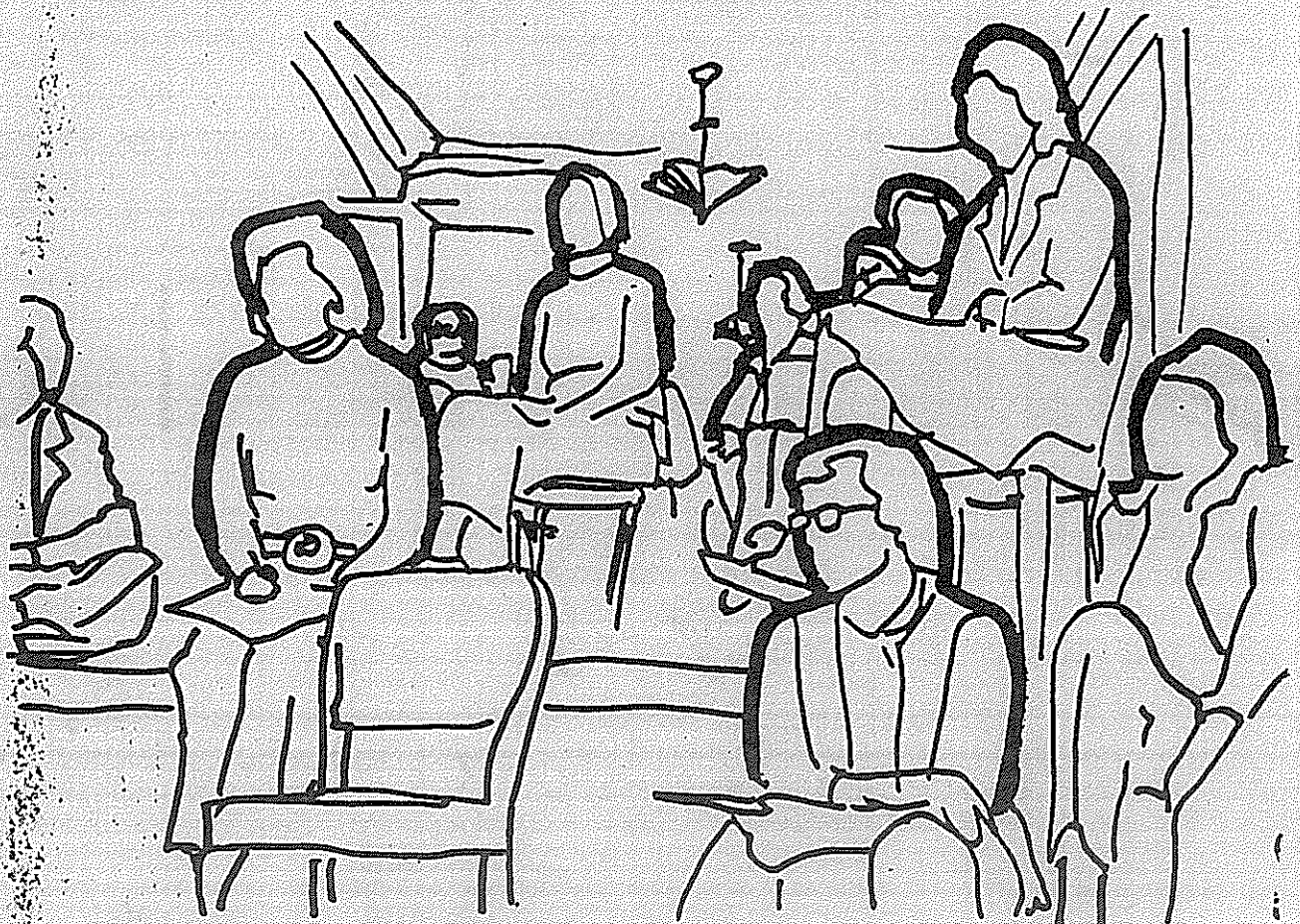


A PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE
WOMEN'S INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
RESEARCH PROJECT

February 11, 1989



Graphic from the Women's Institute for Social Change Annual Report, 1972-1973

CURA RESOURCE COLLECTION

Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
University of Minnesota
330 Humphrey Center

*Liz Hefner
and
Paul Hefner - fashion*

*Carol Houghton
fundraising for
Macalester*

** Donna Barry
social work*

*James White
(Mans)*

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School of Social Work
at my house w.
Jean*

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- Susan McGrath Flagler
- Margaret Forney
- Ann Lewis
- Mary Martin
- Mary Murphy
- Elizabeth Shippee
- Patty Streitz
- Mary Lou Thorpe
- Mary White

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SOME HISTORY

The following replica of a WISC brochure from 1972 captures the spirit of the organization.



