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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

AN INVESTIGATION OF SPOUSAL SUPPORT
FOR RE-ENTRY WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

MARGO DEEGAN

JANUARY 1994

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

James Anderson, a noted speaker and scholar in the areas of diversity, access, and retention of students in higher education, states that the largest student group coming to higher education institutions consists of older, adult women (1992). Institutions of higher education label these women as nontraditional students. Certainly they are different from traditional students in age. Most of these women are in their late 20s and early 30s. What really makes these students different is that they are women who began college and for a variety of reasons stopped attending. Some married, some left for financial reasons, some were undecided about what they wanted to do in life. Women are returning to higher education at exactly the time when the number of traditional age students are declining. Thus, higher education institutions need re-entry women; women over 25 years of age who have interrupted their education for at least one year and are now re-entering college (American Association of University Women, 1991).

Re-entry women will confront many challenges that their male peers will miss (Dickeson, 1992). While men are thought to have a myopic orientation toward their careers (Levinson, 1978), the attention of women is thought to be focused on the significant relationships in their lives (Frieze, 1978). Men have been socialized to be goal-oriented, a task made easier for those who are married, because their wives have been socialized to support their professional efforts (Goldhaber, 1986). As married women return to complete baccalaureate degrees they must engage the support of their husbands (Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; Minor, 1992). Engaging spousal support may require the renegotiation of marital roles and responsibilities (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

As the pool of traditional age students dwindles (Hossler & Kemerer, 1986), institutions of higher education are forced to look in other directions for their student population. Research conducted by the College Board's Future Directions for a Learning Society (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) found that over 60 million adults, half of all adults 25 years and older, have learned one or more topics in the past year. Over half (52%) of this group of learners was women. These women tend to have had prior higher education experience, to have high family incomes, and to live in the suburbs (Dearman & Plisko, 1980). It is this group of re-entry women that has attracted the interest of higher education institutions. Often these women have a marginal status in higher education as they are concentrated in female-intensive disciplines, such as elementary education and nursing, and because they are more likely than males to attend less expensive and less selective public institutions. Reentry women over the age of 25 who have interrupted their education for at least one year and are now returning to postsecondary institutions comprise the largest potential source of new students, and their interest in higher education is expected to increase for some time to come (Hall & Gleaves, 1981).

Statement of the Problem

Simply put, the recruitment of returning women offers higher education institutions an answer to the dilemma of shrinking enrollments (Anderson, 1992; Hossler & Kemerer, 1986). However, as Hossler and Kemerer (1986) also note, recruitment is only half of the challenge. The real dilemma that institutions of higher education face is retention. As these women return to higher education, they add yet another role, student, to their already full adult life. Several higher education researchers have reported about the increased demands which are placed on women when they return to complete their education (Anderson,

1973; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Bernard, 1981; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler & Wethington, 1989; Cross, 1981; Diness, 1982; McIntosh, 1973; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989). Several authors have noted that the increased demands placed on re-entry women are due to a lack of spousal support (Dennis, 1992; Minor, 1992; Smith, 1992).

Married women re-entering higher education need help from family, friends and spouses in juggling the demands for adaptation they experience between their careers (including education, housework and any work done outside the home), their family, and the development of their self-image. Two variables that make the acquisition of spousal support more difficult for married re-entry women are found in theories of women's adult development and theories of marital communication style.

Frieze (1978), a noted researcher of women's adult development, offers some insight for the problems that confront married women as they return to higher education. For married women, the life cycle emphasis revolves around interpersonal competence with a focus on family and home. Married women are constantly attempting to balance their need for personal satisfaction with the expanded role expectations that come with age, marriage, and family (Frieze, 1978). Based on what is known about women's adult development and the importance of spousal support in a variety of other domains, the best predictor of success for married re-entry women is probably a supportive husband (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981; Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; McIntosh, 1973; Minor, 1992).

The dimensions of social support provided by marital partners has been reported by Cutrona and Russell (1987). To date it is not known if spousal support is associated with marital communication style. To understand the premise of marital communication style, a brief overview of one theory of relational

development is necessary.

The foremost theory on relational development suggests that interpersonal relationships develop through the exchange of information (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). This information consists of the pattern of beliefs, meanings, and understandings which each individual develops concerning her or his own personal characteristics, capacities, limitations, and worth as a human being. Byrne (1961, 1971) suggests that most people are attracted to others with whom they share similar social, political, and economic views. Stated simply, people find others attractive if they share similar beliefs, attitudes and values. Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (1977) has generated a typology of marital communication based on Byrne's (1961, 1971) principle of relational congruence.

Purpose of the Study

Higher education researchers and administrators agree that a major obstacle women must overcome when they return to complete their education is the inability to engage family support (Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; Minor, 1992). These scholars suggest two problem areas. First, women do not seem to be able to identify the specific type of help or support they need (Minor, 1992). Second, women who lack family support are rarely able to complete a baccalaureate degree (Dickeson, 1992; Schlossberg, 1984, Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

Dennis (1992) suggests that it is critical that institutions explore every area which impacts the success, or failure, of adult students. Based on the salience of social support for women returning to higher education, this study sought to determine if spousal social support is unique to an individual's marital communication style.

Fitzpatrick's (1977) typology suggests three distinct marital communication styles, **Traditional**, **Independent** and **Separate**. The purpose of this study was to determine how each of these marital communication styles defines spousal social support.

Method

Married women who attend a small, private liberal arts college in the Midwest and their husbands were asked to participate in this study. Two surveys were mailed to the participants. The women and their husbands were asked to complete the Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI) which identifies marital communication style (Fitzpatrick, 1977; see Appendix A.).

The women were also asked to respond to the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) which determines respondent's perceptions of the type(s) of social support provided by one's spouse (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; see Appendix B.).

Responses from the two instruments, the RDI and the SPS, were analyzed to determine if dimensions of social support are distinctive to marital communication style. The statistical procedure performed on the data was discriminant analysis. Discriminant analysis provides a powerful technique for examining differences between two or more groups with respect to several variables simultaneously (Klecka, 1980).

Definition of Terms

To ensure an effective understanding of this study several terms must be defined. The focus of this study is married **re-entry women**. These are married women over the age of 25 who have interrupted their college education for at

least one year. For the purposes of this study, only women who have been married for at least one year were eligible to participate. The rationale for this decision was that it takes a minimum of one year of marriage for couples to negotiate their marital roles and expectations (Pearson, 1989).

The conceptual framework for this study comes from theories of social support. **Social support** is defined as “the interpersonal resources mobilized to deal with the strain inherent in living” (Leatham & Duck, 1990, p. 2). Social support differs from **coping** as the latter is the mobilization of personal resources, psychological and tangible, to deal with life stresses (Duck, 1990).

This study will rely on the six dimensions of social support generated by Weiss (1969, 1974). These six dimensions are: the opportunity for **nurturance**, feeling needed by others; **attachment**, emotional closeness; **social integration**, a sense of belonging to a group who share similar interests, concerns, and activities; **reassurance of worth**, recognition of competence, skill, and value by others; **guidance**, advice or information; and **reliable alliance**, persons who can be counted on for tangible assistance.

Marital communication style, according to Fitzpatrick (1977) consists of three factors: ideology, interdependence, and conflict. **Ideology** is the couple's definition of marriage which can vary from a conventional perspective to non-conventional notions regarding the family. **Interdependence** is a variable reflecting the extent to which an individual is dependent on or autonomous from his or her spouse. **Conflict** has to do with whether the couple engages each other in disagreements or avoids verbal opposition. This theory of marital communication styles was developed by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (1977), who discovered that married couples tend to cluster into three distinct groups along the aforementioned factors. The three marital communication types are:

Traditionals, Independents, and Separates.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to help returning women succeed in higher education. Several authors have noted the increased demands placed on women when they return to higher education (Anderson, 1973; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Bernard, 1981; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler & Wethington, 1989; Cross, 1981; Diness, 1982; McIntosh, 1973; Schlossberg, 1984; and Smith, 1992). In particular these increased demands are due to a lack of family support (Dennis, 1992; Minor, 1992; and Smith, 1992).

Dickeson (1992) reports that families of women returning to higher education are often unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to enable the woman to complete her degree. He further asserts that these same sacrifices, such as less time with the family, would be taken for granted if the returning student were male. Dickeson notes a high correlation between divorce and separation and inability to complete the baccalaureate degree for returning women.

Aslanian (1992) found that adult students are incredibly consumer-oriented and demonstrate no loyalty in selecting or returning to a college. She reports that adult students switch institutions based on courses offered, the times classes meet, money, convenience, or anything that matches their need.

The services most desired by returning female adult students are support services such as family counseling, day care, and financial aid (Aslanian, 1992). Advising women students of the type of support they will need to succeed in higher education and how to get that support from spouses and family seems to be a critical retention issue.

Extensive documentation supports the notion that returning women students have different needs than men who re-enter higher education (Anderson,

1973; Aslanian, 1992; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Bernard, 1981; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler & Wethington, 1989; Cross, 1981; Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; Diness, 1982; McIntosh, 1973; Minor, 1992; Schlossberg, 1984; and Smith, 1992). Higher education institutions who meet the needs of returning women students may retain more of those students. This study seeks to identify the characteristics of spousal support which are the best predictors of success for married women who return to higher education.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are twofold, theoretical and methodological. Theoretically, this study assumes that the best predictor of success for a married woman who returns to higher education is a supportive husband (Anderson, 1973; Aslanian, 1992; Bernard, 1981; Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; McIntosh, 1973; Minor, 1992; and Smith, 1992). However, this may not be true of all married women who return to college. Some will succeed in spite of a lack of spousal support.

This study seeks to determine how specific marital communication types define spousal support. To do this, this investigation focuses on “pure” marital types. Couples in which the husband and wife share the same definition of marriage, degree of interdependence and style of conflict management. Unfortunately, not all women returning to higher education are married to men with whom they share this specific type of relational congruence. This study makes no generalizations involving “mixed” couple types, couples who do not share a congruent ideology regarding marriage and family.

The final theoretical limitation of this study involves the investigation of the importance of six dimensions of social support to specific marital communica-

tion styles. The provisions of social support identified in this study are: nurturance, attachment, social integration, guidance, reliable alliance, and reassurance of worth. While these are the most widely recognized dimensions of social support (Cutrona, 1984, 1986a, 1986b; Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Cutrona, Russell & Rose, 1986; Duck, 1990; and Weiss, 1974), there may be other, yet undiscovered, aspects of social support which could have a significant impact on married women returning to higher education. In addition to the conceptual limitations of this study there are a few methodological limitations which must be discussed.

Methodologically, this study has several limitations. First, the sample consists of women over the age of 25 who have been married for at least one year and who have interrupted their college education for at least one year. These women have returned to a small, private, Midwestern, liberal arts college. Generalizations can only be made to populations who fit the demographics of this sample.

Although this study uses the Total Design Method for Mail Surveys designed by Dillman (1978), which maximizes the probability of response, some subjects chose not to participate in the study. Some women did not participate because they did not want to take the time, others because they were not interested in the focus of the study, still others because they did not wish to address the issue of lack of spousal support. All of this lost information would add important dimensions to this study.

Finally, some women did not participate in this study because they were not able to engage the participation of their husbands. These women, who lack spousal support, leave an important vacuum. This is a discovery study which relies on husband participation. This study will identify the nature or characteristics of spousal support for each of three marital communication styles. Women

whose husbands refuse to participate could very well be the population most in need of this research.

Organization of the Study

Several themes will be explored in this investigation of re-entry women. First, theories of student and adult development will be reviewed to understand why women return to higher education and to develop a more thorough understanding of the importance of marital identity to women. Second, theories of marital communication style will be examined to explore the nature of these relationships. Third, theories of social support will be examined to determine what constitutes social support, particularly spousal social support. Finally, theories of social support will be combined with the theories of marital communication style to identify how spousal support is characterized in different marriages.

