

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

**LIVING BETWEEN THE EXTREMES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
HOW MID-LIFE WOMEN RECREATE THEIR IDENTITY AFTER A WORK
TRANSITION**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

Trina R. Hess

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

December 2009

The dissertation of Trina R. Hess was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Fred Schied
Associate Professor of Adult Education
Thesis Advisor
Chair of Committee
Graduate Program Officer for Adult Education

Eunice Askov
Distinguished Professor Emerita of Adult Education

Judith Kolb
Associate Professor of Workforce Education

Sharon Falkenstern
Assistant Professor of Nursing

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined the "lived experiences" of learning identity during work transitions among three women (ages 35 to 55) who were not previously married. The research question was how do particular mid-life women who engage in a work transition re-construct the meaning of (or make sense of) their identity? Primary research questions included the following:

- * What effect does the work transition experience have on one's identity?
- * What kind of feedback was received concerning the work transition?
- * How does one's identity affect what the new work role means to the participant?
- * How are various aspects of identity re-negotiated over time in the new career in order to reconcile a more whole or complete sense of self within the new work environment?
- * What aspects of identity (formation, or re-creation) remain difficult, and are these struggles dependent on length of time spent in the previous career?
- * Does one need to define oneself differently in order to accomplish the tasks required by the new work role?

Research questions asked how co-researchers described their work transition, as well as inquiring about the feedback participants received during and after the transition process. The study found that within the transition experiences the following themes emerged: finding one's purpose in life; sensing unease during transitions; learning how to be in control through various means such as maturity, time, education, support/belonging, spirituality, hope and humor; passiveness with money, decision-making, and peer support; learning stereotypes versus learning one's purpose; learning marriage and singleness messages; conflict in the family of origin; and progressive

mothers versus being 'just' a housewife.

Qualitative research guidelines developed by Moustakas (1990, 1994), van Manen (1997, 2003), and the Duquesne Studies (1979, 1985) were used extensively. This phenomenology explicated theoretical lenses of meaningful work, transformative learning and feminist perspectives. Data was gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews, and also journal entries. Understanding more about the "lived experiences" of particular groups of women will increase awareness and understanding of the individual and therefore increase the possibilities for improved adult services and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>COMING TO THE PROBLEM</i>	IX
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
Overview.....	1
<i>Women and Transformation</i>	3
Discussion of Participants	5
Problem Statement and Research Questions	8
Definition of Terms	11
<i>Work Transition</i>	11
<i>Identity</i>	13
<i>Learning Event</i>	14
Trustworthiness of Study	14
Organization of Dissertation	16
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Introduction	17
Transformative Learning Theory	18
<i>Critical Reflection & Transformative Learning Theory</i>	20
<i>The Authority of the Discourse Group</i>	25
<i>Power</i>	28
<i>Other Ways of Knowing</i>	31
<i>Conclusion</i>	37
Theories about Meaningful Work.....	38
<i>Vocation or Calling</i>	38
<i>Work as Identity: Development, Social Aspects, and Women’s Experiences</i>	42
<i>Work as Expression of Personal Values</i>	46
Feminist Theories.....	50
<i>The Non-unitary Self and Constantly Shifting Identity</i>	51
<i>Learning and Women’s Identity</i>	52
<i>Feminist theories in adult education</i>	52
<i>Self and Society</i>	56
<i>Learning in Relationships</i>	58
<i>Women’s Career Change</i>	61
Literature Review	63
<i>Identity Creation and Learning Identity</i>	63

Occupational identity.....	66
Career development and identity	68
Work Transition and Adult Development	70
Alternative and Adult Development Theories	75
Stage theories	77
Women’s developmental models.....	78
Integration	80
Development and Transitions	82
Single women participants	86
Mid-Life Age Range	92
The Third Shift	95
Middle Class	96
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	98
Research Questions.....	98
Purpose of Study.....	99
Phenomenological Approach	100
<i>Background to Phenomenology as a Research Method</i>	100
<i>Intentionality</i>	105
<i>Intuition</i>	107
<i>Reflection</i>	108
<i>Epoche</i>	109
<i>Lifeworld</i>	110
<i>Bracketing</i>	112
<i>Sociological Imagination</i>	114
Data Collection	116
<i>Participant Selection</i>	116
<i>Participant Descriptions</i>	121
Participant R	121
Participant K	122
Participant V	123
Phenomenological Interviews	124
<i>Interview Questions</i>	127
Data Analysis	131
<i>Data Analysis Procedure</i>	136
Development of Themes	144
<i>Bracketing in the Data Analysis Process</i>	150
<i>Reflective Processes</i>	152
Themes of Work Transitions and Construction of Identity	159
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION: LIVING IN BETWEEN THE EXTREMES	162
Introduction.....	162

Participant Analysis.....	162
<i>Participant R</i>	162
<i>Participant K</i>	166
<i>Participant V</i>	168
Discussion of Themes	172
<i>Theme 1: The Attainment of One’s Purpose</i>	173
<i>Theme 1a. Sensing Unease During Transitions</i>	177
<i>Theme 2: The Quest for Control</i>	183
<i>Theme 2a. Learning how to be mature</i>	186
<i>Theme 2b. Learning to control time</i>	191
<i>Theme 2c. The importance of education in gaining life control</i>	195
<i>Theme 2d. Belonging and support in gaining life control</i>	200
<i>Theme 2e. Hope as a means to control of one’s life</i>	205
<i>Theme 2f. Humor’s role in becoming in control of one’s life</i>	208
<i>Theme 3. Passiveness</i>	211
<i>Theme 3a. Money and passiveness</i>	217
<i>Theme 3b. Decision-making and passiveness</i>	218
<i>Theme 3c. Support and peers and passiveness</i>	224
<i>Theme 4: Learning the Stereotypes vs. Learning One’s Purpose</i>	228
<i>Theme 5. Learning Marriage and Singleness: via Family Messages</i>	234
<i>Theme 6. Conflict in the home</i>	244
<i>Theme 7: Progressive mothers and purpose messages</i>	246
<i>Theme 7a. Working mothers and “just” a housewife</i>	253
 CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY	 257
Control	258
<i>The Role of Learning to Hope</i>	263
<i>Hope and Spirituality</i>	265
Learning Passiveness	268
Learning about Oneself	275
Conflict in the Home	278
 CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	 280
Adult Education in the Work Transition Situation	282
Outlook for Women’s Identity Formation	285
Thinking Differently About Learning	288
Thinking Differently About Transitions and Transformative Learning	291
Recommendations for Further Research	296
 REFERENCES.....	 300