WHAT IS IT?

It's an effort to train women to effect change in the community.

It's a center for women and their friends who are committed to social change.

The changing role of women in society, coupled with the spread of public concern regarding a host of social problems, only increases the importance of a major educational resource for women which can propel them into the mainstream of public decision-making on crucial public questions.

WHY IS IT?

Purpose of the Institute is to train women as social change agents in the furtherance of public interest programs covering such areas as welfare, corrections, housing, women's movement, ecology, child care, education, family life and human rights.

The Institute program is designed to enhance the knowledge, skill and attitudes of women in their function as leaders. It consists of both formal seminar sessions and supervised field work.

The basic course is of eight weeks' duration, two days per week. Additional time for field work experiences is necessary; these will be related to needs and background.

The course is demanding. Everyone who applies should be prepared for a sizeable commitment of time and energy.

Begun in 1970, WISC was established as a demonstration project of the Junior League of Minneapolis. Sponsorship was enlarged to include CURA of the University of Minnesota, the National Organization of Women and the Minneapolis YWCA, WISC was staffed by paid and volunteer staff throughout its history. Mary Martin (Director) and Elizabeth Shippee (Assistant Director) moved WISC into the YWCA building where a children's center, counseling services and the graduate program were established. Charlene Smith was the second director. Susan Dean was assistant director to Smith and to third director Mary Williams. The Board of Directors was made up of graduates, resource faculty, members of the sponsoring organizations and the community. The Women's Institute for Social Change trained over 400 women before its closing in 1976.

THE STUDY

The women who participated in WISC in the seventies are representative of a generation whose lives have dramatically altered the work, family and volunteer patterns of American society. A Workgroup made up of former graduates and paid and un-paid staff members of WISC considered the experiences of this group sufficiently important to warrant a serious research effort. The project was not designed as an evaluation of the WISC course, but rather as an effort to answer the question:

How have WISC graduates evolved since their involvement in WISC in the following areas: (1) personal growth, (2) family and relationships, (3) work in the home, as volunteers and for pay, and (4) social change?

This preliminary report presents the results of the first parts of the project -- a mailed questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. This meeting of WISC graduates is expected to yield responses to the findings that will enable the Workgroup to produce a final report that has been validated and expanded upon by WISC graduates.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Of the 401 known graduates of the WISC course, 312 (78%) were identified as accessible by mail. Of these 312, one hundred and sixty-nine (56%) responded to a questionnaire about their current life and their experiences when they took the WISC course between 1970 and 1976. Fifty-three names (31% of 169 who returned the questionnaire) were randomly selected to be invited to be interviewed. (Tests comparing this group to the 169 respondents demonstrated that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. That is, we could be confident that the women interviewed were not different from the larger group in terms of basic characteristics such as marital status, volunteer involvement and work outside the home). Of the 53 women selected to be interviewed, 44 (83%) completed a structured, hour long interview with a Workgroup member.

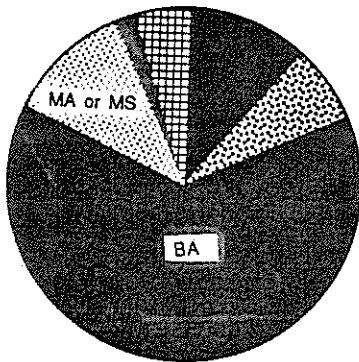
Forty-four interviews produce a lot of words. There are more than 40 single spaced pages summarizing the interviews, in addition to the results from the 169 returned questionnaires. Because no two women responded identically to all the questions, any summary approach sacrifices individual differences. The intention of the Project has been to construct a composite of WISC graduates' experiences in selected areas over the past fourteen to sixteen years. Thus this report will present summary information about the WISC graduates and then will present the most common responses to the questions, augmenting this with direct quotations from the women interviewed.