The research suggests three distinct marital communication styles, **Traditional**, **Independent** and **Separate**. The goal of this study is to determine how each of these marital communication styles defines spousal social support. This information may be helpful for re-entry women who progress toward the completion of the baccalaureate degree.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To ensure the reader a comprehensive understanding of this investigation several theoretical perspectives will be reviewed. The chapter will begin with an examination of theories of student and adult development which will provide some understanding of the specific barriers confronted by women as they return to higher education. Next, a typology of marital communication style will be reviewed to provide the known communication characteristics of married women. This will be followed by a review of the conceptual base for this study, the theories of social support. The theories of student and adult development, marital communication style and social support will be brought together in the final section of this chapter which discusses the dilemma which married women face as they attempt to elicit their husband's support for their return to higher education.

Student and Adult Development

Student affairs researchers in higher education identify four developmental theory areas: 1) cognitive-structural theory, 2) interactionist theory, 3) typological theory, and 4) psychosocial theory.

Cognitive-structural theories are based on the work of Piaget and attempt to describe how individuals interpret their experiences with the world. These theories propose stages which are hierarchical and mostly unconscious. The interactionist perspective reflects the three historical perspectives of personologism, situationism, and interactionism, in an attempt to show that behavior is best understood and predicted through the interaction of individuals and their environment (Huebner, 1990). Although typological theories have not identified a

unifying theoretical base, they attempt to describe permanent or semi-permanent stylistic or type preferences and usually are placed into four categories: personality type, information processing, social interaction, and instructional methods (Rodgers, 1990). Psychosocial theories deal with the “developmental issues or tasks and life events that occur throughout the life span, as well as to a person’s pattern of responses to issues and adaptations to events” (Rodgers, 1990, p. 121).

The present study was grounded in psychosocial theories which encompass theories of adult developmental and personality issues (Delworth & Hanson, 1989). The issues of adult development and personality provide a predictive base concerning probable responses to life’s stages. Specifically, the reason women re-enter higher education after the age of 25 is because they generally experience psychological growth in the later years (Frieze, 1978).

Although the majority of personality theorists focus on the basic influences of childhood as the main determinants of adult personality, some have begun to look at personality changes that occur at later points in the life cycle (Coup, Greene & Gardner, 1973; Frieze, 1978; Glick, 1957; Gould, 1972; Levinson, et al., 1974; Lopata, 1971; Vaillant & McArthur, 1972). Developmental research suggests that a complex pattern of psychological change may exist throughout the life cycle (Clausen, 1972). Each stage of adult life is seen as bringing new central issues, role patterns, feelings, and insights into focus. Personality evolves not smoothly, but in a sequential pattern that is analogous to a series of metamorphoses occurring over the life span (Gould, 1975). Temporary periods of dissonance seem to be inherent to later adjustment.

The developmental perspective is based on three assumptions about normal psychological growth. First, each stage of life is assumed to have critical psychological issues that become central focuses for individuals. Second, some

stages require major personality restructuring and result in a loss of equilibrium, while other phases demonstrate personality consolidation and relative balance. Finally, each stage is sequential, building on preceding stages. If one were to look at a woman's adult roles over her life cycle, a number of salient themes seem to emerge with each stage. The themes which emerge during each stage of a woman's adult development consist of the demands for adaptation generated by women's roles; the relationship between expanded role expectations and satisfactions; the decreasing role demands with age; and the psychological growth of women in their later years (Sales, 1978).

Women's life cycles and developmental stages differ from those of men. Male life cycles seem to be linear, goal-directed and defined in terms of occupational growth (Levinson, 1978). Female life cycles seem to be more complicated than those of males; they appear to emphasize interpersonal competence and focus on family and home (Frieze, 1978).

For insight into the development of women, researchers have looked at the various roles which women occupy in the family life cycle. In 1957, Glick compared demographic events for three cohort groups. The women were born in 1890, 1940, and 1950. The events Glick used to mark the stages in the family cycle were: woman's age at first marriage, age at birth of last child, age at marriage of last child, age at death of spouse, and age at death. Glick found that age at first marriage had remained relatively steady, occurring around the age of twenty-one; however, while the age of mother at birth and marriage of her last child had declined, age at widowhood and death had risen.

Lopata (1971) expanded on Glick's (1957) work to look at a special population, the housewife. She identified five successive adult female roles for this group which consisted of: becoming a wife and housewife, becoming a mother,

and a final addition of community involvement. At this point the roles stop expanding and start decreasing with a shrinking circle as children leave home, and a gradual disengagement from most of these roles occurs.

Coup, Greene and Gardner (1973) studied working class women. They generated five stages of development which were quite different from those found by Lopata (1971). The Coup, et al. stages are: "Premarital Man-Hunt"; the trying stage of "Early Marriage"; "Early Childrearing" which women report to be both physically and emotionally overwhelming; "Assertion or Rediscovery"; and finally a "Post Family" stage which focuses on independence.

The work of Frieze (1978) also focuses on family. She found that women's lives were characterized by a greater interdependence between the three adult careers of work, family, and self. Stage One is characterized by women who leave their family of origin and develop an adult life plan. Most women do not face the stress of choosing a work role; rather, their focus is on choosing a husband. Women who differ from this norm by actively pursuing a career may well face the same stresses felt by men during this period. In addition to the pressure to succeed, these women risk social criticism for what is considered by many to be inappropriate sex role behavior. Bernard (1981) suggests that this may be a partial explanation for why parents discourage educational or career paths which they believe might reduce their daughter's marriageability. Anderson (1973) posits that this may provide some insight into why spousal support is critical for re-entry women. Historically, women have not been able to look to their parents for social support in the areas of career and education.

Stage Two of Frieze's (1978) conceptualization consists of women entering the adult world by marrying, developing careers, and becoming mothers. Most women confront some stress over the decision to marry. For traditional women,

stress is reduced once marital choices are made as their energies are channeled into operation of the home and maintenance of family cohesiveness. Women with careers struggle to combine the responsibilities of home and work, and typically report an increase in stress. Frieze's (1978) findings during this stage are consistent with those of Coup, *et al.* (1973). She reports that women who pursue all three of the adult careers (work, intimacy, and self), simultaneously report feeling overburdened. This stress between roles frequently results in women leaving their careers until their children enter school.

Stage Three finds women entering the adult world again. The children are in school; the tension between the roles of work and family are reduced sufficiently to allow the woman to shift her attention to career. At this time women seek new sources of satisfaction. During this stage women shift from dependence to independence; from passivity to activity; and from compliance to assertion. It is during this stage that women are most likely to re-enter higher education.

Stage Four occurs when a woman becomes her own person. Self-confidence is at an all time-high. A woman sees her self-image as expanding, exploring new dimensions.

Stage Five focuses on priorities and past role involvements. Women may experience their children leaving home during this stage and often report a renewed interest in their marriage during this period.

Stage Six finds women mellowing, reflecting on their life. Women reported that they reflected on their early expectations and the variance in their actual life. Most women reported high satisfaction regarding the way life events unfolded.

In 1982, Phyllis Diness was able to identify approximate ages which typi-

fied Frieze's (1978) stages. Diness studied 542 women who had received scholarships from the Business and Professional Women's Foundation. The preferences for career versus homemaking for this group were: age 25, preference for homemaking only; age 35, preference for combining homemaking and career; age 40, preference for career.

Again, women's life cycles and development differ from men. Well into middle age, men place primary emphasis on achievement and individual effort, while women focus on affiliation, compromise, and intimacy (Goldhaber, 1986). While men engage in ego development, moral and ethical development, and intellectual development, women are socialized to remain in the conformist stage of character development, forming an interpersonal style that is dependent rather than autonomous (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981). It is not until later in the life cycle, at precisely the time that men are exploring their potential for affiliation with family, that women begin investing their energy into work. It is during this period in the life cycle, this period of assertion and re-entry into the adult world, that women have the greatest potential to succeed in higher education as they resocialize themselves to be autonomous and independent.

The complications of this re-entry process have been explored by Juhasz (1989) through an innovative triple helix model. The Juhasz model portrays the "balancing and meshing, the coordinating and prioritizing that take place as humans juggle their personal, interpersonal, and occupational lives" (p. 305). The model shows the interplay among the three adult roles of work, family, and self, powered by the need for self-esteem.

Career, including education, forms the role of work. Family incorporates all of the roles associated with family intimacy including, but not limited to, spouse, parent, child, and sibling. The final strand of Juhasz's (1989) model, the

self, is the most intricate. The self is partly the result of learning and self-development and should be expected to redefine its role throughout adulthood. The power which drives the Juhasz model is the need for self-esteem. Self-esteem is enhanced as a result of increasing competence, harmony between the individual and the environment, and a sense of individual unity (Werner, 1957).

One of the most interesting aspects of Juhasz's (1989) work is her discussion of what happens when one role takes precedence, forcing another role to be put on hold. Juhasz (1989) does not foresee any role deterioration, rather, a refocusing of energy to meet the demands of the dominant role. Based on this explanation, when women are in their period of assertion and re-entry into the work world, one should expect to see more energy directed to the roles of work and self, and not necessarily to the detriment of family.

In summary, an analysis of theories of women's adult development demonstrates that women are most likely to return to higher education after children are in school when there is a reduction of their family roles and the beginning of psychological growth which generally occurs in the later years.

For some women the successful juggling of work, self, and family is difficult. Some marriages do not adapt well to a change in the marital role. A potential predictive base for the success or failure of a woman's mid-life role redefinition may be found in marital communication style.

A Typology of Marital Communication Style

The foremost researcher of marriage in the domain of communication is Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (1977, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988; Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1985; Fitzpatrick & Best, 1979; Fitzpatrick & Dindia, 1986; Fitzpatrick & Indvik, 1979, 1982) whose critical and exhaustive research efforts over the last decade

have generated a widely accepted typology of marital communication style. The Fitzpatrick studies are based on a questionnaire, the Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI), which asks individuals about specific dimensions of their marriages. The RDI is based on the work of Kantor and Lehr (1975) who found that marriages could be characterized by the partner's use of space, time, and energy, and the degree to which they express feelings, exert power, and share a common philosophy of marriage. Fitzpatrick administered 187 questions about these topics to approximately 1500 heterosexual couples who were married or had been living together for at least six months. The original questionnaire was narrowed to 77 items. Using factor analysis, Fitzpatrick found that these items measured three basic factors: ideology, interdependence, and conflict. Ideology varies between conventional and nonconventional notions of family. Interdependence is the degree to which one is dependent on or autonomous from one's spouse. Conflict indicates whether the couple engages or avoids disagreements. Fitzpatrick found that the couples tend to cluster into three distinct groups according to these factors. She identified the groups as: traditionals, independents, and separates.

Traditional couple communication is characterized by interdependence and expressiveness. The couples have conventional views about marriage and family life. Traditional couples seek regularity in their use of time and prefer stability and certainty in role relations over variety and spontaneity. Very few boundaries are stipulated in their use of physical and emotional space, and they demonstrate very little autonomy. These couples confront rather than avoid conflict, but do so with some degree of social restraint. Simply put, traditionals appear to know which issues are worth fighting over. Perhaps one reason for this is because power and decision-making are distributed according to custom-

ary norms. Consequently, little need exists to negotiate and resolve problems in these marriages. Traditional couples can be assertive with each other when necessary, but each person tends to support conventional rules and roles concerning the relationship. Traditionals intertwine their daily life with the life of their partner, share much companionship, disclose both their joys and their frustrations, send many positive nonverbal cues, and seem supportive of each other.

