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Women over thirty involved in life planning: Society's cultured pearl

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WOMEN OVER THIRTY INVOLVED IN LIFE PLANNING:
SOCIETY'S CULTURED PEARL

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Counseling and Guidance

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Sue Akers Cameron

May, 1977

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of
Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Thesis Committee	Name	Department
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Robert Butler
Chairman

June 8th 1977
Date

Acknowledgement

Five women joined hands to help dispel this quote.

"It is shocking what happens to American women. They die at 40, and they're not buried until 80."

Ruth H. Osborn

We spent many hours together as equals all learning from our joint experience. We read, talked, laughed, cried and shared ourselves. Thank you Louise T., Ann W., Evelyn N., Ramona K. Together we pursued a course in life planning and surfaced refreshed; each able to embark on a separate path with renewed confidence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables.	v
Course Outline.	vi
Introduction.	1
Purpose of Course and Counseling.	4
Implementation.	4
Personal Exploration	4
The Self-Assessment.	4
Identify Abilities	8
Career/Educational Exploration	8
Organizing a Job Campaign.	8
Interviewing Strategy.	13
The Self-Assessment.	13
Discussion of Findings	13
Results	13
Discussion and Summary.	18
Bibliography.	21

List of Tables

	Page
I. Self-Assessment Question Exercise.	5
II. A Look at the Life Span.	6
III. Terms to Understand.	7
IV. Ability Identification	9
V. Occupational Table	10
VI. Sample Resume.	11
VII. Key Words for Resume Writing	12
VIII. Frequently Asked Interview Questions	14

Course Outline

- I. Personal Exploration
- II. The Self-Assessment
- III. Identify Abilities
- IV. Career/Educational Exploration
- V. Organizing a Job Campaign
- VI. Interviewing Strategy
- VII. The Self-Assessment
- VIII. Discussion of Findings

Introduction

More and more American women have been expressing the need to gain a greater fulfillment from life other than the single role of housewife, regardless of how devoted she is to her family. She increasingly realizes that the sense of self is greater if one wants to do something than if one wants to have something (Millet, 1971).

Today's laws aren't stopping women from having a full-time career outside the home. Almost all occupations and learning institutions have been made open to women. For the first time there are laws and national policy to end discrimination on the basis of sex, both on the campus and on the job.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which covers employment, was amended in March, 1972, to cover all educational institutions, public or private, regardless of whether or not they receive Federal monies. The June 1972 passage of the Educational Amendment Act, Title IX, now prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in all federally assisted educational programs.

These laws are helpful, but they are not enough. Changing attitudes and plowing under myths, such as all 'women belong at home', is where the greatest bulk of work is yet to be done (Harris, 1970). Anna Garland Spencer's excerpt, "Why Are There No Women Geniuses", expresses not only a question but a response. "Can a woman become a genius of first class? Nobody can know unless women in general shall have an equal opportunity with men in education, in vocational choice, and in social welcome of their best intellectual work for a number of generations" (Spencer 1925, taken from Stacy 1974).

Programs, concerning the continuing education for women, are one way in which to erradicate these long lived attitudes and myths. New lifestyles and life options for women and men need to be explored (Jencks, 1973). Analysis of the shifting responsibilities and changing roles of both women and men should be stressed, for the implications are great, not only on marriage and family, but on health, career and economy (Sheehy, 1976).

The price of a full time job outside the home is often feelings of guilt and worry about the neglecting of children, husband, home, and can lead to physical and mental exhaustion. Marya Mannes went straight to the center of the problem: "How marvelous it would be to have someone always standing between you and family needs and interruptions--like a wife. But there it is. A wife can't have a wife." (Mannes, 1960). Therefore; the majority of women have settled for the life of total domesticity, demanding fulfillment as humans from husbands, endless streams of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and car pools. Others are standing and asking for recognition as individuals in a supplicant manner; however, a minority are flying in the face of rejection and demanding their own choice of place in this "man's world". The later group of women's voices are being heard more frequently despite the prevailing attitude that men and women are trained identically for careers, yet, after the system has finished its training period, the outer world space belongs only to men. Thus our attitudes have not developed much past Aristotle's notion that women that develop and use their minds have "masculine minds" (Howe excerpted from Stacy, 1974). This attitude supports a quote from Marya Mannes: "Nobody objects to a woman's being a good writer sculptor, or geneticist, if at the same time

she manages to be a good wife, a good mother, good looking, good tempered, well-dressed, well-groomed, and unaggressive" (Horner, 1970). This dichotomy of expectations has brought many counselors and women together to face the reality of the now. Women are wanting to know, "Who am I now? Where do I want to go from here? and How do I get there."