THE FACTS

The 169 WISC graduates who responded to our questionnaires were in their middle years (with an average age of 44) and were affluent. Forty percent reported that their household income was over \$100,000. More than two-thirds reported incomes over \$50,000.

These women's lives have changed a great deal since their WISC years. They are better well educated, work more for pay and less as volunteers. They are less apt to be married than in earlier years, but over three-quarters are currently married. They had an average of 2.37 children living in their homes in their WISC years. But their lives are not without children today, as the average number of children in each household is currently 1.16.

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

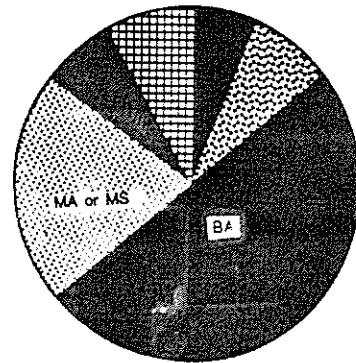


THEN (WISC)

11.0%
7.0%
64.0%
11.0%
2.0%
5.0%

- High School
- Two Year Degree
- BA
- MA or MS
- PhD, JD or MD
- Other

6.0%
8.0%
50.0%
21.0%
7.0%
8.0%



NOW (1988)

WORK SITUATION

THEN (WISC)

NOW (1988)

5 Hours

PAID WORK

25 Hours

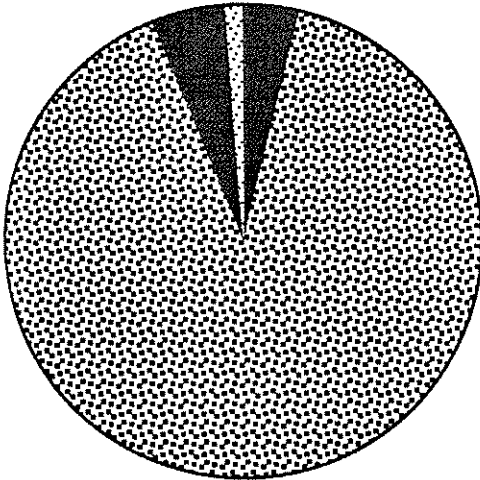
11 Hours

VOLUNTEER WORK

5 Hours

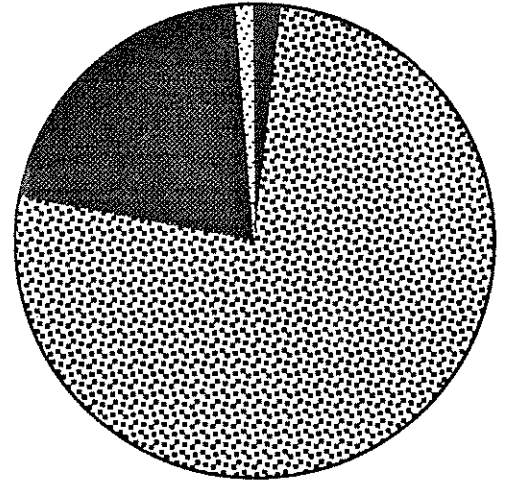
MARITAL STATUS

THEN (WISC)



| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| ■ Never Married | 4.0% |
| ▣ Married | 90.0% |
| ■ Sep/Divorced | 5.0% |
| ▣ Widowed | 1.0% |

NOW (1988)



| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| ■ Never Married | 2.0% |
| ▣ Married | 76.0% |
| ■ Sep/Divorced | 21.0% |
| ▣ Widowed | 1.0% |