The **Independent** couple-types, on the other hand, are only moderately interdependent and hold nonconventional views about marriage and the family. Independents are the most autonomous of the relational types as well as the ones most committed to an ideology of uncertainty and change. This type exhibits less temporal regularity in its daily schedule than the others and is opposed to a belief system that stresses traditional values. Although this is the most autonomous type, it is nonetheless defined by a moderate amount of sharing between the partners, who usually understand each other very well. Although independents may spend time together, they value their autonomy and often have separate rooms in the house, as well as separate interests and friends outside the family. Because they do not rely on conventional roles, independents are constantly renegotiating the relationship. Rather than avoiding conflict or confronting it with social restraint, independents often vie for power in their struggle to redefine the relationship. Independents argue over every issue, an activity they must learn to control if the marriage is to survive. Within the relational context of sharing and conflict the couples also experience autonomy. Apparently, it is a negotiated autonomy. It is because of this balance between interdependence and autonomy that the couples are labeled as Independents.

The **Separate** couple-type is not interdependent, holds ambivalent views about marriage and family life, and is not at all expressive in marital communica-

tions. Separate couples emphasize differentiation of space and emotional distance. Separate couples do not expend the time, effort, or energy to confront conflict. This may be a conscious strategy to avoid intimacy. This type keeps a fairly regular daily time schedule, but despite the partner's separated space they do not feel particularly autonomous. This relational type lacks a strong commitment or aversion to either the ideology of traditionalism or the ideology of uncertainty and change. For these reasons, and because the type seems separated yet neither autonomous nor interdependent, this couple type is labeled as Separates.

Fitzpatrick discovered that there are satisfied couples in every category. Approximately 60% of the couples Fitzpatrick tested fell into one of the three categories. In these cases there was sufficient agreement between the responses of the husband and the wife to classify them as purely traditional, independent, or separate. The relevance of this is that marital types have unique patterns of interacting and communicating that reflect the way individuals think about marriage and spousal roles.

Although role redefinition may be a problem for most women when they re-enter the adult world of work or higher education, for each of the different couple-types the problem has its own unique complexities. For the woman in a traditional marriage, the problem is the redefinition of the role itself. Spouse and children have come to view the woman as a specific role occupant, limited to specific behaviors. As this woman attempts to expand the parameters of her life she will have to renegotiate her role from traditional to more independent. The energy this woman expends on the development of self via reconstruction of her career will have to be carefully balanced with a nurturing of her family into acceptance of this new role. However, part of the traditional role is to stand by one's partner. Therefore, one would expect the traditional male to adapt to the

wife's new role and provide the social support needed for a successful re-entry bid.

The woman in an independent couple will probably have the easiest time of the role readjustment process. This woman, along with her partner, never views herself as a one-dimensional character. Role expansion should come very naturally to this woman. Because the partners share an egalitarian outlook, eliciting spousal support should not be difficult for the independent woman. The only barrier the independent woman faces during her re-entry into higher education is reducing her need to confront conflict. Because this woman is very expressive with her spouse, she feels the need to negotiate and achieve consensus on every issue. Perhaps one would expect to see her expend more energy on the development of the self, putting the strand of family on hold.

Life during role redefinition is probably most difficult for the woman who is a member of the separate couple-type. Researchers in the field of higher education generally agree that any kind of professional or career success among married women calls for the support of husbands (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981; McIntosh, 1973). It will be useful to discover how support is demonstrated by Separate couples who prerer emotional distance.

Conceptual Framework

Theories of Social Support

The goal of this investigation is to study the relationship between spousal social support and marital communication style for re-entry women as they pursue degrees in higher education. As discussed earlier, this quest to earn a degree while juggling several other roles can be quite stressful (Juhasz, 1989). Thus, a theoretical model has been selected which encompasses a broad range of interpersonal contexts, some of which are uniquely relevant to stressful life events,

others of which promote life satisfaction. Robert Weiss's (1974) model has been selected because it incorporates the major elements of most current conceptualizations of social support (Caplan, 1974; Cobb, 1976, 1979; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hirsch, 1980; House, 1981; Kahn, 1979; Schaefer, Coyne & Lazarus, 1981). As noted previously, spousal support is crucial to the success of re-entry women who attempt to balance the adult careers of work, intimacy and self (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981; Juhasz, 1989; McIntosh, 1973).

Weiss (1974) denotes six social provisions which can be found in interpersonal relationships. Weiss found that all six functions were necessary for individuals to report that they feel satisfied and supported in their relationships with others. Although certain types of relationships typically provide specific dimensions, there are some relationships which provide many of the dimensions of social support. Conceptually, the Weiss (1974) provisions can be divided into two categories: those which require assistance, and those which do not require assistance. The first category consists of the provisions most relevant to problem-solving during stress: **guidance** (advice or information) and **reliable alliance** (the knowledge that others can be depended upon for concrete assistance). Weiss suggests that guidance is typically achieved from authority figures, whereas reliable alliance is generally sought from loved ones.

The non-assistance effects are thought to be mediated by cognitive processes, such as the reinforcement of self-esteem, which impacts one's causal attribution mechanisms. **Reassurance of worth** (acknowledgement of one's competence, skills and value by another) is this type of a provision. Studies by Bandura (1977, 1982) have demonstrated that one's coping ability is directly related to perceptions of self-concept. The self-concept is composed of one's self-image (whom we view ourselves to be) and one's self-esteem (how we feel

about ourselves). Together these variables contribute to one's ability or inability to deal with stress. Thus, the individual whose ability is bolstered from the supportive statements by interpersonal sources would be expected to deal more effectively and suffer fewer negative effects of stress than one whose support system does not provide such reinforcement. Individuals who typically receive reassurance of worth from their social support systems generally function more effectively.

The second non-assistance function of the Weiss (1974) model also has implications for self-concept. A salient dimension of interpersonal relationships is the perception that one is needed by others. Thus, Weiss includes **opportunity for nurturance** (the belief that others rely upon us for their well-being) in his paradigm. Weiss found that the most typical sources of opportunity for nurturance were spouses and children. While this dimension does not provide for receiving support, it shows that for social support to be healthy, it must also be reciprocal. This provision must be included to demonstrate that re-entry women are not emotionally drained by the challenge of higher education; rather, they are experiencing a redefinition of roles as characterized by Juhasz (1989).

The final two provisions involve the existence of affectional ties: **attachment** (emotional closeness from which one gets a sense of security) and **social integration** (a sense of belonging to a group that shares similar values, interests and activities). These provisions indicate the amount of comfort, security, pleasure and sense of identity re-entry women derive from their husbands. Women who are more interdependent with their husbands, like the Traditionals and Independents, would be expected to need more social support, while women who are independent of their husbands, such as the Separates, could function with less spousal support. These findings could have important implications for

married re-entry women who are encouraged by their spouses.

These expectations are dependent on the ability of the re-entry woman to elicit social support from her spouse as she pursues a degree in higher education. Social support is more than just the interpersonal resources one can mobilize to deal with the strain inherent in living. Social support is the belief, in fact the knowledge, that others are available to provide emotional and practical support in times of need (Cutrona, 1984). While some researchers assume that any marriage should provide social support, most scholars acknowledge that non-intimate, unhappy, distressed, and rocky marriages exist (Duck, 1986). Truly, most marriages display negative attributes at one time or another; however, some partners seem more able to elicit social support from their spouses.

People most frequently seek social support from individuals with whom they share a close relationship (Gourash, 1978). A few studies note that specifics concerning the type of crisis and nature of the relationship may interact to determine the effectiveness of social support. For example, when women experience prenatal distress, only the husband's support helped to reduce it (Lieberman, 1982). Similarly, Brown and Harris (1978) discovered that no other relationship could protect a woman from depression after a serious crisis better than an intimate relationship with a husband or boyfriend. Cutrona and Russell, (1987) also found that among married couples, answered requests for emotional support correlated positively with marital satisfaction.

In addition to the nature of the relationship, perception of the problem impacts the ability to mobilize social support. If the dilemma is seen as uncontrollable, important, and somewhat unpleasant, people are more likely to be able to engage the support of others (Barbee, Gulley & Cunningham, 1990). Re-entry women are unable to control the demands that their return to higher education

put on spouse and family. If these demands are viewed as unpleasant, they are almost certainly perceived to be important. Thus, women who return to higher education seem to meet the criteria suggested which would warrant the mobilization of spousal support.

Eliciting Spousal Support

Why can't all married re-entry women elicit social support from their husbands? Kelley (1983) suggests that cognitive, affective, and behavioral predispositions impact one's ability to request and receive social support. Simply put, how one thinks about, feels about, and behaves toward one's spouse predict success in eliciting social support.

Linguist Deborah Tannen (1986, 1990) offers another explanation for why married women have such difficulty eliciting the support of their husbands. During the course of her research, Tannen found some significant differences in the communication styles of men and women. While male conversation seems to establish a hierarchy, women's conversation seeks to be connective and to establish intimacy. Men desire freedom, autonomy and respect from their peers but women want security. The context of male conversation is based on information while the locus of female talk is establishing rapport. Men see themselves as experts who solve problems. Women present their problems for discussion. Men use opposition to establish connections and frequently give commands without reasons. For women, interaction and conversation are the essence of intimacy. Women do not give commands; they make suggestions and offer reasons for their positions. Simply put, the male conversational style is direct and explicit while the female style is indirect and implicit. In all likelihood, re-entry women suggest that it "would be nice" if their husbands could help them in their pursuit

of higher education. Unfortunately, these women would get much more from their husbands if they told their husbands to prepare dinner on the nights when they are in class. Thus, it is critical to identify a re-entry woman's marital communication type to find if communication style is linked to the provision of social support.

Further, in the marital interaction literature, recurrent conflict patterns have been identified that discriminate between satisfied and dissatisfied couples. It would seem that recurrent interaction patterns in a couple's attempts to deal with stress can be identified which discriminate between high and low support couples (Cutrona, 1986). These high and low support couples may be identified by their marital communication style. It is critical for these couples to be asked to analyze perception of support while they face stressful life circumstances, such as the wife's return to higher education (Cutrona, 1986).

Perception of support is unique to the individual. For some it may be as simple as providing messages which alleviate or lessen the emotional distress one is experiencing (Burleson, 1985). For others stress must be acknowledged and legitimized (Applegate, 1980; Burleson, 1984). Finally, for others support may only be real if one's spouse compensates for stress by doing more work at home (Bolger, Kessler & Wethington, 1989). Because of the various perceptions concerning perception of support, the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale has been used to assess perception of support.

Several reasons exist as to why married re-entry women need the support of their husbands. First, these women are expanding their roles, often experiencing difficulty balancing the three adult careers of work, intimacy and self. Secondly, women define themselves by their relationships (Coup, Greene & Gardner, 1973; Frieze, 1978; Glick, 1957; and Lopata, 1971). Research has shown

that people inevitably seek social support from individuals with whom they share a close relationship (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Gourash, 1978; and Lieberman, 1982). For married women, no other close relationship can provide the security and protection better than an intimate relationship with a husband. Finally, for women connection is all-important (Tannen, 1986, 1990). They need to talk about their problems, and they usually have developed a pattern of talking to their husband, perceived as the expert who uses information to solve problems.

Based on the preceding review of literature, one research question has been generated: How will spousal social support be characterized for each of the three couple types? Each of the three marital communication styles (Traditionals, Independents, and Separates) have distinctive perceptions about marriage and the roles associated with marriage. To date no research has investigated how these couple-types define spousal support. This study will seek to discover which of Weiss' six dimensions (attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, guidance, and opportunity for nurturance) are associated with each couple-type.

In summary, based on the literature reviewed and discussed in this investigation of how re-entry women define spousal social support, the following research question was investigated:

RQ₁: How will marital couple-types among re-entry women characterize the nature of spousal social support?