Purpose

The pressing expectations of society and self brought five women (all educated--some formally, some informally), 30 years of age and over, together, to explore and journey through the literature; look at career development; probe into the feelings and attitudes about themselves; determine who they were at the moment and where they chose to take their futures. Renewal was the key.

Implementation

I. Personal exploration

The women met two sessions a week (1½ hour each session) for a period of ten weeks. During this time a minimum of 45 minutes each session was spent with open discussion about the self. A wide range of feelings were openly explored, ranging from feelings of sexual inadequacy to the fear of success. Each individual wrote a paper at the beginning of the course on "How I See Me" and finished the course with another personal evaluation. Books and readings were assigned at the course's beginning and were discussed as the course proceeded. The books read were: Passages by Gail Sheehy; Your Erroneous Zones by Dr. Wayne Dyer; and readings from Born to Win by James and Jongeward.

II. The Self-Assessment

Each participant was given a self-assessment question exercise coupled with discussion upon finishing (Table 1). This exercise was followed by A look at your Life Span exercise. During this time words were given to each member to define so when the terms surfaced during the discussions there would be a unity of understanding (Tables 2 & 3).

Table I

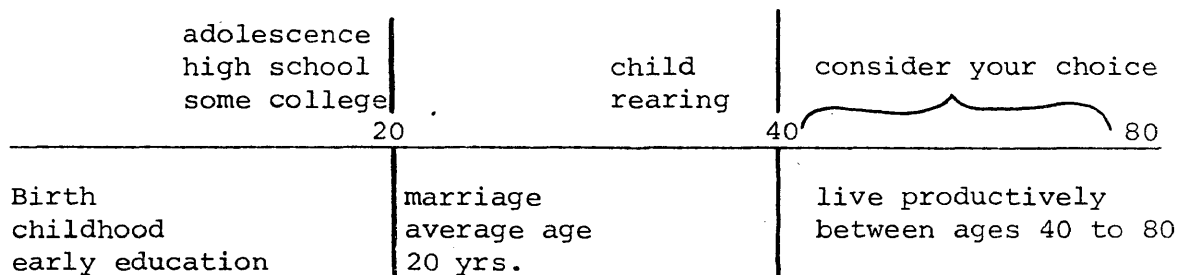
Self-Assessment Question Exercise

adapted from C. Randell Powell
Career Planning & Placement

What in my background shows my persistence?
Why did I choose my major subject (if attended college)?
Why did I or didn't I attend college?
Where have I shown leadership potential?
What are the characteristics in a friend that I admire?
Do I possess a strong, mild, gruff, loud or wavering voice?
What events in my background suggest that I am an extrovert?
What type of temperament do I possess?
Am I an emotional or a very private person?
What social activities appeal to me? Why?
What activities excite me? School, sports, politics, work, etc.
Is my conversation usually organized or often disjointed?
Do I prefer team or individual projects?
Is my speech clear?
What importance do I place on my appearance?
Why do I think I am ambitious? What evidence can I show?
What degree of confidence do I show in my abilities?
Do I attend to or overlook detail?
Which past accomplishments have I taken pride in?
Are prestige and status important to me?
Does money, fear, or praise motivate me?
Do I crave independence or association?
What do you do with your leisure time?
Are your abilities more mechanical than creative?
Do you enjoy making decisions?
Show examples of how you motivate others?

Table II

adapted from Osborn:
New Horizons for Women



Indicate milestones in your life by plotting your age at each happening.