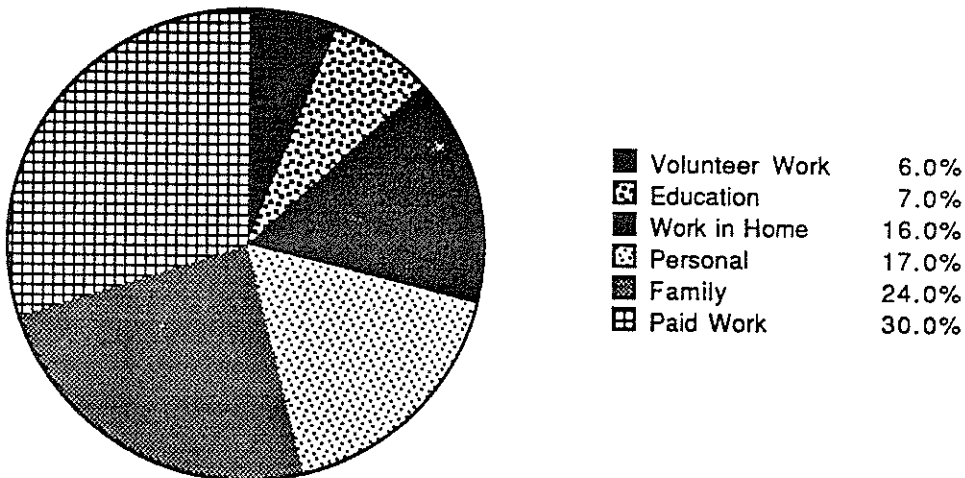
These are the "facts" about our 169 respondents. In order to get behind this information, to understand how life has been and is for these women, 44 randomly selected graduates were interviewed with a structured questionnaire. A summary of these findings is presented in three sections: "The Hours in the Week," "Life Changes," and "Social Change - Then and Now."

THE HOURS IN THE WEEK

The findings from the 44 interviewees are presented by re-stating the actual questions that were put to the women and then by summarizing their answers.

QUESTION: Please show (on the pie chart) what percent of your time is spent in each of the following areas: personal interests/self selected activities, family and/or relationships, education and training, work in the home, as a volunteer or for pay. (The women were asked to consider the pie as including approximately 100 hours within a week).

How WISC Women Use Their Time

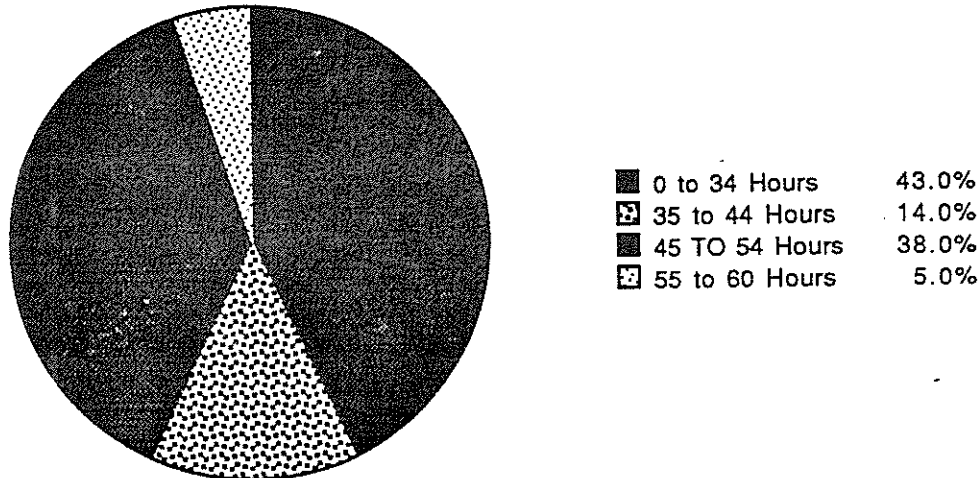


The work that women do in their homes took an average of 16 hours a week, nearly the same amount of time - 17 hours - that they devoted to their personal activities. Time spent - 24 hours - with family and other relationships was second only to paid work in importance. They spent 7 hours on education and training and 6 hours in volunteer work. Women spent an average of thirty hours each week on paid work, more time than they spent on any other activity. Eighteen percent (8) do not work - four by choice, two because of illness, one is recently and temporarily unemployed, and one is retired.

QUESTION: Tell us about your paid work experiences.

Many of these women work long hours and most of them hold demanding positions. Of the eleven women in business, three of them are in executive positions. Nine women have executive positions in academia, social services, foundations or government. Fourteen are professionals. Two are lawyers, six are direct services professionals and there is one management consultant, one "headhunter", one self-employed public relations expert, one artist/teacher, one editor and one professor.