Chapter Summary

In order to examine this research question, two self-report scales were administered. Married women, over the age of 25 who have returned to college after being out for at least one year were the focus of this study. These women

and their husbands were asked to complete the Relational Dimensions Instrument which identifies marital communication style. The re-entry woman was also asked to complete the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale which measures her perception of her husband's social support. The objective of this research was to determine which of Weiss's six dimensions of social support is linked to each of the three marital couple-types.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Because the best predictor of success in higher education for a married, re-entry woman is a supportive husband (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981; McIntosh, 1973), this study sought to describe the nature of spousal support for each of three distinct marital communication styles (couple-types). In order to discover these data, the Fitzpatrick (1977) Relational Dimensions Instrument was completed by married re-entry women and their husbands to determine their marital communication style. The re-entry women also completed the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1987) to determine their perception of spousal social support. Results from the two questionnaires were analyzed to discover how social support is characterized for each of the three marital communication styles (couple-types).

Population and Sample

The population for this study was women who had been married for at least one year, who had interrupted their college education for at least one year and had since returned to higher education. The sample for this study was women who met the above requirements and attended a private, religiously-affiliated, four-year college which was located in the Midwestern section of the United States of America.

The college enrolls approximately 1750 students in the Day Session and 1250 students in the Evening Session and other continuing education programs. The college was founded in the tradition of the American liberal arts colleges which are dedicated to the preparation of people for leadership and responsible service to society. The vision of liberal education held by the college upholds

the essential values of the enlightened mind and education for professional service. The college has an equal commitment to both general education and the departmental major.

The total number of students enrolled for the Spring term of 1992 at this institution was 2,868. The college identifies re-entry students as those students who have previously attended any college but were not enrolled for one regular academic term (i.e. Fall or Spring). The sample consisted of both full-time and part-time, married re-entry women. All married, re-entry women were invited to participate in the study. It is important to note that the sample was identified from Spring 1992 enrollments; however, data were collected in the Summer of 1992 when the 391 married re-entry women and their husbands were asked to complete the Fitzpatrick (1977) Relational Dimensions Instrument. The re-entry women were also asked to complete the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (1987).

The total number of re-entry students in the day session was: 189 females and 88 males. The re-entry enrollment for the evening session was: 558 females and 448 males. One hundred, fifty-three married re-entry females were enrolled in the day session (54%) and 238 married re-entry females were enrolled in the evening session (33%). Therefore, the total eligible sample for this study was 391 married, re-entry women.

Procedures

The procedures utilized in this study followed those specified by Dillman (1978) in his classic work Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method. Dillman's procedures are based on the Theory of Social Exchange (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The basic premise of the Theory of Social Exchange is

that behaviors are commodities which may be exchanged in the social marketplace. Dillman reports that successful returns will be achieved from mail surveys if the respondent believes that his or her participation in the study is important and if the perceived costs of participating in the study are low. To ensure respondent participation Dillman requires that three things be done. First, the researcher must minimize the cost for responding. Second, the rewards for participating in the study must be maximized. Finally, the investigator must establish trust in the subjects that the rewards will be delivered.

Dillman outlines a very specific method of data collection that relies heavily on personalization and planning. To personalize the mailing Dillman suggests several strategies. First, a cover letter must be generated which is dated and addressed to the respondent. The first paragraph of the letter informs the participant what the study is about as well as its social usefulness. The second paragraph indicates why the recipient is important and, if needed, who should complete the survey. The third paragraph includes the promise of confidentiality and an explanation of the survey identification number. The fourth paragraph discusses the usefulness of the study and offers a token reward for participation in the study. The final paragraph tells subjects what to do if questions arise. The letter concludes with a statement of appreciation, a salutation, and a personalized signature in blue ink.

Based on Dillman's research, the 391 married, re-entry women were sent a personalized cover letter which described the study and requested their participation (See Appendix A). Included in the original mailing was the cover letter, the questionnaires, and an addressed, prepaid envelope for return mailing. The letter asked the women to participate in the study if they were over 25 years of age, married for more than one year, and if their college education was interrupted for

at least one year. These demographic criteria are the defining characteristics of re-entry women as reported by the American Association of University Women (1992).

Following Dillman's (1978) plan, one week after the original mailing, subjects were sent a postcard. The postcard served as a thank you to those who had responded and as a reminder to those who had not responded to the survey (See Appendix B). Two weeks later (three weeks since the first mailing) a second mailing was directed at nonrespondents. This mailing included a cover letter which stated that "as of today we have not received your questionnaires", and a restatement of the basic appeal (See Appendix C). The cover letter was accompanied by a replacement questionnaire and another addressed, prepaid return envelope. Four weeks later, seven weeks after the original mailing, the final mailing went out to the remaining nonrespondents. This tier included the second cover letter, another replacement questionnaire, and another addressed, prepaid envelope.

At the time of publication, the Total Design Method had been tested 48 times (Dillman, 1978). The average response rate for this method was 74%. When surveying specialized populations the return rates have been as high as 77%. The lowest reported return rate experienced using the Dillman method was 50%. Dillman reports no problems securing these results as long as the survey does not exceed 12 pages. The Relational Dimensions Instrument is five pages, and the Marital Version of the Social Provisions scale is two pages, well within Dillman's limits.

The Instruments

The first instrument which respondents in the study were asked to com-

plete was Fitzpatrick's (1977) Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI). The RDI is a 77-item 1-7 Likert type scale. The RDI has eight subscales. Twenty-three items are factored together to produce the subscale of sharing. Twelve items constitute the subscale of traditionalism. Eight items make-up the subscale for uncertainty. Five items constitute the subscale of temporal regularity. The subscale for autonomy is comprised of six items. The subscale of assertiveness consists of six items. The subscale for space is composed of eight items. The final subscale for conflict consists of nine items. The RDI identifies marital communication style by assessing how partners use their space, time and energy and the extent to which they express feelings, exert power, and share a common philosophy of marriage. These six dimensions measure three basic factors: ideology, interdependence, and conflict. How a couple's scores on the RDI cluster together on these three factors (ideology, interdependence, and conflict) determine their marital communication style. The RDI has a reliability of .77 (Fitzpatrick, 1977) and its validity is demonstrated by its ability to predict other concepts of interest as well as behavior. Therefore, all of the studies which followed the original development of the RDI should be considered as validation of the typology (Fitzpatrick, 1992).

Perceived social support was assessed by using the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). This scale was developed to assess the six dimensions of social relationships proposed by Weiss (1974). These dimensions (termed "provisions" by Weiss) include the following: (a) **attachment**, a sense of emotional closeness and security; (b) **social integration**, a sense of belonging to a group of people who share common interests and recreational activities; (c) **reassurance of worth**, acknowledgment of one's competence and skill; (d) **reliable alliance**, assurance that one can count on others

for tangible assistance; (e) **guidance**, advice and information; and (f) **opportunity for nurturance**, a sense of responsibility for the well-being of another person. The measure asks participants to rate the degree to which their relationship with their spouse is currently supplying each of the provisions. Each provision is assessed by four items, two that describe the presence and two that describe the absence of the provision. Respondents indicate on a 4-point scale (1 = not at all true; 4 = completely true) the extent to which each statement describes their spousal relationship. For scoring purposes, the negative items are reversed and summed together with the positive items to form a score for each social provision. A total social provisions score is also formed by summing the six individual provision scores.

Internal consistency for the total score is relatively high, ranging from .85 to .92 across a variety of populations. Alpha coefficients for the individual subscales range from .64 to .76. Factor analysis has confirmed a six-factor structure that corresponds to the six social provisions (Russell & Cutrona, 1984, 1985). The validity of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) has been confirmed in several studies. Among first-year college students, the six social provisions in combination accounted for 66% of the variance in scores on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Cutrona, 1982). Significant negative correlations between the SPS and negative emotional states have been found both longitudinally and in cross-sectional studies of diverse populations, including postpartum mothers (Cutrona, 1984), public school teachers, (Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987), nurses, (Cutrona & Russell, 1987), and the elderly (Cutrona, Russell & Rose, 1986). Finally, analyses of data from a college student sample have supported the discriminant validity of the SPS against relevant measures of mood (e.g., depression), personality (e.g., neuroticism, self-esteem), and social desirability (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

Data Analyses

A cluster analysis was performed on the responses to the Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI) in order to determine the three couple-types: Traditional, Independent, and Separate. Cluster analysis identifies relatively homogeneous groups of people or objects. In this case there are three clusters (ideology, interdependence, and conflict) for each of the three marital definitions. The original study which tested the RDI used a 1,600 person sample. The use of such a large database to estimate mean values adds to the stability of the findings for researchers working with smaller samples, such as this study.

The two instruments, the Relational Dimensions Instrument and the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale, were used to determine how each of the three couple-types, Traditionals, Independents, and Separates, characterize spousal social support. Two analyses were performed on the data: multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and discriminant function analysis (DA).

MANOVA is an extension of univariate analysis of variance designed to test simultaneous differences among groups on multiple dependent variables (Pedhazur, 1973). Although MANOVA and DA are similar procedures, most researchers suggest that MANOVA be used first to determine whether there are overall significant differences between groups. Significance on the MANOVA rejects the null hypothesis that the groups are equal. DA identifies the variables on which the groups differ mostly and the nature of the dimensions on which they differ.

Discriminant function analysis examines differences between two or more groups of objects with respect to several variables simultaneously (Klecka, 1980). One of the functions of discriminant analysis is to combine group characteristics in a way that allows one to identify the group which a case most closely resem-

bles. In this study there are three groups, **Traditionals**, **Independents**, and **Separates**. The six dimensions of social support, **Attachment**, **Social Integration**, **Reassurance of Worth**, **Reliable Alliance**, **Guidance**, and **Opportunity for Nurturance**, were used to assign, or classify, a case into the group which it most closely resembles.

In summary, the process used in this study was a mail survey. The sample consisted of married, re-entry women in higher education. The women were mailed two surveys. The first survey identified their marital communication style. The second survey characterized the married re-entry women's perception of spousal social support. Data from this study were analyzed to determine marital communication style and to discover if the dimensions of social support are associated with marital communication style. The next chapter presents the results of the data analyses.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to determine if the types of spousal social support used by married women when they return to higher education were associated with marital communication style. This chapter presents the results of the data collection and analyses along with the researcher's explanations for these findings.

Overview of Data Collection and Procedures

The focus of this study was on married women over the age of 25 who had returned to complete their undergraduate college education. The women had to be married for at least one year to ensure that marital roles and expectations had been negotiated. The women had to have interrupted their college education for at least one year to be classified as reentry women in higher education (American Association of University Women, 1991).

The sample was drawn from the official college records of a small, private college in the Midwest. The college is a baccalaureate institution with a liberal arts orientation. An analysis of the Spring, 1992 college records indicated that 391 married female students were enrolled and potentially could be invited to participate in the study. A decision was made by the researcher to eliminate 28 women from the potential sample as they had either academic or financial holds on their records.

The remaining 363 women were mailed a cover letter which informed them of the purpose and procedures of the study along with three surveys. The women were asked to complete the Relational Dimensions Instrument

(Fitzpatrick, 1977) and the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). The women's spouses were asked to complete a separate copy of the Relational Dimensions Instrument (Fitzpatrick, 1977).

After the first mailing, 19 women either wrote or called to inform the investigator that they were divorced and therefore not eligible to participate in the study. Additionally, several couples who returned their surveys did not meet the criteria for further participation in the study. Eight couples who returned their surveys had been married less than one year, and 12 women had interrupted their education for less than one year. Based on these returns, the number of eligible participants was reduced from 363 couples to 324 couples.

Fifteen women and one husband notified the researcher of their refusal to participate in the study. Fourteen of the women, and the 1 man reported that the survey items were too personal. One woman stated that the survey was not relevant to women returning to higher education. The 16 people who refused to participate in the study were recorded as nonrespondents. From the 324 eligible couples in the sample, responses were received from 208 couples. The 208 couples who responded to the survey represent a response rate of 64.19%.

However, this rate does not represent the number of usable surveys.