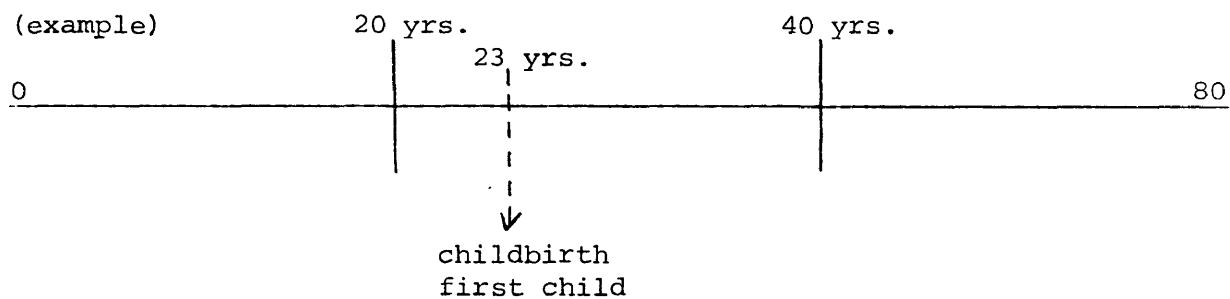


Table III

autonomous	non-degree
potential	non-credit
motivation	continuing education
cultural block	certification
climate	aptitude tests
accreditation	interest tests
resume	entry-level
cover letter	GPA
admission standards	MBA
LSAT	GRE
GMAT	PHD
JD	management

III. Identify Abilities

Each woman was asked to assess their own abilities based on work experience, volunteer experience, prior scholastic achievement and rate themselves (Table 4). Discussion followed self rating.

IV. Career/Educational Exploration

The women each wrote to the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C. 20210 and requested the following publications:

- A. (1) Job Horizons for College Women-Bulletin No. 288
- (2) Job Finding Techniques for Mature Women, Pamphlet No. 11
- (3) Continuing Education Programs and Services for Women, Pamphlet No. 10
- B. Group Hospitalization, Inc.
550 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C.

requested a copy of Generation in the Middle from the above

Each participant also reviewed the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and learned how to use it as an information source. A list of occupations was distributed and each woman chose five areas of interest and put them in rank order (Table 5). Then each woman researched each area in college catalogues and wrote down academic commitment time and occupational outlook.

V. Organizing a Job Campaign

Entry levels for the college graduate and the high school graduate were discussed and established. The group then took a step-by-step preparation for the job hunt: Communication; Resumes were written, letters practiced and oral presentations were made both in person and by phone (Table 6). Key words for Resume preparation were reviewed and used (Table 7).

Table IV--adapted from Osborn: New Horizons
for Women

	Above Aver.	Aver.	Below Aver.	No Opportunity to Determine
1) scholastic				
2) (ability to learn) mathematical ability				
3) clerical ability				
4) artistic ability				
5) supervisory ability				
6) ability to teach				
7) ability to organize other people				
8) ability to organize facts, figures and draw conclusions				
9) creative ability				
10) speaking ability				
11) writing ability				
12) other abilities (specify)				

Table V

___ Accountant	___ Medical Records Librarian
___ Advertising Work	___ Medical Technologist
___ Anthropologist & Sociologist	___ Medical Technician
___ Architect	___ Mental Health
___ Artist	___ Merchandising
___ Astronomer	___ Museum Worker
___ Banking Occupations	___ Musician (see Performing Arts)
___ Biological Scientist	___ Newspaper Worker (see Writer)
___ Business Administrator	___ Nurse
___ Business for Yourself	___ Oceanographer
___ Careers in Foreign Language	___ Occupational Therapist
___ Cartographer	(see Therapist)
___ Chemist	___ Opportunities for High School Grads.
___ Church Careers	___ Performing Arts & Entertainment
___ Clerical Worker	___ Personnel Work
___ Correctional Worker	___ Pharmacist
___ Counselor (see Guidance)	___ Physical Therapist (see Therapist)
___ Crafts and Trades	___ Physician
___ Data Processing & Computers	___ Physicist (see Earth Scientist)
___ Dental Hygienist	___ Photographer
___ Dental Technician	___ Political Scientist
___ Dentist	___ Programmer (see Data Processing)
___ Dietician	___ Psychologist
___ Draftsman	___ Public Relations Work
___ Earth & Physical Scientist	___ Radio & TV Work
___ Economist	___ Real Estate
___ Educational Administrator	___ Recreation Worker
___ Educational Research Worker	___ Rehabilitation Counselor
___ Engineer	___ Retailing (see Merchandising)
___ Fashion & Design	___ Secretarial Worker
___ Food Services	___ Social Worker
___ Geographer	___ Sociologist (see Anthropologist)
___ Geologist (see Earth Scientist)	___ Speech & Hearing Clinician
___ Government Careers	___ Statistician
___ Guidance Counselor	___ Teacher, Pre-school & Elementary
___ Historian	___ Teacher, Jr. & Sr. High School
___ Home Economist	___ Teacher, College
___ Hospital Administrator	___ Teacher, Adult Education
___ Hotel Work	___ Teacher, Culturally Disadvantaged
___ Insurance Work	___ Teacher, Exceptional Children
___ Interior Decorator	___ Technical Writer
___ International Opportunities	___ Technician (X-ray, Chemical, Medical)
___ Investment & Finance	___ Therapist, Occupational
___ Journalism (see Writer)	___ Therapist, Physical
___ Landscape Architect	___ Travel Agent
___ Lawyer	___ Urban Planner
___ Librarian	___ Veterinarian
___ Market Research Analyst	___ Writer
(see Advertising & Merchandising)	___ Youth Services
___ Mathematician	___ Other areas of interest to you:

Table VI

RESUME

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Mary Smith Jones 2930 Main Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20029	Social Security No. 269-58-3811 Date of Birth: March 26, 1921 Birthplace: Jamestown, Mass. (Cit. USA)
Home Phone: 529-3640	Marital Status: Married, 1942 (3 children--22, 17, and 15) (optional)

EDUCATION

	<u>Dates Attended</u>	<u>Degree</u>
Univ. of Massachusetts, Boston Mass. Major: Speech - Minor: English Lit. Elected to Phi Beta Kappa	1938-1942	B.A.
Jamestown High School, Jamestown, Mass. Valedictorian for a class of 216 students		
The George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Completed one graudate course in education		

EXPERIENCE

Paid Employment

1960-1966	<u>Substitute Teacher</u> , D.C. Public Schools, Washington, D.C. Have taught in junior and senior high schools on a substitute basis approximately 35 days per year for six years.
1943-1944	<u>Personnel Clerk</u> , U.S. Dept. of Navy, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Washington, D.C. Assisted with job analyses and interviewing for a classifi- cation system.
1942-1943	<u>Secondary School Teacher</u> , Smithville, Rhode Island. Taught three classes in English and one class in drama to 10th grade students.

Volunteer Experience

1949-1960	<u>League of Women Voters</u> - active participant in this organization, serving as secretary one year and vice president another year.
1950-1952	<u>Children's Theater</u> - organized a drama group and produced two plays in which neighborhood children ranging in age from 7 to 16 participated.

Table VII

Key Words for Resume Preparation

Action Words

actively	eliminated	motivated	responsible
accelerated	established	organize	responsibilities
adapted	evaluate	originate	revise
administer	expanded	participated	review
analyze	expedite	perform	schedule
approve	founded	plan	significantly
coordinate	generate	pinpointed	simplicity
conceived	increased	program	set up
conduct	influence	proposed	solve
completed	implemented	proved	strategy
control	interpret	provide	structure
created	improve	proficient	streamline
delegate	launched	recommend	successfully
develop	lead	reduced	supervise
demonstrate	lecture	reinforced	support
direct	maintain	reorganized	teach
effect	manage	revamped	

Self-Descriptive Words

active	determined	independent	realistic
adaptable	diplomatic	logical	reliable
aggressive	disciplined	loyal	resourceful
alert	discrete	mature	respective
ambitious	economical	methodical	self-reliant
analytical	efficient	objective	sense-of-humor
attentive	energetic	optimistic	sincere
broad-minded	enterprising	perceptive	sophisticated
conscientious	enthusiastic	personable	systematic
consistent	extroverted	pleasant	tactful
constructive	fair	positive	talented
creative	forceful	practical	will travel
dependable	imaginative	productive	will relocate

VI. Interviewing Strategy

Discussion was held on arrival time before interview, personal appearance, getting psychologically prepared, how to accentuate the positive, question answering, question asking, how to talk about salary, how to close the interview. Practice interviews were held and some questions frequently asked by employers were given and discussed (Table 8):

VII. The Self-Assessment

Each participant was invited to write a paper on "The Emerging Self". Each participated and included goals (academic, career); feelings about self and expressed feelings of change or lack of change.