APPENDIX A: RECRUITING SCRIPT FOR POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS	324
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL/SCREENING QUESTIONS	325
APPENDIX C: EXCERPTS FROM RESEARCHER JOURNAL.....	328
APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS OF PARTICIPANT V..	329
APPENDIX E: SECOND HIGHLIGHTED COPY OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	330
APPENDIX F: PRELIMINARY CATEGORIES FROM INTERVIEW DATA.....	331
APPENDIX G; MICROSOFT® WORD DOCUMENT OF CATEGORIES FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	332
APPENDIX H: EMERGING PATTERNS DRAWN FROM CATEGORIES.....	333
APPENDIX I: CULLING THEMES FROM THE EMERGENT PATTERNS.....	334
APPENDIX J: FINDING SUBTHEMES.....	335

Coming to the Problem

During my first semester in the adult education program at Penn State, I learned about various ways our external environments shape our identity, the careers we choose, and how we think of ourselves. Previously, I had given little thought to my background, or how it had made me who I am today. I had taken for granted many aspects of myself—my race, my gender, my social class, and my experiences (travel, education, hobbies, friends, and experiences). I had assumed that my life was “normal”, and that everyone else had similar experiences to mine. Mezirow (1991) would have deemed mine an unexamined life. My own personal perspective transformation had begun.

Prior to enrolling the Penn State doctoral program in adult education, I had participated in a career research program, first as a student, and later as an instructor. As a student in the program, I learned about my interests, values, and abilities, and which career I should find most satisfying. My quest for a career direction had shown me that career decision making is not always a simple, direct matter. There can be many diversions in the path even when one finally does make a career choice. Career can thus be described as a life process, with the ultimate goal culminating not in a promotion, but in a more elusive goal: life purpose.

An understanding of the concept of career change as it relates to one’s identity requires that we consider the economic and political institutions of society—not merely the personal situation and character of the individual participants (Mills, 1959). This mindset reflects the feminist standpoint that even the personal is political. That is, we need a larger grasp of events in order to understand the wider perspective of our individual dilemmas. Such a viewpoint will promote better decision-making, and will

prohibit the individual from taking a role as victim. Our common problems can be seen more clearly as we notice that others face the same circumstances and challenges as we face.

I wondered whether a work transition is simply a matter of trading roles or workplaces, without having too much--or any--impact on one's identity. That is, do people always feel a shift in their identity when they make a work transition, and does this shift occur immediately after one is in the new work role? From my research on the subject, I found that this "culture shock" to one's identity has not been adequately addressed. Most educational interventions for adults involve analysis of work-related skills, behaviors, and performances rather than personal emotional adjustments to a new career. And once an individual is hired, the workplace does not emphasize creating or sustaining a career identity. Instead, the workplace demands efficiency, time, commitment, and results in the form of profits.

A technology advanced Western culture demands adults be able to adroitly move through and from jobs as the market dictates—often with no regard for how the work transition may adversely affect the worker and his or her productivity. Should we leave all parts of our former identity (excluding our transferable skills) back at our old job, in favor of creating a new identity in our new work role? Should we protectively insulate our identity from the career? Or should we allow our identity to be tainted by integration with the career? Integration (in the form of educational interventions) may allow for easier transition to subsequent jobs. However, if we no longer need to adjust our identity, we may simply be a collection of interchangeable workers with interchangeable skills.

CHAPTER 1

Background to the Study

This study centered on work transitions among particular mid-life women. In this chapter, I will discuss my reasons for choosing this topic and I will show the rationale for why the study matters to the field of adult education. If we as educators can understand women who are in the transition process because of a work transition, we can begin to change our perspective to accommodate different learners' needs. This will represent a starting point for us to begin to design programs and courses that are more appropriate to learners in any type of transition situation. We will then be better able to follow what Brookfield (2005) describes as Habermas' view of social evolution: having the ability to detach from everyday thinking and decide—after discussing with others—how to act “in ways that are not ideologically predetermined (p. 257).” Educator and learner both are enriched by witnessing the learners' new ways of being and doing in the worlds and relationships they create.

Much of adult learning occurs in the powerful emotional context; these affective issues influence why adults show up for educational programs, as well as the processes by which learners engage the material, their experiences, and one another and the teacher (Dirkx, 2006). In the process of adult learning, there is an implication that both teacher and learner engage in a shared endeavor and that both are changed through this shared experience (Ettling, 2006). There is an anticipation of an enlargement of the sense of self (Lange, 2001)--i.e. a transformation of the learner's very identity. This may be why adults seek out educational programming at precisely those times in their lives when they have or feel little or no sense of self apart from those they care for, marry, or work for.

Mezirow (2000) believes one of the goals of adult education is “to help the learner develop the requisite learning processes to think and choose with more reliable insight, to become, in effect, a more autonomous thinker (p. 348).” This autonomy could lead to reconstructing one’s identity into one which is consciously chosen, rather than one that is adopted from other’s expectations. Educators can assist in this goal of autonomy by challenging learners. Challenging of the learner during the educational process has a long history in adult education and may be considered one of its central tenets (Cranton, 2006).