In addition to those who refused to participate, three couples who returned their surveys failed to complete the entire survey. Two husbands and one wife omitted a significant number of items which made an analysis of their questionnaires impossible. Finally, seven surveys were returned which were completed by the wife only. These seven surveys were accompanied by notes or letters which indicated that their husbands refused to participate in the study, but the women wanted to do their part to advance understanding concerning the importance of spousal support for reentry women in higher education. The 10

couples discussed above were counted as responding to the survey, but not calculated into the usable response rate. The eligible sample consisted of 324 married, reentry women and their husbands. Usable responses were received from 198 couples. These data thus constituted a usable response rate of 61% (See Table 1).

Researchers who mail surveys to collect data expect a lower response rate than would be obtained if the data were collected in person or over the telephone (Dillman, 1978). Generally, social scientists who survey respondents by mail are pleased to get a response rate of 50%. There are two probable explanations for the overall response rate of 64.19% and the usable response rate of 61% in this study.

TABLE 1
Number and Percentage of Respondent Surveys

| <u>Descriptor</u> | <u>N</u> | <u>%.</u> |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Married women (college records) | 391 | |
| Eliminated due to academic/financial holds | 28 | |
| First Mailing | 363 | |
| Divorced | 19 | |
| Married less than 1 year | 8 | |
| Education interrupted less than 1 year | 12 | |
| Eligible N | 324 | |
| Responses | 208 | 64% |
| Wife only returned surveys | 7 | |
| Incomplete survey (husband) | 2 | |
| Incomplete survey (wife) | 1 | |
| Useable responses | 198 | 61% |

The best predictor of the high overall response rate (64.19%) is the use of a plan for mailing surveys such as that generated by Dillman (1978) in his scientific study on mail and telephone surveys which was used in this study.

Researchers who follow Dillman's design can expect to receive a high response rate.

Another reason for the high response rate involves the focus on the special population of married women who have returned to college. The cover letter informed the women that their participation in the study would provide valuable information relevant to their own personal goal of completing the baccalaureate degree. These women probably had a vested interest in the study and this fact may have motivated them to return the surveys.

Data Analyses

Two stages were developed for the data analyses. First, the data about the couples (RDI) were analyzed to determine their marital communication style. Second, a separate analysis of the SPS data determined which characteristics of spousal support were associated with each of the three styles of marital communication.

Determination of Marital Communication Style

The number of couples who met all criteria for inclusion in this study and who returned usable surveys was 198. The statistical analysis conducted to determine marital communication style was a cluster analysis. A cluster analysis factors the respondents' scores on items which assess married partner's use of space, time, energy, expressiveness of feelings, power and the degree to which the partners share a common philosophy of marriage. The manner in which a

couples' scores align together on the previously mentioned dimensions (space, time, energy, expressiveness of feelings, power and the degree to which the partners share a common philosophy of marriage) form the clusters of ideology, interdependence and conflict which determine marital communication style (Fitzpatrick, 1977). Table 2 reports the results of the cluster analysis performed to determine the couples' marital communication style.

TABLE 2**Marital Communication Style**

| | <u>Gender</u> | | | | | |
|--|---|-------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| | Traditional | | Independent | | Separate | |
| Females | 112 | (57%) | 55 | (28%) | 31 | (15%) |
| Males | 105 | (53%) | 54 | (27%) | 39 | (20%) |
| <u>Pure Couple-Types (N=134, 67%)</u> | | | | | | |
| | Traditional | | Independent | | Separate | |
| | 85 | (63%) | 32 | (24%) | 17 | (13%) |
| <u>Mixed Couple-Types (N=64, 33%)</u> | | | | | | |
| | Traditional Female/ Independent Male | | | Traditional Female/ Separate Male | | |
| | 14 | (22%) | 13 | (20%) | | |
| | Independent Female/ Traditional Male | | | Independent Female/ Separate Male | | |
| | 14 | (22%) | 9 | (14%) | | |
| | Separate Female/ Traditional Male | | | Separate Female/ Independent Male | | |
| | 6 | (9%) | 8 | (12%) | | |

The frequency analysis of marital communication style by gender yielded the following results. The **Traditional** style of marital communication consisted

of 105 males (53%) and 112 females (57%). The **Independent** style of marital communication was composed of 54 males (27%) and 55 females (28%). The **Separate** style of marital communication included 39 males (20%) and 31 females (15%).

The most frequent style of marital communication for both men and women was **Traditional**. This style of marital communication is characterized by conventional views concerning marital roles and expectations. The simplest explanation for the frequency of occurrence of the **Traditional** style of marital communication is that it mirrors societal expectations for marriage and the family and is therefore the role most individuals model.

The second most common style of marital communication was **Independent**. This style of marital communication focuses on autonomy, equality and change. Fitzpatrick (1977) believes the **Independents** are the future of marital communication. She bases this assertion on the correlation between the **Independent** style of marital communication and the dual career couple. These two variables, the **Independent** style of communication and dual career couples, almost always occur together (Fitzpatrick, 1977). According to college records several of the couples who participated in this study were dual career couples, so it is not surprising that these men and women have adopted the type of marital communication which best fits their lifestyle.

The least frequent style of marital communication represented in this study was the **Separate** couple type. Again, this was expected. In her original study Fitzpatrick (1977) obtained a fairly even distribution of the styles of marital communication. However, based on the sample from which this study was drawn, that distribution was not expected. The sample for this study was drawn from a Midwestern liberal arts college which holds traditional, conservative values which

are skewed toward the **Traditional** style of marital communication. Fitzpatrick (1977) refers to the **Separate** couples as the “emotionally divorced”. They have uncertain, often conflicting, expectations for the marriage and for one another. It is interesting to note that all of the styles of marital communication were represented in the study regardless of the value set of the college.

One hundred and thirty-four (67%) of the couples who returned useable surveys were “pure” couple-types (See Table 2). The “pure” couple is one in which both the husband and wife were found to share the same marital communication style. The percentage of “pure” couple-types (67%) found in this study follows the trend discovered by Fitzpatrick (1977) in her original study in which 60% of the couples were classified as “pure” couple-types. In her original study Fitzpatrick classified the pure couples thusly: 38% were Traditionals, 34% were Independents and 28% were Separates. The percentage of “pure” couple-types was less evenly distributed in the present study.

The **Traditional** style of marital communication was shared by 85 (63%) of the “pure” couples. The **Independent** style of marital communication was shared by 32 (24%) of the “pure” couples. Finally, the **Separate** style of marital communication was shared by 17 (13%) of the pure couples. The frequency of the “pure” couple-types follows the individual preferences for the three styles of marital communication.

The remaining 64 couples were found to be “mixed” couples with regard to their marital communication style. Fourteen couples (22%) were a composite of **Traditional** women and **Independent** men. Thirteen couples (20%) were a blend of **Traditional** women and **Separate** men. Fourteen couples (22%) were a combination of **Independent** women and **Traditional** men. Nine couples (14%) were a mix of **Independent** women with **Separate** men. Six couples

(9%) were a blend of **Separate** women with **Traditional** men. Finally, 8 couples (13%) were a composite of **Separate** women and **Independent** men (See Table 2).

It is not surprising that 67% of the couples who participated in this study were “pure” couple-types. A “pure” couple exists when the husband and wife share with one another the same ideology regarding marriage and family, similar notions concerning how interdependent or autonomous they are from each other and similar approaches to handling relational conflict.

One of the best predictors of marital success is the construct of relational congruence. Simply stated, relational congruence implies that two people share similar beliefs, attitudes and values which promote attractiveness (Byrne, 1961, 1970; Byrne & Lamberth, 1971; Byrne & Nelson, 1965, 1966; Clore & Gormly, 1974; Duck, 1975, 1982; Gormly & Gormly, 1981). Based on the recognized construct of relational congruence investigators should expect to find marriages composed of individuals who share a similar set of expectations concerning marriage.

Determining Characteristics of Spousal Support

To determine if the three styles of marital communication, **Traditionals**, **Independents** and **Separates**, are associated with different dimensions of social support, three stages of analysis were conducted on the data. First, the statistical test Multivariate Analysis of Variance was performed to determine if there were differences between the groups (three styles of marital communication) on multiple variables (six dimensions of social support). Next, a Discriminate Function Analysis was conducted to identify variables on which the groups differ mostly and the nature of the dimensions on which they differ. Finally, T-tests were performed on the cell means to determine which groups were significantly different

from one another on each of the dimensions of social support.

Social Support and Marital Communication Style

As previously found, the 134 “pure” couples were clustered into three groups. There were 85 **Traditional** couples, 32 **Independent** couples and 17 **Separate** couples. A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to assess whether there was a significant difference between the 3 groups on the 6 variables of social support. These variables include: **attachment, guidance, opportunity for nurturance, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance and social integration.**

The main effect for an overall difference between the three groups was significant ($F=.293, p=.001$) (See Table 3). This result reveals that overall the three styles of marital communication are significantly associated with the dimensions of social support.

TABLE 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Social Support by Couple-type

| | <u>TRADITIONAL (N=85)</u> | | <u>INDEPENDENT (N=32)</u> | | <u>SEPARATE (N=17)</u> | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| | <u>M</u> | <u>S.D</u> | <u>M</u> | <u>S.D</u> | <u>M</u> | <u>S.D.</u> |
| ATTACHMT | 14.5 | 2.3 | 14.0 | 3.1 | 11.5 | 3.1 |
| GUIDANCE | 12.4 | 1.2 | 12.1 | 1.8 | 11.4 | 1.5 |
| NURTURAN | 11.5 | 2.3 | 10.5 | 2.4 | 10.8 | 2.1 |
| REAWORTH | 14.3 | 2.0 | 13.4 | 2.9 | 12.0 | 3.2 |
| REALLIAN | 15.3 | 1.3 | 14.5 | 2.2 | 13.4 | 2.0 |
| SOCINTEG | 12.9 | 2.1 | 11.4 | 2.3 | 10.4 | 2.8 |

The main effect for the dimensions of social support reveals that the overall mean scores for five of the six variables were significantly different from one

another. The social support dimension of **Opportunity for Nurturance** was the only dimension not found to be statistically significant. Two explanations for this finding are possible. First, the results of the present analysis are based on a relatively small sample size of 134 couples. If the sample size were increased, significance would probably have been achieved. The previous assumption is based on the theorem that as the sample size increases, the variability of the sample means decreases (Young & Veldman, 1972). Simply stated, increasing sample size reduces variability which in turn decreases the probability that the effect is due to chance.

The second explanation for not achieving significance on the social support dimension of **Opportunity for Nurturance** is a conceptual one.

Nurturance is the only social support dimension which provides for the giving, rather than the receiving, of social support. Perhaps the lack of significance on the variable of **Nurturance** was due to the high needs for receiving support which re-entry women in higher education display. The present study was designed to identify which dimensions of social support were associated with each of the three styles of marital communication for married women who return to higher education. The group of married, reentry women in higher education face increased stress as they attempt to juggle the expansion of their roles. Perhaps, for this group, the focus is on help with adjusting to the demands of role expansion, not on providing support. As was previously noted, it was the importance of spousal support for the success of professional, married women (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981; McIntosh, 1973) which precipitated the present study.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine which specific dimensions of social support are associated with each of the three marital communica-

tion styles. A method of analysis was used to characterize couple-type based on the six dimensions of social support. The goal then was to create a profile for each couple-type that would clearly differentiate each type along the distinct dimensions of social support. Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics of each of the social support dimensions by couple-type.

A method of analysis was used which would classify group members according to multiple discriminating variables. In the present study the groups are the styles of marital communication (**Traditional, Independent and Separate**). The discriminating variables, the characteristics used to distinguish among the groups are the six dimensions of social support (**Attachment, Social Integration, Reassurance of Worth, Reliable Alliance, Guidance and Opportunity for Nurturance**).

The statistical procedure selected was Discriminant Function Analysis (DA). This procedure generates weights for each dimension of social support that can be used in a formula to classify the characteristics of social support with the group that they most closely resemble. The results of this analysis indicate that the characteristics of social support received by married reentry women in higher education are unique to marital communication style.