VIII. Discussion of Findings

A three hour, two session discussion period followed the completion of "The Emerging Self" papers. Each individual discussed how she saw herself in her existing world and talked about feelings of control over self vs. external control of self.

Results

The purpose of this combined group discussion and course was to provide five mature women with an opportunity to gain self-insight, academic information, career guidance information and life direction. This 10-week course provided much of the proposed information.

Their Personal Data Characteristics

1. The age range of the five women was 38 to 44 years.
2. Four of the women were born in the U.S.; one in Canada.
3. All five women had been married 20 or more years.

Table VIII

Twenty Frequently Asked Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. Expand on your resume.
2. For what position are you applying?
3. What are your long-term career goals? Where in ten years?
4. Why do you feel that you will be successful in. . .?
5. What supervisory or leadership roles have you held?
6. How do you spend your spare time?
7. What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing school or work experiences?.
8. What are your strongest (weakest) personal qualities?
9. Give me some examples that support your stated interest in. . . (field, industry, position, or firm).
10. Why did you select us to interview with?
11. What courses did you like best? Why?
12. What did you learn or gain from your part-time and summer job experiences? Relate to your goals?
13. Which geographic location you prefer? Why?
14. Would you prefer on-the-job training or a formal program?
15. What can you do for us now? What can I do for you?
16. What are your plans for graduate study?
17. Why did you choose your major?
18. Why are your grades low?
19. Tell me about your extracurricular activities and interests.
20. Why did you quit your various jobs?

4. Each woman had at least two children, one woman had six children.
5. None of the women were more formally educated than their husbands. One woman had the equivalent education of her husband.
6. Two women have one college degree or more; one is a full-time student; one has completed three years of college; one is a high school graduate.
7. All expressed at least minor discontent with their current life styles.
8. All the husbands were executives and current incomes over \$20,000 annually.
9. Family backgrounds ranged socio-economically from poor to upper class.
10. The mothers of the women were primarily homemakers and the fathers occupations were three farmers, two professionals.
11. The women that were formally educated (college) tended to be high achievers. The striving for achievement increased with age; four women expressed discomfort over their need for achievement.

Multiple Roles

The women in this study were all homemakers, active in organized social groups, advisors for large groups, none are employed outside the home and two are non-working professionals. Four of the women chose to seek gainful employment in the near future and one chooses to pursue a college degree. One member has a graduate degree and chooses to go further in her academic career and attain a terminal degree. None choose to maintain the status quo. All the women are active in what are considered leisure time activities, e.g., teas, coffees--these are related to husbands jobs, and all pursue at least one hobby. Interests and hobbies range from reading, sewing, tennis to archeological digs. The group was multifaceted in interests.

Motivation for Change

A All expressed the need for more personal growth, self-fulfillment, desire to learn, self-improvement and more personal financial security. Each member expressed the desire to be more autonomous and assume the responsibility to be in charge of self. All the group members were self-starters and willing to work and finish started projects.

Problems Surfaced

B The women found their initial difficulties arose from feelings of personal inadequacies ranging from lack of self-confidence to educational deficiencies. However, most problems initially encountered failed to persist. Lack of self-allowed personal free time was a recurrent problem. After much discussion and reading each member chose to take control of self and time. Each member practiced saying no and this assumption of control proved to be less and less difficult.

Goals established for academic/career development

1. Louise T. is a full time student and will continue to pursue an accounting career and eventually wants to be a CPA.
2. Ramona K. lacks one year of college before receiving an undergraduate degree. She has decided to finish school after her husband's retirement, but will change fields from teaching to interior design plus opening a small design related shop.
3. Ann W. has one degree and desires now to open an import shop of her own and gain more financial independence.
4. Evelyn N. has a high school education. Evelyn worked in an office prior to marriage and enjoyed the position. Through volunteer work and actively seeking information she has decided to return to work in a secretarial capacity preferably in an oil company.

5. Sue A. has an undergraduate and graduate degree. She chooses to pursue a terminal degree in the counseling field and intends to become more involved in the political community.

The Self-Assessment

All five concluded that life was to be lived with vigor rather than with apathy. Each group member realistically assessed positive and negative attributes, cultural barriers, limitations and family responsibilities.