Ideally the educator follows Freire’s (1972a.) original view that we are responsible for challenging and questioning learners and we are to never remain silent, especially on social inequalities. This self-evaluation that educators encourage becomes part of learners’ decision-making processes and leads them to an empowering strategy (Cranton, 2006). Self-evaluation involves a critical examination of ourselves as well as our environments. In a career and self-evaluation search, critical reflection is an invaluable tool. Not only must learners examine their current and evolving career interests; they must also question what influenced their initial career choices, as well as what changes are causing the current work situation to be dissatisfying. Reliance on Mezirow’s (1991) seminal work on transformative learning theory can help educators foster the learner’s awareness and subsequent incentive for taking action and making changes.

The educator’s own example of being an authentic learner him- or herself aids learners in achieving their own mode of questioning, sorting, and ultimately creating their own knowledge of the world they inhabit. Adult educators can create environments

conducive to whole-person learning (Davis-Manigualte, Yorks, & Kasl, 2006), as well as acknowledge unconscious and imaginative learning (Dirkx, 2006). Learners can then be equipped with additional tools with which they can question those external factors (assumptions and constraints) that may have led to their initial career choice. As these assumptions become revised, learners can make a more informed and more satisfying decisions about work and career.

Women and Transformation

My study focuses on a particular group of women. Because of their current status, the women in my study are living outside the expected or typical lifestyle defined as normal by traditional theorists (Levinson, 1950; Erikson et al., 1978). In order to more effectively serve adult learners who are outside this traditional norm, we as educators need to examine the traditional views about adult development, the development of self, and adult learning. Primarily, we need to reevaluate the perspective of unitary self within adult education and replace it with a more practical, realistic view—that of non-unitary self as introduced by Clark (1999). When we recognize how the fluid nature of adults' lives has been affected by the many different contexts in which they live, we can see how adults come to define themselves—both as human beings and as learners. Their definition of themselves has ramifications that in turn affect their ability to learn.

Modern expectations of the feminine self demand that self to be unitary and rational (Clark, 1999)—even though this demand is impossible and unrealistic. Cain (2002) maintains that women's self in the educational environment reflects her class, gender, and race; within these dimensions the intersections of psychological and social constructions of self are challenged on a daily basis. Educators need to be able to

understand how women experience their sense of self in our society. Awareness of the oppression and obstacles that women face will give insight to educators into more effective program design.

In addition, educators need to recognize the impact that patriarchy has had on women's experience. Patriarchy weds us, men and women alike, to a false story about human nature and then names our resistance to this story as a sign of pathology or sin (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Similar to how Gilligan & Richards (2009) describe Athenian culture, I describe my participants as enjoying freedoms of being educated, independent, and modern—and at the same time living those in tension with their patriarchal practices in public and private life.

By not acknowledging and honoring our experience, including our body and emotions, we are wed to a false story about ourselves (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). This false story informs our identity that we claim for our self-definition. This initial identity incorporated messages that ultimately led us to our first career choice. When we can understand how we were originally influenced, we can be in a position to more effectively shape our new career and work situation.

My study sheds light not only on transformation in work but transformations in any area of the life course. Adult education often encounters such learners who are in some sort of transition situation. Whether they are attending welfare to work programs; moving from illiterate to literate; being a non-native speaker who is gaining accomplishments in ESL classrooms; career changers advancing to different futures; or workers learning a new way of operating within their current job--all are encountering a change in their prior lives, experiences, and identities. If educators can understand how

learners learn their way through transition situations, they can better predict which supports and types of programs would best address their learners' needs.

My study does not attempt to suppose that the experiences of these particular participants occur in all single, mid-life women after a work transition. The particular women represented by my study represent the lynchpin of the patriarchal system: that is, these women's compliance with power structures will ensure that there will be more heterogeneous members who will eventually support the patriarchal system. Other women may not sense with the same intensity as my participants have, the expectations of compliance to the societal norm. Feminism helped to frame my study, as it encouraged using the experiences of my chosen participants as a means to expose weaknesses in existing principal theories, and to ultimately force the issue of reconstruction (Alcoff, 2000).

Discussion of Participants

I did not choose a wide variety of women as participants, but focused instead on those who shared a commonality with my own experience of gender, class, and education level. Because of my lack of expertise in the areas of other classes or educational levels, I felt I could not adequately honor their experiences within this study. Not only would I not be able to understand their lived experience, but it would be difficult for me to even craft the interview questions or know what would be the pertinent points to investigate. It was for this reason that my study was heuristic; this stance allowed me to more fully investigate the pertinent topics and experiences, and to draw responses from my participants that would adequately reflect the phenomenon that we all had experienced.

The investigation of patriarchy involves a discussion of how this mindset affects

how women perceive themselves, or create their identity. For example, the more completely women fulfill society's oppressed views of self, the worse it becomes for their personal well-being (Meyer, 2000). The women in my study live daily at the intersection (I call them prongs or spokes) of societal expectations based on traditional notions of gender, race, social class, and religion, as well as traditional notions of women's potential. Simultaneously, these women have been directly or indirectly (chiefly through educational interventions) influenced by feminist thought that occurred during these women's childhoods. They are pulled in two directions, encouraged to excel in diametrically opposed camps. They are, literally, living in between the extremes, with no guidebook as to how to navigate—especially as concerns fulfillment of each of the extremes' requirements for success.

Despite the advances made during the second wave of feminism that occurred during the participants' formative years, the number and types of behavioral options available or allowable for women to express is still limited by society. In addition, there are sometimes limited actions or reactions permissible for women to confront societal standards that women deem unjust. Women have been subject to a form of learning that Habermas (1971) terms normative learning. Normative learning is oriented to the expectations of certain behaviors that reflect common values. Impressionistic learning is done to enhance one's impression on others. Both types of learning have influenced women to conform to patriarchal standards and definitions for healthy, adult women.