Patterns of Paid Work



The 37 women who are employed, work an average of 36 hours each week. Sixteen (43%) work part-time, that is less than 35 hours per week. Of the 21 (67%) who work full-time, 5 work 35 to 44 hours, 14 work 45 to 54 hours and 2 work 60 hours a week.

The women were then asked a series of questions that related to ways that they allocated their time on the pie chart. Each question is re-stated, the answers are summarized and representative answers are quoted. (Note: Many women made more than one response to most questions. Thus, summary findings are calculated from all the responses made by all the women.

1. Are you surprised by anything that this process has shown?

Sixty-five percent responded negatively, indicating self awareness about their use of time. For the 35% who were surprised, the most common observation was how little time they spent in volunteer activity.

Three were surprised by how little time they spent with family, but they were balanced by three who were surprised at how much time they spent on family. Three listed paid work as taking a larger segment of time than they had realized.

As one interviewee put it, "I'm not surprised really but work certainly does take a large chunk of time. Volunteer time is smaller," and, another, "Surprised by changes that have taken over in my life. At time I took WISC course, I was doing about 60 hours of volunteer/training work. Also spent more time in home relationships and less on personal choice time."

2. Is there any way you would like to change the use of time?

Seventy percent of the women would like to change. Twenty-two percent of them would like to spend more time on volunteer activity.

*21% wanted changes in regard to paid work: 6 wanting to work less; 2 wanting to work more and one wanting a better job
16% wanted to spend more time on personal interests
16% increase time in education
13% would decrease time spent on housework
2 would eliminate it altogether*

Two interviewees commented as follows: "Like to have more community volunteer work in there. Part of that time is going to care for aged parents," and, "At some point I would like to do volunteer work again. At the moment it is an area that has gone by the wayside."

3. How do you think the use of your time has changed since WISC?

Fifty-nine percent stated that paid work has created the most striking change. Again, volunteer activity was mentioned as taking less time than in the 70's.

*23% specifically mentioned the effect of their children growing up
34% spend more time on personal interests*

"Volunteer pay is the biggest change and the fact that my children grew up and left the state."

"More time in paid work, much less time in volunteer and a change in personal activities...added three hours a week in exercise."

4. Why has this change occurred?

Sixty percent answered that they spent more time in paid work and 41% cited changes that come naturally with the passage of time: notably the maturing of children.

*17% cited more emphasis on personal interests
12% cited changes brought about by divorce
9% cited change in priorities*

One attributed the change to becoming a full-time homemaker and another suffered a debilitating disease.

As one interviewee put it: "No paid work then. 85% of my time was home or family relationships," and another, "I'm beginning to grow up. Huge amounts of personal growth; lots more risk taking, affirmation of nontraditional roles; parents have died...children have grown up. The children have brought us all up, I believe.

5. How much choice did you have in regard to these changes?

Fifty-four percent responded that they had a lot of choice.

*30% thought they had some choice
12% choice in some areas; not in others
2.5% had no choice*

"I think I was privileged to have a lot of choice. I didn't know that at the time of WISC, but I know it now."

"I feel that I had some choice in these changes: 50% result of choice and 50% the result of the passage of time."



Next question: I believe that life is a constant striving for balance, requiring frequent tradeoffs between morality and necessity, within a cyclic pattern of joy and sadness, forging a trail of bittersweet memories until one slips, inevitably, into the jaws of death. Agree or disagree?

Adapted without permission of the The New Yorker.

LIFE CHANGES

The women were given a blank piece of paper with a line across it and were told,

"This line represents the time between when you took the WISC course and today.

Would you identify people and events starting when you took the WISC course. We are interested in what has had an impact on you, both positive and negative. Use symbols, abbreviations, pictures, words, anything that will help you tell your story...We will be using your responses as a way to remember important people and events that we want to ask you questions about."

1. What item on the lifeline gave you the most satisfaction?

Not surprisingly, answers to this question were scattered. Also, some interviewees gave multiple responses. Despite these constraints, patterns emerge.

*Work, paid or volunteer, constituted 39% of the responses.
27% cited family relationships
28% of respondents cited personal growth
11% of respondents cited marriage/mate
2 respondents listed the WISC course
2 respondents cited relationships*

"Paid work. I do believe WISC was the catalyst that motivated me to go beyond the home, to examine my past and my skills, and to face the fact that I need to be challenged..."