1. Louise T. concluded that family was paramount and her interest in accounting stemmed from the knowledge of financial gain for her family through the accounting field. She has arithmetic ability and likes working with numbers. She is outgoing, loves to be with people and will pursue her career as a free agent rather than work for a company. Her family is supportive and she is not plagued with feelings of personal inadequacy.
2. Ramona K. feels that she portrays the picture of the typical Southern lady and that the picture is deceiving. She is quick witted and intelligent yet allows others to see her as "a lady" because it creates less waves. Her family is important yet she feels a growing sense of self and the ripples are beginning on the pond. Her abilities are multileveled and she can do whatever she chooses to pursue.
3. Ann W. sees herself as intelligent, logical and typically dissatisfied with something. The social structure and social attainment is important and she strives to gain more social position and finances for herself and family. She recognizes being selfish but also recognized the need for reciprocal personal warmth with others.

She's ready to work on self as well as striving for a more elevated family position. Ann likes to be number one and makes no apologies for her attitude.

4. Evelyn N. sees herself as being of average intelligence but with the readiness to tackle new endeavors. Her family is closely knit but she feels the need to be more independent especially where her husband is concerned. She is slowly taking more responsibility for her actions. She is practicing making more statements of personal need. She feels she is a warm, caring person; a follower, not a leader and is comfortable with this knowledge. Evelyn's manual dexterity is great and she enjoys working with her hands.
5. Sue A. views herself as having a growing sense of liking herself. This feeling spills over into her relationship with others. She enjoys spending time on cultivating in-depth relationships. She sees herself as a leader, persuasive and with a sense of direction. Her family is important to her but being a model for her children is more important to her than being a molder. She has good verbal aptitude and likes the aesthetic. Being creative is also important; she likes being an idea person.

Discussion and Summary

Much has been written about women but little has been said. Most of the literature supports the sociology theory of Cooley called the looking-glass self (Cooley, 1975). Cooley believes the social-self determines who we are in everyday life. The myth that women have only a few roles in society is at the very heart of the social-self illusion. Many women have been convinced that the one role, that of family

nurturer is the only meaningful role; therefore the woman is a willing participant in her own psychic downfall. The circle becomes a vicious one and the looking-glass self becomes a mirror filled with distortions--for when one's self-importance is placed only on the ability to nurture and procreate, then the sense of self withers for it is based on what is externally rewarded.

The external vs. internal sense of self is where the group placed the bulk of their intent. I am who and what I choose to be rather than what others assign for me. The conscious choice may be that of wife and mother--this study in no way wishes to degrade or undermine the importance of the family and woman's place in that constellation. Choice is where the concern of this study focuses. The choice to be what one chooses: Wife, mother, lawyer; wife, mother, accountant; wife mother shop owner. These combinations sound no more incompatible than husband, father, lawyer, or husband, father, accountant. This position seems not an easy one for women in this society to assume. Martina Horner approaches society's prevalent attitudes on today's women, academic success and the female traditional roles in her article, "Toward Understanding of Achievement-Related Conflicts in Women" (Horner, 1970). She sees not only throughout history but in today's popular circles as well that femininity and individual competitive achievement are two desirable but mutually exclusive goals. Through research Horner has substantiated that women as individuals and society in general see achievement and aggressive behavior as being incompatible with femininity. Women in essence avoid success, not necessarily out of fear of success but from the fear of social rejection and/or the negative feelings of being unfeminine as a result of their success.

The women participating in this course were not different than the ones Horner researched. The conclusions that have been reached after ten weeks of interaction, support the need for more comparative studies concerning married women, 30 years and older.

These five women desire personal growth and self-improvement which reinforces the growing reality that the need for intellectual development does not terminate after marriage and age 21. After searching and seeking information about self, people, places, things and society these mature women also accepted the fact that there would be problems involved with undertaking life style changes, be it school or work. Sacrifices would have to be made in leisure time, time spent with husband and children, physical exhaustion, mental strain, and the conflict over sense of society's values such as 'woman's place is in the home'. There may be increased tensions at home because the equilibrium of the family unit may be temporarily tilted. However, the conclusion reached by all was, "I take charge of my self."

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