Although Habermas' (1971) other types of learning--emancipation, instrumental and communicative—may be beneficial and useful for women in creating a more composite, complete identity, it is the former types that have characterized most of

women's educational experiences (and hence, shaped their view of themselves.) When women align themselves with the societal expectations that normative learning and impressionistic learning require, they may jeopardize their own self-understanding, likes, dislikes, and even their marketable employment skills. It may be safer—literally and figuratively—to stay within the bounds of expected behaviors, but ultimately as women live out these constrained ways of knowing, learning and being they become more disconnected with their interpretation of their own experience (Alcoff, 2000).

Not all women are the same, and not all women are faced with the same societal expectations. To Alcoff (2000), it seems that a man's identity and behaviors are consistently underdetermined, allowing him more options in designing his life's journey. In contrast, Alcoff (2000) adds, a woman's identity and behaviors (chiefly caring for others) have been over-determined, thereby limiting her life's journey. These societal mandates for women's behavior lead to dictating what a woman feels about herself (Clark, 2000)—including how she feels as a learner and a creator of knowledge. By integrating aspects of spiritual development such as cognitive, moral or cultural identity development, educators can attempt to integrate these various lines of adult development (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Clark & Caffarella, 1999), thereby more effectively honoring women's sense of—and reconstruction of--self.

Women's increased participation in the workplace is not matched by an increasing understanding of their motivations, inclinations, or circumstances toward work transitions. Likewise, the marital sphere has not kept pace with the changes that women have encountered; women bear the greater burden of what Hochschild (2003) terms the speed up of life due mainly to technological advances. Women have changed but their

men have not (Hochschild, 2003). Researchers have tended to assume that all women will or should experience expected changes—and be able to adapt to or overcome those changes—at certain designated times. However, those time markers were the result of research studies that had been largely based on men’s developmental experiences (Erikson, 1950; Levinson, et al., 1978). As the workplace changes due to technological advances and business turbulence we need to adapt traditional thinking about career stages to the reality of these stages in women’s lived experiences.

I chose to examine work transitions as the backdrop for understanding shifting identity, because Lynn and Todroff (1995) maintain that “for women, work-lives and work-learning are woven into family and other relations with particular fluidity and complexity and are marked by struggles that are critical in their learning and sense of self (p. 1).” Furthermore, women create the self in ways that are not often or always able to be pre-determined by the basic tenets of adult development of the self or traditional developmental theories (Fenwick, 1998). There was clearly another element at work in the creation of women’s identity—before as well as during and after a work transition. Our experiences give us the opportunity to define meaning in our lives. Therefore, a work transition can represent for women a new way to define themselves.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The overarching research problem was how do particular mid-life women reconstruct their identity after a work transition? This question involved asking how women define themselves in their new work environments, including what meanings they give to their experiences there. In order to answer this, I investigated aspects of the former identity that were retained, but that were not congruent with the new career role. I

wondered whether the women in my study needed to be able to see themselves--to define their identity--differently in order to accomplish the tasks required in the new career. Also, I wondered whether they needed to—or could--integrate their work and personal identities.

To address these topics, the primary research questions were the following: What is the experience of a work transition (career change) on a woman's identity? And, more specifically, what support, if any, was received concerning the work transition? That is, was there any outside affirmation, encouragement, or discouragement, by peers or family members about the work transition decisions my participants had considered? Also, how did identity affect the meaning that these women now make of their new career role; and further, how were various aspects of identity re-negotiated over time in the new career in order to achieve a sense of integration? In addressing these questions, it was important to realize how, and to what extent one's identity was tied to, or defined by, one's choice of both the previous and the new careers.

Identity formation and learning identity are relevant to adult education. Belenky et al. (1986) maintain that women's self-concept and ways of knowing are intertwined; by extension, their identity is tied to their method of learning, knowing, and acquiring understanding. Women worry that developing their own powers would have to be at the expense of others (Belenky, et al., 1986). That is, those fears are sometimes justified because some women have experienced loss of love or understanding from significant others, especially at times of transition (during which women may gain more personal power as they initiate life changes).

My research question was how do particular mid-life women who engage in a

work transition re-construct the meaning of (or make sense of) their identity? I was interested in discovering whether there was a renegotiation of one's identity when one makes a work transition. My primary research questions included the following:

1. What effect does the work transition experience have on one's identity? Identity here means one's definition of oneself when living out certain roles.

1a. What kind of feedback was received concerning the work transition?

2. How does one's identity affect what the new work role means to the participant?

3. How are various aspects of identity re-negotiated over time in the new career in order to reconcile a more whole or complete sense of self within the new work environment?

3a. What aspects of identity (formation, or re-creation) remain difficult, and are these struggles dependent on length of time spent in the previous career?

4. Does one need to define oneself differently in order to accomplish the tasks required by the new work role?

Interview questions also included information about one's current career. More specifically, the study addressed the following: feelings about one's workplace; participants' emotional responses to careers they have had; age at the time of work transition(s); family circumstances; and educational level. These questions may have illuminated a relationship between adult development theories and the outcome of a career change. That is, attainment of a certain developmental stage may have led to a career change; or, the career change could have encouraged the next developmental level. Open-ended interview questions led to an emergence of meaning, and possibly to new, and sometimes clarifying, questions to ask of participants. Throughout the interview

process, participants and I together attempted to make continuing sense of what we were saying to each other (Mishler, 1986).

Definition of Terms

Work Transition

In my study, I used the term work transition to describe what has been popularly termed career change. A review of the literature suggests that there is no all-encompassing definition of career change—the concept means different things to different authors. For the purposes of my study, a work transition is a change from one career within a sequence of jobs which constitutes one's entire or overall career. This overall career may occur in one subject area or concentration, or may represent an entirely different subject area.

Within this conception, a career can be considered as a life process. Accordingly then, when a work transition change is made, an entire set of experiences and relationships must be reorganized and renegotiated. As relationships are reorganized so too must our identity be reorganized or recreated in response. How we are seen by others, and how we see ourselves in relation to other people will necessarily change as our external circumstances change.

