles are utilized by professors, instructional procedures will find more approval among such students. The women maintain there is both age and sexual discrimination in class. They cite class situations where professors treat mature students as children and make insensitive comments about older women. Some respondents,

concerned about the lack of communication and rapport with their professors, feel that most professors do not encourage either. However, respondents are quick to point out instances where professors change examination times, extend due dates for assignments and other kind thoughtful actions when circumstances have required such steps. Such acts of thoughtfulness indicate to many respondents that some professors do encourage closer contacts with their mature students.

The themes which emerge as situational barriers are related to study skills, age factors, mental discipline and feelings of stress. Study skills, such as writing, reading, and concentration skills, are described as "rusty". New academic skills, such as using word processors and computers, as well as the different library services, must be learned. Age effects re-entry women's learning processes, making studying "harder than before". Some believe their age affects the type of topics they choose to study. Self-discipline and mental readiness appear to accompany their desire to study. Although most feelings of stress are associated with the lack of or the learning of academic skills, age and time pressures are also significant elements. Combinations of rusty academic skills and re-learning research and writing skills generate large units of time taken from other activities. Other causes of stress are lack of finances, and familial and faculty members' attitudes. The time required to re-gain self-discipline and concentration ability is long and difficult and some respondents suggest that their age has altered their learning styles.

The major causes of stress for the respondents tend to be a lack of time to be with family and friends, to study and research and a lack of energy to contend with other academic pressures. Lack of time causes feelings of guilt and the loss of friends. Many respondents utilize unique

coping mechanisms. Examples include the establishment of family routines to run the house and roles changes among the family members. Mechanisms like these help to overcome pressures from home, university and society.

Age is a component in respondents' attitudes towards fellow classmates. Most are more comfortable with students of their own age. One respondent observed the consequence of the progression of age among the students and feels the focus of the mature female graduate is from themselves to the world at large. She suggests that younger students have much different values and foci and that mature female graduates cannot relate to them.

Finances are important only to the extent of their job and the loans which support them at university. Some distress regarding the costs of transportation is evident but most important is their concern to support themselves and their family. Others need only to contribute financially to living costs of their family. Lack of money causes feelings of stress and fear. Student loans may be large.

Feelings of uncertainty and hesitation emerge as was described in the section on dispositional barriers. Doubts arise about "Why am I doing this?" and "Will I get it all done?". Some develop "superwoman complexes" attempting to "get it all done", while others feel guilty. Guilt feelings are connected to their lack of time and energy, parental pressures, and personal, physical and mental fatigue.

Academic confidence is linked to personal self-confidence, writing skills and undergraduate experiences. Respondents are fearful in their new role as a student. They feel that they have no control or power and exams make them vulnerable to "being weeded out". Competition is one aspect of returning to university but loneliness and a sense of isolation are greater

concerns. Success causes some of the women to fear the future because they experience a type of identity crisis. The identity crises are related to conflicts in roles, changes in their life styles and their personal expectations.

The new findings of this study include extensions of and information on support systems, age factors and the personal health of mature female re-entry graduates. The support systems initiated and used by these woman are remarkable. Components of the support systems described include their immediate families such as husbands and children, parents, in-laws and aunts in addition to friends. Other supporters are found outside the immediate family and include faculty members, staff, librarians, babysitters, and sympathetic restaurateurs. Perhaps the most significant aspect of their support system is their "inner strength" which enables them to continue on during personal dilemmas and during troubled times. While there are some reports of mis-undertanding and loss of friends and family, most have substantial support for their return to study.

Age is a theme which winds through other themes and affects many aspects of the respondents' thinking, learning and living styles. In some instances recognition of their age may be the "trigger" for women to re-enter university. For others, this realization may be the "trigger" to start their family. Faculty members' attitudes to respondents' ages are meaningful. Age or sex discrimination are unacceptable to most respondents, because such discrimination generates feelings of uneasiness, resentment and indignation. Age affects women's decision regarding jobs and finances. They are unceratin if they should be drastically changing their lives at this point. Feelings of isolation and loneliness are accentuated by younger students in classes and programs.

The respondents' health is a consideration since it alters their level of energy and their learning capacity and impedes the graduates' academic progress. Pregnancy, fatigue, and lack of accomplishment are involved in their state of health. Mental and emotional drains are evident and are described by some respondents as "personal costs".

#### Questions for Further Study

Information obtained in this perception study raises more questions regarding this rapidly growing minority group of women in universities. Possible themes for further study are outlined below. A brief description of each theme follows.

1. A perception study of the husbands of mature females graduates who return to university. Men, in this study, are major supports to the women who have returned. Descriptions of how these men feel and what would make it easier for them, might assist both husbands and returning mature female students. If returning mature female graduate students and their institutions were equipped with such knowledge, could the educational process be modified to contain fewer elements causing stress and fatigue for students who return to university?

2. An examination of reasons that returning female graduates with indifferent undergraduate academic histories excel as graduate students. Such information would be useful to faculty departments as well as any personnel responsible for undergraduate programs. Faculty advisors who are working with post-graduate students and undergraduate students require knowledge about ways to help people learn. Perhaps a study such as this might cast new data on why some students were unable to be as successful in their undergraduate education as they are in their graduate education.

3. A perception study describing the familial changes which occur when the wife and mother goes back to university. Such a study would demonstrate the growth and development which all family members experience as the adult female member struggles towards her educational goal as well as the changes perceived by each individual in the family. Information obtained could be beneficial to university counselors, family counselors and mature students who are anticipating a return to university.

4. An examination of support systems would be valuable for faculty members and staff personnel who are working with and teaching re-entry graduate female students. Perhaps a comparison of the support systems of successful female graduates with those of unsuccessful female graduates would illustrate means of assisting future women who return to university.

These themes are some which may be utilized for further research in the study of mature women who return to graduate and professional studies. Based on the research literature, it seems certain that the phenomenon of mature female graduates returning to university will continue. The general university system, faculty members and the public require information to understand, instruct and accept these students. Understanding and acceptance will happen only through sensitive well-grounded research which portrays the actual situations and circumstances of these women. We, as educators of adults, must take advantage of all admissible knowledge to create learning environments which will inspire and consummate mature females' educational dreams, whether the women are thirty-two or fifty-seven years of age.

## Appendix A

## Statement for Consent

I am undertaking a study of the perceptions of re-entry mature female graduates enrolled in professional and graduate faculties as part of a Masters of Education thesis with the University of Manitoba.

The proposed semi-structured interview will give you an opportunity to discuss your perceptions of being re-enrolled in university.

All information gathered will be confidential and, in order to maintain confidentiality, real names will not be used in the reports.

Should you agree to participate in this study as described, please sign below.

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Consentor

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Investigator

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