One's interpretation of the results of the discriminant function analysis rests in the classification function coefficients. Simply stated, the larger the score a group achieves on a dimension of social support, the more closely the dimension resembles or belongs to that group (Klecka, 1980). There was a main effect for significant group membership on all of the dimensions of social support ($F=.7635, p=.0007$). Table 4 reports the results of the classification coefficients by couple-type.

TABLE 4

Classification Function Coefficients by Couple-type

| | <u>TRADITIONALS</u> | <u>INDEPENDENTS</u> | <u>SEPARATES</u> |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| ATTACHMT | -1.43 | -1.23 | -1.63 |
| GUIDANCE | 4.84 | 4.88 | 4.76 |
| NURTURAN | 0.79 | 0.66 | 0.94 |
| REAWORT | -0.36 | -0.41 | -0.36 |
| REALLIAN | 5.41 | 5.20 | 5.08 |
| SOCINTEG | 0.25 | -0.02 | -0.04 |
| CONSTANT | -65.61 | -60.42 | -55.62 |

The Social Support Dimension of Attachment

Based on an analysis of the classification function coefficients, the social support dimension of **Attachment** was most descriptive of the **Independent** style of marital communication. The range for the classification function coefficients on the dimension of **Attachment** includes negative numbers. The score of 1.23 is higher among the three scores since it is closer to a positive group centroid (Klecka, 1980). As previously noted, the highest score a group receives on a dimension of social support the more closely the dimension resembles that group.

T-tests for independent couple-type samples were performed on cell means of the dimensions of social support as a post hoc test to determine if there was significance between the groups on each dimension. Table 5 reports the results of this analysis.

TABLE 5

T-tests for Independent Samples

Couple-type by Social Support

| | <u>TRADITIONAL</u> | <u>INDEPENDENT</u> | <u>SEPARATE</u> |
|----------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| ATTACHMT | | t=2.64, p=.01* | |
| GUIDANCE | | t=2.98, p=.004** | |
| NURTURAN | | | t=2.23, p=.02* |
| REAWORTH | | | t=3.99, p=.000** |
| REALLIAN | t=4.84, p=.000*** | | |
| SOCINTEG | t=4.22, p=.000*** | | |

Probability level note:

*p <.05 **p <.01 ***p <.001 ****p <.0001

T-tests for independent couple-type samples were performed on the cell means to determine if there were significant differences between the groups on this variable. Results of this analysis found **Independents** were significantly different on the **Attachment** dimension of social support.

Attachment was negatively related to all three couple-types, but most closely resembles the **Independent** style of marital communication.

Attachment is a nonassistance effect of social support. It indicates the emotional closeness, comfort, security and pleasure the couple gets from affectional ties. **Independent** couples are together because they enjoy the partnership. Typically their financial resources and power in the relationship are relatively equal. It is their perception of emotional closeness and their unique understanding of one another as individuals that forms the bond in their relationship.

It is worth noting that significant differences were obtained between the **Independents** and **Separates** on the dimension of **Attachment**, but not

between the **Independents** and **Traditionals**. This may be because one of the functions of **Attachment** is to provide a strong sense of identity with the relationship. While **Independent** women have a strong sense of their own identity, their lives are also intricately intertwined with those of their partners.

Traditional women often define themselves first as a wife and mother, then as an individual. For these reasons **Traditional** and **Independent** women both value the variable of **Attachment**.

The Social Support Dimension of Guidance

Guidance consists of assistance in areas of advice or information relevant to problem-solving during stress. This variable most closely resembles the **Independent** style of marital communication. **Independent** couples share their opinions with one another and value their partner's input. However, because they are autonomous, they do not feel obligated to follow the advice offered by their spouse. This may be why, although this dimension is valued most by **Independents**, the distance between the groups is only significant between the **Traditionals** and **Separates**.

It is unlikely that **Separates** would seek advice from their partners. **Traditional** women would probably feel obligated to follow the advice provided by their husbands. Consequently, unless **Traditional** women intended to unconditionally follow spousal advice, they would not be likely to align themselves with the dimension of Guidance.

The Social Support Dimension of Opportunity for Nurturance

The dimension of **Opportunity for Nurturance** was most descriptive of the **Separate** couple-type as this group achieved the highest score among the classification function coefficients. Results of t-tests performed on cell means indicated that although **Nurturance** belongs to the **Separates**, it is statistically

different only between the **Traditionals** and **Independents**.

Relying on the classification function coefficients it is clear that **Nurturance** belongs to the **Separate** style of marital communication. However, it is important to note that this variable was unique for several reasons. First, it is the only variable which did not achieve significance in the MANOVA ($F=2.86$, $p=.06$). More interesting is how this variable was different from all other dimensions of social support on the canonical discriminant function coefficients. All other dimensions of social support (**Attachment**, **Guidance**, **Reassurance of Worth**, **Reliable Alliance**, and **Social Integration**) achieved significance on the first discriminant function. Only **Nurturance** achieved statistical significance on the second function. Clearly, this dimension of social support is different from the other dimensions.

The **Opportunity for Nurturance** builds on the belief that individuals rely on others for their well-being. This dimension does not include receiving support; rather, it shows that for social support to be healthy it must be reciprocal. Certainly, the **Separate** couple-type would not rely on a partner for nurturance; however, the partners need to feel needed. Perhaps this is part of the ambivalent, undefined role expectations which make up the **Separate** couple. They have no trouble giving support, as there is less of an emotional investment in giving support than there is in receiving support (Duck, 1992).

Interestingly, the **Traditional** couple-type was significantly different from the **Independent** couple-type on the dimension of **Nurturance**. **Traditional** women expect to support their husbands while the **Independent** women do not see this as an integral part of their role. This is further support that the three styles of marital communication are mutually exclusive groups.

The Social Support Dimension of Reassurance of Worth

Reassurance of Worth is most characteristic of the **Separate** style of marital communication. The **Separate** couple-type attained the highest classification function coefficient on this variable.

Results of t-tests performed on cell means to determine if the groups were statistically significant from one another on the variable indicated that the **Separate** couple-type was significantly different from the **Traditionals** on this variable ($t=3.99$, $p=.000$).

Reassurance of Worth involves an acknowledgement of the competence, skill, and value of one's partner. This in turn enhances the partner's self-esteem. This characteristic seems tailor made for the **Separate** couple. Acknowledging the skills and competence of one's partner implies that the partner is quite capable of achieving a goal without help. **Separates** do not like to become intertwined in the life of their partner and **Reassurance of Worth** releases them from that obligation.

The Social Support Dimension of Reliable Alliance

Based on an analysis of the classification function coefficients, the dimension of **Reliable Alliance** was descriptive of the **Traditional** style of marital communication. The **Traditional** group received the highest score on the variable of **Reliable Alliance**.

The results of the t-tests analysis performed on cell means for **Reliable Alliance** indicated that the **Traditional** style of marital communication was significantly different from the other couple-types on this dimension.

The dimension of **Reliable Alliance** is a perfect match to the **Traditional** style of marital communication. **Reliable Alliance** consists of the knowledge that one's partner can be depended upon for concrete assistance to solve problems during times of stress. Roles are clearly defined along conventional sexual

stereotypes for the **Traditional** couple. The husband is the breadwinner and the wife would expect him to provide financial assistance to help her solve her problems. This type of support might vary from paying tuition to arranging for help in the home. **Independent** and **Separate** wives are more likely to be financially independent from their spouses. For these reasons **Independents** and **Separates** should value Reliable Alliance less than the **Traditionals**.

The Social Support Dimension of Social Integration

The final dimension of social support is **Social Integration**. Based on an interpretation of the classification coefficients, **Social Integration** most closely resembled the **Traditional** style of marital communication. Results of t-tests on cell means indicate **Traditionals** are significantly different from both the **Independent** and **Separate** couple-types on the dimension of **Social Integration**.

Social Integration is a nonassistance dimension of social support which has implications for self-concept. This variable characterizes a sense of belonging to others who share similar values, interests and activities. **Social Integration** is characteristic of the **Traditional** style of marital communication. Truly, the characteristics of this variable are a match with the defining characteristics of the **Traditional** couple-type.

It is understandable why the **Traditionals** are significantly different from **Independents** and **Separates** on this dimension of social support. **Social Integration** indicates security and a sense of identity from the relationship. **Traditional** couples display a high degree of certainty and stability in their marital roles, which provide security. **Traditional** women tend to value their identity as mother and wife. This is certainly not the case for the **Independents** who view themselves as unique individuals nor for the **Separates** whose role defini-

tions are obscure at best.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of statistical tests used to determine if the six dimensions of social support (**Attachment, Guidance, Opportunity for Nurturance, Reassurance of Worth, Reliable Alliance** and **Social Integration**) were associated with the three styles of marital communication (**Traditional, Independent** and **Separate**). In summary, the dimensions of social support which most closely resemble the **Traditional** style of marital communication are **Reliable Alliance** and **Social Integration**. **Independent** couples are characterized by two dimensions of social support, **Attachment** and **Guidance**. Finally, the characteristics of social support which are associated with the **Separate** style of marital communication are **Opportunity for Nurturance** and **Reassurance of Worth**. The following chapter provides the reader with a summary of this study, the relevant conclusions which can be drawn from this research as well as recommendations prompted by this investigation.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Statement of the Problem

Institutions of higher education have been looking in new directions for students to cope with the problem of a shrinking pool of traditional-age college students (Hossler & Kemerer, 1986). The recruitment of re-entry women offers higher education institutions one potential solution to the dilemma of diminishing enrollments (Anderson, 1992). Re-entry women are defined as women over the age of 25, who have interrupted their education for at least one year and have now returned to higher education (American Association of University Women, 1991).

While student recruitment is a major problem higher education institutions face, the real challenge confronted by these institutions is student retention (Hossler & Kemerer, 1986). Specifically, the retention of women who return to higher education present special challenges. Researchers and administrators in the field of higher education acknowledge that a critical obstacle women often must overcome when they return to complete their education is the enlistment of family support (Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; Minor, 1992). Some returning women seem unable to identify the specific type of support they need (Minor, 1992); and women who lack family support have been found less likely to complete a baccalaureate degree (Dickeson, 1992).

Several studies which have examined the success of professional women have focused on married women. Results of these studies indicate that the best

predictor of success for a married woman is a supportive husband (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981, McIntosh, 1973). This line of reasoning has prompted scholars in the field of higher education to conclude that spousal support is critical to the success of married re-entry women (Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; Minor, 1992). To date researchers have not reported characteristics or factors that constitute social support for married reentry women. One approach in achieving this goal would be to examine social support and marital communication style.

Conceptual Framework: Theories of Social Support. Social support is conceptualized as “the interpersonal resources mobilized to deal with the strain inherent in living” (Leatham & Duck, 1990, p. 2). Weiss (1969) found that there were six dimensions of social support. **Attachment** which indicates emotional closeness; **Guidance** provides one with advice and information; **Opportunity for Nurturance** which allows one to feel needed by others; **Reassurance of Worth** involves the recognition of one’s competence, skill and value by others; **Reliable Alliance** which indicates that others can be counted on for tangible assistance; and **Social Integration** which provides a sense of belonging to a group who share similar interests, concerns, and activities.

Marital Communication Style

Mary Anne Fitzpatrick (1977) generated a typology of marital communication style. Couple types were determined based on their definition of marriage, the degree of autonomy in their relationship and how they dealt with conflict. Three styles of marital communication emerged from the analysis: **Traditional, Independent** and **Separate**. **Traditional** couples share a conventional view of marriage, are quite interdependent, and know which issues in the marriage are worth fighting over. **Independent** couples have nonconventional definitions of

marriage, are relatively autonomous and argue over everything. **Separate** couples have ambivalent views concerning marriage, are not interdependent and avoid conflict.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study, in investigating the relationship between social support and marital communication style, sought to determine if specific dimensions of social support were characteristic of the three styles of marital communication.