Into the definition of work transition I included changing from one workplace to another, even if the same type of work is performed at both locations. For example, if a worker leaves her accounting job to work as an accountant at another organization, the new work environment will be different from the previous one. I maintain that a seemingly minor work transition such as this will still require an adjustment on the part of the individual in order to more successfully perform the work role and to form a more

complete or integrated career identity. This integration may allow the worker to have feelings of self-efficacy and accomplishment. The sense of accomplishment gained will further reinforce one's career identity.

My definition of work transition is one in which there is a role change, as well as a financial boundary or marker. Individuals may be more attuned to a financial change and therefore this aspect may contribute an important piece to the emerging identity in the new career. For example, if an individual's role changes to that of parent, the change will involve tax deductions that previously did not exist for that person. If the role change involves becoming a member of a marriage partnership, the change may involve two incomes where there had been only one. A newly single parent may experience a loss of income. Widowhood incurs a death benefit to the surviving spouse, and/or a lowering of total income. A student will experience a drop in income while studying; the next role change to employee may provide an increase in income. A retiree can collect a pension and Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, annuities, etc.

In addition, one's salary or wages may increase or decrease; the benefits package will change; the commuting costs may change; the price at one or another workplace cafeteria may change. The financial aspect also is seen in terms of what is considered meaningful work. When someone is willing to pay an individual for doing a task, that task becomes meaningful (to the individual, as well as to the employer who is paying a wage). Work then may become defined by monetary measures; this may influence one's identity or feelings of self-worth.

Meaningful work can also represent or reflect one's values and desire to contribute to society. A change in values in mid-life can drive or encourage a

corresponding (or reactionary) change in career to somehow match those newly discovered and articulated values. Individuals may enact a work transition because they are searching for this integration of values, work, and identity. Throughout the study I retained the term ‘career change’ in those studies that used the term to describe their participants’ work transitions.

Identity

For my study, identity indicated one’s view of oneself, in response to external factors—or in some cases, despite external factors. When a work transition is made, a shift in identity is therefore required. Hayes and Flannery (2000) claims that identity is created around a certain set of social and historical circumstances, and when those circumstances change, so too can our identity. Tisdell (2000) adds that as our understandings begin to change, so does our identity; we increase our capacity for agency, and develop new ways of acting in the world.

As our interests change, we seek new work worlds. A corresponding change in our identity is required. This includes how we define ourselves within our particular work roles. I heavily rely on Newman’s (2006) conception of identity, one that is comprised of an indefinite number of different, matching, opposing, intersecting and separate concepts of self. An individual, in effect, inhabits different personalities in each of his or her different roles—a dual consciousness, or being two selves simultaneously (Newman, 2006). When a society offers little or no stability or continuity—whether for economic or other reasons—a person ceases to have any predominant self at all and becomes instead a flock of Others, open to continual definition and redefinition (Newman, 2006).

Learning Event

My use of the term learning event relies on a person's having had a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). And although Mezirow's theory includes a disorienting dilemma, one is not always required in order to be a learning event. A learning event is merely one that leads a learner to question prior understandings about the subject matter and/or oneself. Other learning events may lead to acquiring new skills—an important matter in work transitions. However, for the purposes of my study, a learning event is one that leads to a progression of questioning one's prior identity, and then adding to or altering one's current identity, creating a sense of self one has not previously experienced.

For further discussion of the three terms, see Chapter 2.

Trustworthiness of Study

Phenomenological studies depend on the passion of the researcher for the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Because I have experienced various work transitions in my own life, I could bring background understandings that assisted me in making sense of participants' experiences (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). My vantage point may have been more helpful than that of an objective outsider in that I may have been better equipped to elicit responses from participants, and direct the content of the interviews.

Although my study was heuristic, I did not include my own experiences in discussions with my participants until after the interviews were completed. My interviews were loosely structured, and at times became the informal conversational interview that Moustakas (1990) suggests is most useful for a heuristic inquiry. I

primarily asked questions of participants, and only later did I share my own experiences of work transition. By bracketing my own personal experiences of work transition and identity reconstruction in this way, I could better develop trust with the participants.

That is, if participants suspected I was in a relationship and they were not, they might be hesitant about sharing details of their single-life experiences. Similarly, if I shared my work transition successes, participants may be hesitant about sharing their transition failures. For this reason, I chose to only reveal my own experiences after the interview process was completed. In addition, I may have been inclined to look for similarities or solutions to my own situation in the participants' stories. To address this, I employed bracketing by re-reading the interview transcripts, and allowing the participants to do the same, in order to clarify areas where I may have been tempted to insert my own views (van Manen, 1997).

In phenomenological research, the research question is the focus and therefore every word must be deliberately chosen and ordered in such a way that the primary words appear immediately (for example, using the term, "particular single women"). This wording assured that there was no misunderstanding. The original conception of phenomenology set by Moustakas (1994) notes that the words should guide and direct me in the process of seeing, reflecting, and eventually, knowing. The question must have both social meaning and personal significance; in my instance, work transitions and the subsequent reordering (or learning) of one's identity must be interesting and important not only to me. The topic must also have relevance to adult education practitioners and theorists.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and overview of the study of work and identity. In chapter 2, I review the theoretical perspectives including transformative learning as proposed by Mezirow (1991). Chapter 2 also includes a literature review of theoretical and empirical studies on the topics relevant to my study, including adult development, identity in work and career, mid-life age range, and singleness. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology I used, as well as how I elicited the themes. Chapter 4 explains participants' experiences with work transitions and identity formation. In Chapter 5, I explain how the themes of participants' experiences relate to the literature. In Chapter 6, I offer suggestions for further research as well as how my topic relates to and enriches the field of adult education.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Perspectives and Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical lenses which were used to frame my study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the theory of transformative learning, especially as noted by Mezirow (2000). I also include an examination of various theories of meaningful work. Meaningful work and the search for it can influence decision-making during transition periods. Finally, I will discuss feminist theory as it relates to the field of adult education.