"My family. None of the other experiences could have happened without a stable family unit. I am lucky to have a life 'in harmony.' My paid work, my volunteer and my family are all centered on social change issues. Even my adult children spend a great deal of their time on social justice concerns."

2. Can you think of an area or point on the lifeline that was stressful?

The 44 women interviewed listed 82 stressful situations; the percentages below relate to the number of areas of stress, not to the number of respondents.

Illness of self or family member (including chemical dependency) made up 26.8% of the responses. Another 23% arose out of work, either one's own or spouse's.

17% relationship with sexual partner
10% adolescent children and internal family stress
10% self identity crisis
9% death of family member, relative
5% financial problems
4% children: leaving home and adjustment to change in children
1 response each: "everything," education, political events, Watergate

Individual quotes in answer to this question are too easily identified with specific individuals. The answers, taken as a whole, reflect the gamut of problems, particularly those in families, that women coped with in the 60's and 70's.

These include chemical abuse by children, anorexia, mental illness, serious physical illnesses, death of children and the strains such serious troubles place upon the marriage.

3. Can you identify a point or points on your lifeline that you reached a level of confidence that allowed you to trust your ability to effect what happened to you?

12 interviewees reached that level by paid work; 10 by education and 9 reported that they have always had such confidence.

When analyzing the total of 55 responses to this question, the researchers found this pattern: 51% developed confidence through largely positive experiences and 25% experienced such growth through adversity.

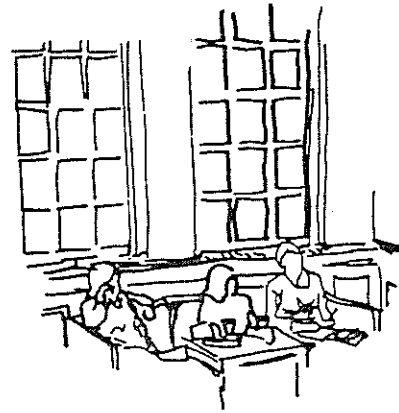
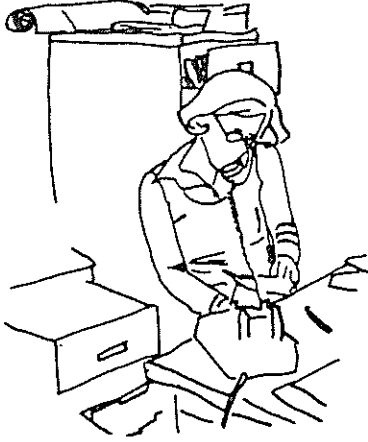
6 interviewees cited illness
4 cited volunteer activities
4 cited divorce/separation
3 listed raising a family
2 listed lifestyle changes
1 cited death in family
1 listed selling family home
3 have not reached that point
2 had confidence and lost it

Again, most answers to this question included personally identifiable facts. Those selected do represent the spirit of many of the other responses.

"I believe I am responsible for myself. Just when I feel in control, something happened and you grow again. If things aren't going well, better take responsibility and change things..."

"In terms of years, about 1980-81 when my personal life came together. I felt confidence in my work life earlier than in my personal life."

"At some levels, I have had it all my life. Now I believe I can handle anything that comes to me."



SOCIAL CHANGE - THEN AND NOW

The women were reminded that SOCIAL CHANGE was in the title of WISC and the subject of much debate and discussion and then asked the following questions:

1. What is your greatest social concern today?

Because many interviewees cited more than one concern, figures in this section relate to the total number of concerns.

Twenty-six percent of the concerns clustered around issues of poverty and economic inequity. Eighteen percent were related to family issues, such as the diminution of the nuclear family, changing sexual values and violence against women and children.

Sixteen percent of the responses related to war, peace and militarization.

Economic issues included: the problems of single women with children; homelessness; hunger and social and economic inequities world wide.

Family issues included: problems with the nuclear family, violence against women and children; lack of moral values; poor preparation for parenting.

Seven percent listed population questions, including overpopulation and the availability of abortion. The same number cited health issues, including AIDs, care for the elderly and health care policies.