The value of this study rests in its potential to help re-entry women succeed in higher education. The increased demands women confront when they return to higher education have been well documented (Anderson, 1973; Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Bernard, 1981; Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler & Wethington, 1989; Cross, 1981; Diness, 1982; McIntosh, 1973; Schlossberg, 1984; and Smith, 1992). Several researchers agree that these increased demands are often due to a lack of family support (Dennis, 1992; Minor, 1992; and Smith, 1992). This lack of support may be due, in part, to the re-entry woman's inability to define for her family the particular type of support she needs from them (Minor, 1992).

If it is found that specific dimensions of social support are characteristic of specific marital communication styles, higher education administrators will have another tool available to them to help in retention efforts focused on re-entry women. For example, women who return to higher education can be given information about types of support that will be most helpful to them, as well as which types of support they can expect to receive from their spouses and their institutions. Institutions who assist returning women to identify the types of family and spousal support needed may succeed in retaining these students.

Method

Married re-entry women who attend a small, private, religiously-affiliated,

liberal arts college in the Midwest, and their husbands, participated in the study. Two surveys were mailed to the participants. The women and their husbands completed the Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI) which identifies marital communication style (Fitzpatrick, 1977). The women also completed the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) which ascertains specific types of social support received from one's spouse (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

Responses from the Relational Dimensions Instrument and the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale were analyzed together to determine what dimensions of social support, if any, were characteristic of the three marital communication styles. The statistical procedures performed on the data included multivariate analysis of variance, discriminant function analysis and t-tests for independent samples. Multivariate analysis of variance determines if there are differences between groups (the three styles of marital communication) on multiple variables (the six dimensions of social support). Because the multivariate test was significant, the differences between the groups needed to be probed. This was accomplished through the discriminant analysis. Discriminate function analysis generates weights for each dimension of social support which are used in a formula to assign the dimensions of social support to the style of marital communication they most closely resemble. T-tests were performed to determine if the differences between the groups (couple-types) on the variables (dimensions of social support) were significant.

Results

The sample for this study was 324 re-entry women and their husbands. Responses were received from 208 couples. This was a response rate of 64.19%. However, usable responses were obtained from 198 couples. Therefore, the usable response rate was 61.0%

One hundred and thirty-four couples who returned usable surveys were categorized as “pure” marital communication couples. A “pure” couple-type is one in which the husband and wife share the same marital communication style. These 134 couples became the primary focus of this study.

A significant relationship was found to exist between marital communication style and social support. Results of a discriminant function analysis indicated that married women do receive different dimensions of spousal support and that difference is associated with their marital communication style. Significant differences were found on all dimensions of social support with the exception of **Nurturance**.

Specifically, the dimensions of spousal support associated with **Traditional** couples were **Reliable Alliance** and **Social Integration**. **Independent** couples were characterized by the variables **Attachment** and **Guidance**. Finally, **Separate** couples were characterized by the social support dimensions of **Opportunity for Nurturance** and **Reassurance of Worth**.

Conclusions

The research objective of this study was to determine if the dimensions of social support were associated with marital communication style. This objective was achieved. Five of the six dimensions of social support were significantly associated with the three styles of marital communication.

The findings of this study thus lead to the following conclusions. First and foremost, the dimensions of social support allow for further definition of the styles of marital communication. Previously, marital communication style was determined based on a couple’s definition of marriage, the degree of autonomy in their relationship, and how they dealt with conflict. Professionals can now

sharpen the definition of marital communication style by adding the dimensions of social support, which are unique to each couple-type, to the existing definition. For example, based on the findings of this study, the characteristics of the three styles of marital communication can be expanded as follows.

Traditional couples, who share a conventional view of marriage and the family, demonstrate very little autonomy, confront conflict with some degree of social restraint, are now known to provide social support via tangible assistance, security in the relationship, and a strong sense of identity with the relationship.

Independent couples, who have nonconventional views concerning marital roles and responsibilities, value autonomy, participate in continuous conflict in their struggle to redefine the relationship, are now known to demonstrate social support through emotional closeness and by offering advice and information.

Separate couples, who hold conflicting views about marriage and family life, prefer physical and emotional distance, and avoid conflict, fill their needs for social support by acknowledging their partner's competence and by allowing their partner to nurture them.

A second major conclusion is that regardless of marital communication style, this study found that all married, re-entry women receive some level of social support from their husbands. Weiss (1974) noted that all six dimensions of social support were necessary for people to feel secure and satisfied in their relationships. Although each group clearly valued some dimensions of social support over others, all six dimensions were identified with the three styles of marital communication.

This study sought to identify the specific dimensions of social support characterized by each of three marital communication styles for married women who have returned to higher education. The results of this study indicated that

Traditional husbands provide two dimensions of social support for their wives: **Reliable Alliance** and **Social Integration**. The dimensions of social support most characteristic of **Independent** husbands are **Attachment** and **Guidance**. Women who are part of the **Separate** style of marital communication can expect to receive **Nurturance** and **Reassurance of Worth** from their husbands.

Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

This study can assist higher education in retaining married women, over the age of 25, who have returned to complete the baccalaureate degree. Twenty years ago scholars found that spousal support was critical to the success of married women who pursue professional careers (Anderson, 1973; Bernard, 1981; McIntosh, 1973). The importance of spousal support to married women who return to college is still evident today (Dennis, 1992; Dickeson, 1992; Minor, 1992, Schlossberg, 1984).

Juhasz (1989) suggested that adults are capable of accomplishing goals by prioritizing life roles involving work, family and self. Key to the success of this reprioritizing process for married women who return to higher education is a supportive husband who assumes new roles to accommodate the inevitable aspect of the wife's role expansion process.

As a result of this study colleges and universities may be able to identify the types of social support returning married women are likely to receive from their husbands and assist these women in attaining the needed remaining dimensions of support.

It is important to remember that the types of support most characteristic of one marital communication style are not the only dimensions of social support which can be provided. Aslanian (1992) reported that re-entry women want

higher education to provide family counseling to help cope with a lack of spousal support (Dickeson, 1992). There are important strategies higher education institutions can implement with the research from this study. First, institutions can assist re-entry women in becoming aware of the types of support they may be receiving currently from their spouses. A second strategy would include teaching couples the importance and characteristics of all dimensions of social support as well as how to provide these dimensions.

Duck (1992) reports that part of the feeling that a marriage is working well depends on what the partners expect from one another. Of course, expectations, in part, also come from beliefs that society has about marriages (Sabatelli & Pearce, 1986). Partners can see how their marriage matches up to their own, and society's, ideals for the union. If they feel their expectations are being met, then they are more likely to be satisfied. However, dissatisfaction occurs when expected roles are not met. Academic and personal counselors could instruct returning women and their husbands about the demands higher education will place on the family and offer them specific suggestions which will increase their satisfaction with the relationship and make the re-entry process into higher education easier.

This process of instruction involves teaching the couple how to communicate their needs, and their capacities for meeting those needs, to one another. Truly, the primary predictor of marital satisfaction is the communication that occurs between partners (Duck, 1986). Tannen (1990) would predict that re-entry women would have difficulty telling their husbands exactly what their needs are concerning their return to college. She notes that women have great difficulty explicitly saying what they want. Tannen believes women are socialized to make suggestions, which are rarely understood by their partners, and

therefore not acted upon by those partners. Based on Tannen's research, higher education institutions must assist women in learning how to be direct and specific in seeking support from their husbands. Higher education administrators then need to be ready to compensate on those dimensions of social support which husbands are unable to provide for their reentry wives.

Traditional husbands can be taught that it will take more than tangible assistance, a sense of security and identity with the marriage to assist their wives in fulfilling their educational goals. Some studies reveal that many men have a natural inclination to solve problems (Tannen, 1990); what they need is information to do so. Therefore, the **Traditional** husbands need to be taught to be nurturing, to offer information and advice without expecting it to be followed, to reassure their wives that pursuing a college degree is worthwhile, and to understand that their spouse has value in roles other than that of wife and mother. **Traditional** women may require more academic advising as this study found they are less likely to receive guidance and advice from spouses. **Traditional** women need to be reassured that they do not have to vacate the roles of wife and mother while pursuing their education and that they have the ability to perform competently in a variety of roles.

Independent couples must learn to fight less or the marriage will not survive. Every issue does not need to be renegotiated time and again. Re-entry women do not have the time or energy for this on-going battle. **Independent** husbands can be shown that if they monetarily invest in their wife's higher education they will reap financial benefits in the long run as their wife will inevitably earn more money which will either lessen the financial burden on these men or enrich their style of living. **Independent** women may need special financial packages as they are less likely to receive tangible, financial, assistance from their

spouses. These could be in the form of grants, loans, or even payment plans. **Independent** women may have a higher need for social integration with the institution as they do not get a strong sense of security or identity from their spouses. Study groups and co-curricular opportunities may need to be provided for these women.

Separate couples can be taught to display a measure of tangible assistance, to provide one another with a sense of belonging and identity, and emotional closeness. Returning women in higher education need to feel as if they are not facing this challenge alone. **Separate** women may have financial needs similar to the **Independent** women as they are also not likely to receive financial assistance from their spouses. **Separate** women also need to be integrated into the academic community. These women will probably require academic guidance and information which they are unlikely to receive from their spouses.

Recommendations for Future Research

Generalizations from the results of this study may only be made to a special population: women over the age of 25, who have been married for at least one year, who have interrupted their higher education for at least one year and have now returned to a private, liberal arts college. To test the reliability of these findings other studies should be conducted which follow the procedures utilized in this study for the same population.

This study focused on married women who attend a small, private, baccalaureate, liberal arts college. Most students do not attend this type of institution. Therefore, this study should be expanded to include public and private institutions of all levels and types. The next stage of research should be directed at married women who return to higher education through the community col-

leges. This type of study would provide information on re-entry women who are at the beginning of their college education. This research could provide useful insights concerning the early demonstrations of spousal social support. Further studies should expand the sample to include married women who return to large, state universities to determine if this type of institution impacts the dimensions of social support received by re-entry women. In addition to the previously suggested studies, it would be wise to examine the dimensions of social support received by married women who attend graduate school to determine if one's educational goal impacts spousal support.

This was a preliminary, exploratory study in which little demographic data were requested. The only demographic data collected in this study were the age of the woman, her marital status, the date of her marriage, and the number of years that her higher education had been interrupted. It would have been very interesting to know more about these women. Specifically, information could have been collected concerning their academic major, their GPA and the number of credit hours they were taking.

More importantly, women could be asked to rate the amount or quality of support provided by their husbands. This study found that the dimensions of social support were associated with marital communication style, but it did not assess the value of this support. Perhaps **Traditional** women are satisfied with receiving **Reliable Alliance** and **Social Integration** and they need nothing more, perhaps not. This information could prove to be very important to higher education.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine if the dimensions of social support were related to marital communication style. Subjects were 198 married, re-entry

women in higher education and their husbands. The couples were mailed three surveys. The men and women were asked to complete the Relational Dimensions Instrument (Fitzpatrick, 1977) which identifies marital communication style. The women were also asked to complete the marital version of the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1987) which indicates the dimensions of social support one receives. Results of this study indicate that social support is associated with marital communication style. The Traditional style of marital communication is characterized by two dimensions of social support, Reliable Alliance and Social Integration. The Independent style of marital communication is characterized by two dimensions of social support, Attachment and Guidance. The Separate style of marital communication is characterized by two dimensions of social support, Opportunity for Nurturance and Reassurance of Worth.

The development of a theory of social support for married women who return to higher education is a long and arduous process. This preliminary investigation offers a basis for understanding communication in this context. To achieve the status of scientific theory the results of this study must be empirically verified in a variety of settings. The present research is thought to be one step in that direction.