Forming and maintaining an adult identity can constitute a continual struggle in an ambivalent world (Cote 2000). Failure to form an adult identity may result in inauthenticity, or an inability to be true or authentic to oneself or to one's situation. Those who exercise power over others often foster this climate of inauthenticity (Jarvis, 1995). The goal, then, of identity formation in one's career is to remain flexible to society's demands on us, while not forfeiting our personal self interest and our investment in ourselves.

Greller and Stroh realized in 1995 that although research on career change had increased, there was still much that was unknown about women's career change, especially as studied within a lifespan context. Even current research does not adequately study this particular group and especially neglects to study the single woman at mid-life as she encounters a work transition. To foster a feeling of competence on the job, and to have adequate feelings of self-efficacy, an individual may need to form an identity that is

associated with one's career. The formation of identity encompasses several aspects of adult learning, critical reflection, transformational learning theory, and adult development theories. It should be noted that this literature survey is tentative and reflects the researcher's conceptual perspective. Since research is a permanent process of change as new data emerge, this literature review is meant only as a means to clarify my conceptual perspective.

Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow's seminal work (1978) included what he termed perspective transformation, a structural reorganization in the way that an individual looks at oneself and one's relationships. Perspective transformation resembles the reorganizing and renegotiating of one's identity that occurred in the experiences of my study participants. Mezirow's original (1975) study of eighty-three women returning to college in twelve different reentry programs was the basis for his process of personal perspective transformation. This process includes ten phases (Cranton, 2006):

- Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
- Undergoing self-examination
- Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations
- Relating discontent to the similar experiences of others and recognizing that the problem is shared
- Exploring options for new ways of acting
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- Planning a course of action

- Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action
- Trying out new roles and assessing them
- Reintegrating into society with the new perspective.

Cranton (2006) also notes that more recent notions of transformative learning focus on questioning the assumptions and expectations that make the dilemma disorienting.

We can use transformative learning theory to help answer the questions, “Who am I?” as well as, “What is real?” (Jackson, 2008). Asking this question represents what Mezirow (2000) terms a disorienting dilemma. This unsettling feeling leads one onto the process that helps us to rethink our basic cultural assumptions—to use critical reflection. Jackson (2008) terms worldview as that lens we use to comprehend what we see and know of our outside environment. This worldview is affected or created by our various descriptors: ethnicity, race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. Ultimately critical reflection would lead to rational discourse (Taylor, 1998), and possibly to making life changes.

Jackson (2008) described a three-step process for accomplishing transformative learning. In step one, the learner realizes that his or her assumptions are inadequate to explain or understand new facts as they occur in our lives. The second step involved creating or contemplating possible alternative assumptions. These new assumptions will form a coherent and more logical system of thought; in effect, they will form our new worldview. Finally, the learner will be able to demonstrate that by using this new model of thought (and being), the original problems are no longer problems and are no longer problematic. The learner can also use this new worldview to solve current problems that lead to real solutions.

For the purposes of my study, I will focus on Mezirow's (2000) theory of Transformative Learning, which was formed in order to accommodate what he saw as a lack in addressing the needs of adult learners. Transformative learning begins with a critical reflection of assumptions that had previously been taken for granted. In this way, new learning can be accommodated and integrated. Through the learning process, the individual also gains a new perspective on himself or herself—a creation of a new identity. This new identity is able to absorb and integrate the new knowledge gained at the end of the critical reflection process.

Critical Reflection & Transformative Learning Theory

Many of our beliefs are generalized from repetitive interactions that lie outside our consciousness (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Becoming critically reflective is a premise common in both instrumental and communicative learning, involving both reasoning and intuition (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Mezirow's (1998) conception of transformation theory maintains that human learning is grounded in the nature of communication, and is intended to understand the intentions, values, moral issues and feelings of those involved. Such an understanding requires critical reflection—of the sender's motives, and also of those motives that have influenced how we ourselves receive the message. Transformative learning in a career decision would involve several cultures: the workplace culture, the family, the community, the capitalist system, all of which influence the decisions we ultimately make.

In a work transition situation, an individual must be able to analyze various factors that led to choosing the previous career. This investigation can inform the choice of a more appropriate and fulfilling second career. As we peel away those layers of

influence—parental, societal, financial, emotional, etc.—that led us to a faulty or no longer fulfilling or meaningful career, we can see more clearly who we have become in the intervening time frame.

Reflecting on our history--on how we came to choose our primary career, and on what led us to our new career--can help us to learn from and make meaning of our history, in order to become empowered. The basis for understanding these processes is Mezirow's (2000) theory of transformative learning. Transformative learning occurs when an individual uses critical reflection to challenge his or her ways of seeing the world. Critical reflection is a process of reviewing and possibly challenging our previous assumptions about our learning, beliefs, and ourselves.

As we replace the beliefs that are no longer relevant or useful in our lives, we free ourselves from the constraints that our external environment imposed on us. We can then become freed from the forces that limit our options and our control over our own lives. New truths replace those beliefs that we had previously taken for granted as being truth, or "common sense." Our assumptions may have been taken for granted because they were our basis for reality in childhood. Having no other prior experiences or personal authority, we had no other means of organizing or understanding our perception of reality. We assumed our way of viewing the world was the only option, even though our perspective may not have been beneficial.

Although this type of learning may be difficult and painful, it is only through critical reflection and the resulting emancipatory learning that reintegration, reorientation, and finally, equilibrium can occur. In terms of my study, this manifests as one learns or reconstructs the new identity as a result of the transition to, and within the new career.

Through the learning process, we gain an ability to act in the world in a different way than we had previously; we learn to create a new identity of and for ourselves.