Five percent listed women's status issues such as relationships between men and women; barriers to women realizing their full potential and lack of strong direction in the women's movement.

Five percent were about education; both its quality and the lack of motivation to pursue it.

I mention was made of each of the following social concerns: constitutional issues such as separation of church and state and the first amendment; racism; pollution; the effect of the drought; individualism in American society; implications of diversity; general environmental problems and violence in the streets.

"Only one? Inequities in income distribution. Environment is going to turn out to be one of our main issues. Population control, especially world wide. I think in our own country the inequities are becoming greater..."

"I see the dissolution of the family as one of the greatest problems. It effects every aspect of American life and will have an enormous impact on the future and the lives of our children."

"World can stumble into war without meaning to..."

"I guess I would have to say women's economic deficiencies."

2. **How has your perception of social change altered over time?**

Forty-two percent of the respondents described perceptual changes that can be best characterized as moving from simple to complex.

Twenty-five percent indicated they have learned that individuals working together can make a difference

Fourteen percent described their perceptions as more skeptical. In the 70's they were more confident of their ability to affect change.

Nine percent concentrate on their own small world.

Nine percent cited general increased awareness since WISC.

One percent said she had learned to work within the system to achieve change instead of attacking it.

The 42% who described their perceptions as more complex, listed the need to develop analytical skills, the importance of probing for systematic causes of problems, the value of education and the taking of responsibility. They describe themselves as more practical, less idealistic and more aware of the slowness of social change.

"As Ellen Godman says, you get 'heavily into gray.'"

"I think people can make a difference when at one time I didn't."

"I thought social change would be easier in my younger days. It is much more slower going than I thought it would be...My greatest awareness is that recipients must always be in on the planning process and must have a great deal to say about how changes will happen."

"I am more pessimistic now...perhaps more realistic, less idealistic."

3. **Is there a particular person or event that you can identify as changing your perception of social change?**

The most common response to this question (30%) was "no." Twenty-three percent cited either the WISC course or a WISC speaker.

Those who answered a qualified no, attributed changes to a slow unfolding or to experience in living.

9 responses related to political events or activity, such as lobbying on state laws, the effect of presidential elections and the civil rights movement.

4 cited experiences, positive or negative, within the family.

3 were most strongly influenced by experiences related to war and the military.

Persons cited twice included Martin Luther King, Ann Wilson Schaefer and Esther Wattenberg. In addition, five women mentioned five additional WISC speakers. One mention each for Robert Kennedy, Gene McCarthy, a husband, parents and 25 year old clerical worker.

4. **How has your involvement with social change activity changed since you were in the WISC course?**

Sixty-seven percent of those interviewed are less involved in volunteer efforts toward social change.

*6 responded that they are at about the same level of involvement:
4 are very active and 2 not active at all.*

9 women have changed social change efforts into paid work.

7 of the 43 respondents are more involved.

2 responses were unclear as to the level of involvement.

"I became involved in social change after the WISC course. Since 1985 when I went to work full-time I have done less."

"I am more realistic about what I really can do. I do wish that the rush of enthusiasm for change that I experienced in my 20's would surface more often. In my 40's the tone of involvement is more plodding. Maybe it's that full-time work simply tires people out. We middle aged change agents need fires lit under us now and then."

5. Is there an area of social change that you are currently involved in?

Seventy-two percent are involved in social change to some degree with 10 or more issues.

Twenty-eight percent have no connection with social change efforts.

Sixteen percent variety of child and youth issues.

Fourteen percent active (a widely varying levels) in women's poverty and abuse issues.

Twelve percent are interested in changing role of churches.

Nine percent work in areas pertaining to human rights in sexuality and lifestyles.

Seven percent work in politics and 3 (7%) in housing and homelessness.

Five percent work in each of these areas: elderly/aging; mental health; chemical dependency.

Two percent cited each of the following areas: affirmative action, gun control, the deaf community, airport noise, and a social work board.

Two percent responses were unclear.

"No, but am thinking about loaves and fishes or tutoring a child, one to one."

"Yes. I accepted directorship of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing. Our belief is that the housing situation is not a problem but a 'national disgrace.'"

"Education. I am involved day in and day out. Problems in that filled with both gender and racial differences and opportunities."