APPENDIX A

June 21, 1992

Name of Re-entry Woman
 Address
 City, State Zip

Dear Re-entry Woman:

As married women return to college to continue their formal education, they face many challenges. One of these challenges is to engage the support of their husband. Researchers know there are different styles of marital communication, but they do not know how couples define spousal support. Without this knowledge re-entry women, like yourself, cannot be assisted in eliciting the support of their husband when they return to college.

You are one of approximately 300 women attending _____ College who are being asked to give their opinions on spousal support. In order that the results will truly represent the thinking of married, re-entry women (women over 25 years of age, who have interrupted their education for at least one year), it is important that each questionnaire be completed and returned. It is also important that both you and your husband complete the questionnaire without consulting one another. You will have two surveys to complete; however, your husband will only be asked to complete the first survey.

You may be assured of complete confidentiality. The questionnaire has an identification number for follow-up purposes only. This is so that your name may be checked off of the mailing list when your questionnaire is returned. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire.

The results of this research will enable colleges to help women get the support of their husband when they return to college. You may receive a summary of the results by writing "copy of results requested" on the back of the return envelope, and printing your name and address below it. Please do not put this information on the questionnaire itself.

I would be most happy to answer any questions you might have. Please write or call. My telephone number is: (708) 617-3011. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Margo Deegan
 Faculty Advisor for Nontraditional Students

APPENDIX B

June 28, 1992

Last week a questionnaire seeking your opinions about spousal support for women returning to college was mailed to you and your husband. You are one of less than 300 women eligible to participate in this study and we need your information.

If you have already completed and returned it to us please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. Because it has been sent to a small, but representative, sample of women returning to college it is extremely important that yours also be included in this study if the results are to accurately represent the opinions of re-entry women.

If by some chance you did not receive the questionnaire, or it got misplaced, please call me right now (708) 617-3011, and I will get another one in the mail to you today.

Sincerely,

Margo Deegan
Faculty Advisor for Nontraditional Students

APPENDIX C

July 13, 1992

Name
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Returning Woman:

About three weeks ago I wrote to you seeking your opinion on spousal support. As of today we have not received your completed questionnaire.

I have undertaken this study because I believe that the more we know about the problems women face when they return to college the better able we are to help them.

I am writing to you again because of the significance each questionnaire has to the usefulness of this study. Your name was selected because you are a member of this special group of women who have decided to return to college. In order for the results of this study to be truly representative of the opinions of all re-entry women it is essential that each person in the study return their questionnaire. As I mentioned in the last letter you are being asked to fill out both the Relational Dimensions Instrument and the Social Provisions Scale while your husband only needs to complete the Relational Dimensions Instrument.

In the event that your questionnaire has been misplaced, a replacement is enclosed.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Cordially,

Margo Deegan
Faculty Advisor for Nontraditional Students

P.S. A number of people have written to ask when results will be available. We hope to have them out sometime this Fall.

APPENDIX D

August 9, 1992

Name
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Re-entry Woman:

I am writing to you about our study of marital communication and spousal support. We have not yet received your completed questionnaire.

The large number of questionnaires returned is very encouraging. But, whether we will be able to describe accurately how returning women feel on these important issues depends upon you and others who have not yet responded. This is because our past experiences suggest that those of you who have not yet sent in your questionnaire may hold quite different perceptions of spousal support than those who have.

This is the first study of this type that has ever been done. Therefore, the results are of particular importance to the many women returning to college today. The usefulness of our results depends on how accurately we are able to describe how returning women feel about spousal support.

It is for these reasons that I am sending this by certified mail to insure delivery. In case our other correspondence did not reach the person in your household whose response is needed (you have two questionnaires to complete, your husband has only one), a replacement questionnaire is enclosed. May I urge you to complete and return it as quickly as possible.

I'll be happy to send you a copy of the results. Simply put your name, address, and "copy of results requested" on the back of the return envelope. We expect to have them ready sometime this Fall.

Your contribution to the success of this study will be appreciated greatly.

Most Sincerely,

Margo Deegan
Faculty Advisor for Nontraditional Students

APPENDIX F**RELATIONAL DIMENSIONS INSTRUMENT**

This survey is concerned with how husbands and wives communicate with one another and how they organize their family life. Your responses will provide information about couples in ongoing relationships and will have direct practical application in counseling and marital enrichment programs. Your responses will be used for the purposes of research only. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Use the following scale to respond to the next forty-six (46) items.

**(1)Always (2)Usually (3)Often (4)Occasionally
(5)Not Often (6)Not Usually (7)Never**

1. We try to make our guests feel free to enter any room of our house. _____
2. We talk about the future of our relationship. _____
3. We share responsibility for deciding when, for how long, and at what speed chores around the house should be completed. _____
4. We go out together to public places in the community such as zoos, sporting events, public parks, amusement parks, museums, libraries, etc. _____
5. We visit with our friends in their houses or apartments. _____
6. My spouse has taken two vacations without me (even if only for a day or two). _____
7. We try to resolve our disagreements immediately. _____
8. We embrace in public places. _____
9. We tell each other how much we love or care about each other. _____
10. my spouse tells me (i.e. tries to influence) what magazines or books to read and/or what television shows to watch. _____
11. We decide together how to arrange the furniture and set up various rooms in our home. _____
12. We go to bed at different times. _____
13. My spouse encourages me to use my talents, even if it means some inconvenience to him/her. _____

14. Most of our friends know each other. _____
15. We talk more about tasks and accomplishments than about feelings and affection. _____
16. We feel a need to resolve the disagreements or oppositions that arise between us. _____
17. I open my spouse's personal mail without asking permission. _____
18. I feel free to interrupt my spouse when he/she is concentrating on something if he/she is in my presence. _____
19. I tell (i.e. try to influence) my spouse which magazines or books to read and/or what television shows to watch. _____
20. My spouse reassures and comforts me when I am feeling low. _____
21. My spouse forces me to do things that I do not want to do. _____
22. My spouse expresses his/her feelings and reactions to me. _____
23. I get the feeling that my spouse can read my mind. _____
24. We eat our meals (i.e. the ones at home) at the same time every day. _____
25. We seek new friends and outside experiences. _____
26. We are likely to argue in front of friends or in public places. _____
27. I have my own private workspace (study, workshop, utility room, etc.). _____
28. We cook and eat our meals separately, even when we are both at home. _____
29. I feel free to invite guests home without informing my spouse. _____
30. I have taken separate vacations from my spouse even if only for a day or two. _____
31. We express anger with each other. _____
32. I feel free to ask my spouse to communicate his/her true feelings to me. _____
33. In our house, we keep a fairly regular time schedule. _____
34. We share many of our personal belongings with each other. _____
35. If I can avoid arguing about some problems, they will disappear. _____

36. My spouse has his/her own private workspace (workshop, study, utility room, and so on). _____
37. My spouse tries to persuade me to do something that I do not want to do. _____
38. We talk about the present. _____
39. We serve the main meal at the same time every day. _____
40. My spouse complains if I open his/her personal mail without permission. _____
41. It bothers me if a guest goes into our refrigerator or fixes himself/herself some coffee in our home. _____
42. If I am working or concentrating on something, I ignore the presence of my spouse. _____
43. When I am angry with my spouse, I'll say nothing rather than something that I will be sorry for later. _____
44. We openly express our disagreements with each other. _____
45. Events in our house/apartment occur without any regularity. _____
46. Our time schedule varies quite a bit from day to day. _____

Please use the following scale to respond to the remaining items.

**(1)Strongly Agree (2)Agree (3)Moderately Agree (4)Undecided
(5)Moderately Disagree (6)Disagree (7)Strongly Disagree**

47. Life is filled with so many contradictions that I am not certain how to interpret what it all means. _____
48. Our life together seems more exciting than that of most couples I know. _____
49. We cooperate well in resolving our conflicts. _____
50. It is more important to share good feelings with each other than it is to share bad feelings. _____
51. I think that we joke around and have more fun than most couples. _____
52. Infidelity (unfaithfulness) in marriage is inexcusable. _____
53. Relationships should not interfere with each person's pursuit to discover his/her own potential. _____
54. Often the only way to gain perspective on a situation is to see its absurdity. _____
55. Our wedding ceremony was very important to us. _____
56. Pictures, mementos, and other objects that have a special meaning for a couple should be displayed in their home so that others can see them. _____
57. A good motto for our relationship is "Care deeply, but remain composed". _____
58. It is important for a couple (or a family) to attend church (synagogue) and, when possible, to attend together. _____
59. Sex is very important in our relationship. _____
60. I think it is important for one to have some private space which is all his/her own and separate from one's spouse. _____
61. Children should be taught the traditions and customs which are their heritage. _____

62. Once family plans are made, they should not be changed without a very good reason. _____
63. Family secrets should not be shared with friends, no matter how close they are. _____
64. Our society, as we see it, needs to regain faith in the law and in our institutions. _____
65. The meaning of life and our purpose in it is very clear to me. _____
66. The ideal relationship is one which is marked by novelty, humor, and spontaneity. _____
67. In marriage/close relationships there should be no constraints or restrictions on individual freedom. _____
68. There seem to be many minor crises in our lives. _____
69. A woman should take her husband's last name when she marries. _____
70. We can go for long periods of time without spending much time together as a couple. _____
71. We communicate to one another with a greater range and intensity of feelings than most couples I know. _____
72. It is better to hide one's true feelings in order to avoid hurting your spouse. _____
73. With my spouse, I tell it like it is, no matter what the consequences. _____
74. Partners should be frank and spontaneous in conversations with one another even if it leads to disagreements. _____
75. In a marriage, privacy is more important than togetherness. _____
76. In a relationship, each individual should be permitted to establish the daily rhythm and time schedule that suits him/her best. _____
77. In our relationship, we feel that it is better to engage in conflicts than to avoid them. _____

APPENDIX G**The Social Provisions Scale - Marital Version****Instructions:**

In responding to the following set of twenty-four statements, think about your current relationship with your husband or wife. Please indicate to what extent you agree that each statement describes your current relationship with your spouse. Use the following scale to give your opinion. So, for example, if you feel a statement is very true of your current relationship, you would indicate “**strongly agree**”. If you feel a statement clearly does not describe your relationship, you would respond “**strongly disagree**”. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

| | STRONGLY DISAGREE | DISAGREE | AGREE | STRONGLY AGREE | |
|-----|--|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 1. | I can depend on my spouse to help me if I really need it. | | | | ___ |
| 2. | I feel that I do not have a close relationship with my spouse. | | | | ___ |
| 3. | I can not turn to my spouse for guidance in times of stress. | | | | ___ |
| 4. | My spouse depends on me for help. | | | | ___ |
| 5. | My spouse enjoys the same social activities I do. | | | | ___ |
| 6. | My spouse does not view me as competent. | | | | ___ |
| 7. | I feel personally responsible for the well-being of my spouse. | | | | ___ |
| 8. | I feel that my spouse shares my attitudes and beliefs. | | | | ___ |
| 9. | I do not think my spouse respects my skills and abilities. | | | | ___ |
| 10. | If something went wrong, my spouse would not come to my assistance. | | | | ___ |
| 11. | I have a close relationship with my spouse that provides me with a sense of emotional security and well-being. | | | | ___ |
| 12. | I can talk to my spouse about important decisions in my life. | | | | ___ |

STRONGLY DISAGREE
1

DISAGREE
2

AGREE
3

STRONGLY AGREE
4

13. My spouse recognizes my competence and skill. _____
14. My spouse does not share my interests and concerns. _____
15. My spouse does not really rely on me for his/her well being. _____
16. My spouse is a trustworthy person I could turn to for advice if I were having problems. _____
17. I feel a strong emotional bond with my spouse _____
18. I can not depend on my spouse for aid when I really need it. _____
19. I feel comfortable talking about problems with my spouse. _____
20. My spouse admires my talents and abilities _____
21. I lack a feeling of intimacy with my spouse. _____
22. My spouse does not like to do the things I do. _____
23. I can count on my spouse in an emergency. _____
24. My spouse does not need me to care for him/her. _____

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