The first phase of the transformative learning process is a questioning of our previously-unexamined assumptions and our ways of organizing the meaning of our experiences. From Mezirow's early emphasis on a disorienting dilemma as the catalyst for critical reflection, the development of transformational learning has grown to include other aspects of the human experience: emotions, religious experience and spirituality, bodily sensations, unconscious material, and group interaction in adult learning (Taylor, 1998; Cranton & Roy, 2003; Taylor and O'Sullivan, 2004; McGregor, 2004, Tisdell, 2003; Ettlign, 2006). Learners need to consider all aspects of their experience when receiving new information. When we encounter something that runs counter to our belief system, all of these facets of our being experience what Mezirow (2000) terms a disorienting dilemma.

This disorienting dilemma may take the form of a realization that life experiences and relationships are changing and becoming confusing. The individual could then act on those incorrect assumptions by enacting a change in behavior, thinking patterns, or identity. In terms of my study, taking these steps could more effectively lead to better, more clear and informed career decision-making for the second career choice. Ultimately, though, the learner must decide whether to take action, or to merely adapt and conform to the old assumptions. Taking action makes it possible for the individual to integrate the new information and perspectives into a new identity.

Although the disorienting dilemma has taken on a negative connotation, it may hold hidden benefits. For example, in Berger's (2004) study, some participants, when

they were on the edge of their knowing, said the experience felt exciting and energizing. In the study, many people had difficulty articulating how they felt (Berger, 2004). When we assign a negative meaning to this disorienting dilemma, and also do not allow individuals to explain their experience, we lose vital knowledge about transitions and the learning they can encourage.

Mezirow (2000) contends that meaning perspectives are a product of how we see ourselves. Therefore a distorted assumption will lead the learner to view reality in a way that arbitrarily limits what is included, and does not facilitate an integration of experience. Looking at our assumptions in a critical manner allows us the freedom to create new paradigms for living and working. This is the stage when critical thinking enters. Although he revised his original theory, Mezirow's view of transformational learning is comparatively personal; the individual makes personal adjustments solely on a psychological level.

Cranton (2006) says that critical self-reflection is not an automatic reaction to a disorienting dilemma; people respond in different ways based on one's particular station in life. She adds that the reaction to a disorienting dilemma also depends on one's psychological makeup. For example, a person with a preference for the feeling function may be more in tune with their environment and the reactions of others; and those who have a preference for thinking have strong principles and points of view that are not easily shaken (Cranton, 2006). In addition, intuitive persons are likely to respond enthusiastically to the possibility and opportunities inherent in change; one with a dominant sensing function may be more easily shaken by a transition experience or disorienting dilemma situation (Cranton, 2006).

Persons who have a natural internal strength may welcome transition experiences; however individuals may not recognize their strengths during transition periods.

Although Mezirow's (2000) also leans toward this acknowledging of our weakness, his enacting of a personal struggle to surpass our circumstances may not always be possible for individuals in transition. In addition to being sensitive to the personal traits of learners, educators must also acknowledge the lack of resources that learners may have at their disposal to understand their experiences.

The influence of Western culture and its rapid social change may inhibit learners from perceiving their particular strengths. As traditional authority structures have become weakened, such rapid social change can manifest as career dissatisfaction. Ideally the outcome would be toward self-reflection, and toward what Mezirow originally (1991) deemed the most significant learning, critical reflection of premises about oneself. With the insight gained, learners can begin to see their life and career from a new perspective.

The educator can create a transformative learning environment by adhering to Mezirow's original (1990) tenet of ensuring that participants have full information; are free from coercion; can assume various roles; are empathetic; and are able to be critically reflective of assumptions. In addition, educators can recognize the power inherent in interactions in the classroom, and learn to work with that power (Cranton, 2006). Both Mezirow (2000) and Taylor (2000) have revised their concept of the disorienting dilemma as a single, dramatic event; it could also be a gradual cumulative process. And Dirkx (2000) describes transformative learning as more often a process of everyday occurrences rather than a single, pivotal event.

Critiques of Mezirow's theory point to the emphasis it placed on the theoretical component. To address this, researchers could employ quantitative methods to promote greater reliability in identifying the components of the transformative learning process (Taylor, 1998). In addition, they could observe and record a learning experience as it is actually happening (rather than relying on recollections and interviews alone) and then offer more in-depth critiques of their research findings (Taylor, 1998).

There may not be one correct or ideal way of experiencing transformative learning; many social and environmental factors could be involved in the process. Mezirow's original (1991) emphasis on ideal conditions denies the group the benefit of dissonance and conflict. Freire (1972a.) claimed that conflict could be positive; it changes our understanding and consciousness when we are illuminated in real historical conflicts. If educators could modify these ideal conditions, they may be able to create transformative learning situations more easily.

One modification may be to recognize the developmental differences of an ideal learning situation. For example, Neuman (1996) found that critical capacity is based on other developmental changes in a personal life—changes that perhaps do not fit neatly into Mezirow's conception of an ideal condition. Recognizing factors other than, or in addition to, those Mezirow proposes would enable educators to more effectively advise learners as to how to enact a change in their life situations.

The authority of the discourse group

Although Mezirow (2000) minimally addresses power structures in the process of critical reflection, he does not place enough emphasis on power and societal factors. Nonetheless, his theory is still useful as a starting point to examining one's career

choices. The initial perspective transformation based on individual factors—the factors that are within the individual’s limited scope at the time of transition—can gradually grow into a questioning of larger, societal notions of career change. The adult educator (as well as the discourse group) can guide learners into questioning ever widening circles of their existence.

However, according to Mezirow (2000), our own (or others’) truth is not to be trusted until proved correct or logical by a group of (authority) experts in the discourse group; and, we are to be critically reflective of both their assumptions as well as our own. Collard & Law (1989) question how one is to recognize those who have a more critical awareness; and what process one should use to identify the psycho-cultural assumptions that shape one’s experiences. The final truth that is decided by these experts (or discourse group) has been affected by their own social and cultural contexts of group’s participants.

Mezirow (2000) gives many prerequisites for forming a healthy discourse group: Allow for a wide range of views, but also allow for dissension; ideally a best judgment is based on the broadest consensus possible, even though consensus is not always feasible; feelings of trust solidarity, security and empathy are essential for free full participation. However, the honesty one feels able to contribute, the power one feels safe to exhibit, and the amount of energy one feels willing to contribute to the group will vary with each person, each topic of discussion, and each setting that includes an instructor. Mezirow seems to rely heavily on a discourse group, without specifically stating that the majority opinion may always be an influence as to which answer or viewpoint is considered the consensus.

Our choice of judges for validation is also based on our contextual assumptions. Mezirow (1998) conceded that sometimes there is no consensus or empirical tests of validation possible, even after a thorough stint in the discourse group. When this occurs, we either agree to live with our differences, or we look to established forms of authority to justify our point of view. We are, in effect, taking back our assumptions that we have just examined and attempted to discard.

Mezirow gives examples of some of our established forms of authority—for example, the military, social tradition, and the church. However, we must also include in this list of authority figures those whose opinions we claim as superior—even if they derive from the discourse group. Those authority figures may also constrain our assumptions, albeit in a more insidious way than do the overt and established forms of authority. Their covert nature makes us less likely to critically examine them.

As we idealize the authority figure, we retain our unexamined assumptions; although in the processing of our acceptance of those authority figures, we are in effect examining our perspectives. Mezirow never really escapes from this reliance on an authoritative, rational justification for our new beliefs and points of view. For him, there must always be someone (based on an absolute image of rightness) to approve our new beliefs as being correct. That would cause our new insights to be just as tainted as those we have left unexamined. Unexamined, unconscious assumptions do not require an authority to validate them; it is only the examined assumptions that require validation.

Mezirow (2000) suggests acknowledging such values as freedom, equality, tolerance, social justice, and rationality as essential norms for free full participation. He leaves out aspects like intuition, spirituality, and other more individualized notions of

values. I would add, in addition, that certain cultures, as Mezirow (2000) mentions briefly, have different notions of encouraging critical reflection and discourse. Therefore, some students may remain silent due to their cultural understandings of participation in these values-laden learning environments. So, a true assessment of the discourse outcome may never be achieved.

Power

Perhaps the most controversial issue concerning Mezirow's theory is its relationship—or lack thereof—to power and social action (Collard & Law, 1989; Cunningham, 1992, 1993; Hart, 1990 and Newman, 1993, 1994). Newman (1993), for instance, criticized Mezirow for his emphasis on an individual who examines his own personal experience, and then reintegrates back into that experience without questioning the dominant ideology. State and government job-search organizations also regularly emphasize the individual and his or her choices or deficits. Rarely is there an examination of larger societal factors, for example: why there are not more opportunities available for skilled (or even un-skilled) workers; or why, once employed, women may not receive equal compensation as men; or what factors are causing businesses to not invest in certain geographical areas.

These organizations seem to be more concerned with training and development of the worker, and not with emancipatory education for the worker. However, emancipatory education is characterized by inherent social and political action—action that would not only help an individual to find a “perfect fit” job, but also empower that individual in areas other than the workplace. The worker is not merely a collection of skills available at all times to the employer. Instead, he or she is an informed, active, contributing

member of the community—a larger community that also encompasses the workplace.

We as educators need to develop a skill for detaching from everyday thinking and learn how to act in ways that are not ideologically predetermined (Brookfield, 2005). We as individuals and as educators can develop a moral consciousness that is of a higher stage than that which exists in the institutions of our society (Cranton, 2006). This social aspect of transformational learning is not relegated to the post-learning event: it can precede and even influence the transformational learning, as in the case of unbearable social conditions provoking transformative learning (Weissner, 2000). Still, though, Mezirow (2000) maintains that learning can be the acquiring of new or added knowledge without calling into question any of our assumptions or beliefs. Without the examination of our assumptions, we cannot wholly be free from personal and social constraints; therefore we are not able to develop awareness and development (Cranton, 2006).

Although I agree with Hart (1990) that Mezirow's conceptions of power in his theory are somewhat lacking, I think the theory is still useful as a starting point for guiding individuals into the process of questioning their assumptions. There must be a beginning point, in order for learners to see how the larger environment ultimately affects them. However, by immediately addressing issues of power, learners may become confused, upset, or averse to the educational event altogether. Some learners will therefore require a gradual adjustment to the transformation process. A sudden reversal of all a learner has held as truth may be too overwhelming, especially during the period of transition and upheaval inherent in some work transition situations. Granted, adult educators must enlighten learners as to the influence that society and power structures have on our lives. But ultimately the educator must provide a supportive, trusting, and

safe environment for the learner. This environment is created by treading slowly and lightly at first.

Mezirow's explanation for the dearth of political and social emphasis in his theory is his belief that there are different types of transformation, social or political action being only one of many possible outcomes. Tennant (1994) defends Mezirow's theory, stating that Mezirow does not place an importance solely on the individual; instead, his theory represents an intersection of the individual and the social. However, Tennant (1994) thinks that Mezirow does not give enough attention to how social forces shape the individual. In a career and self-evaluation search, it is the ability to peel away the influences of these social forces that may enable one to focus on core values and goals. From there, an individual can make more individualized and fulfilling career choices.

In critical self-reflection on assumptions (CSRA), we look at the assumptions that are the specific reasons for our limitations. But how can we know for sure what our specific assumptions are? Can some assumptions be and remain hidden from us? If we question our social contexts, we necessarily must also question ourselves and our identity. We must ponder who we have become because of our social contexts, and for whose purposes society has created us.

In this view, it seems that we are always passive; that we have no control over who or what creates or shapes us and our identity. It is almost as though we need a discourse group to help us be logical, because up to that point, we are solely intuitive and unaware individuals who are at the mercy of authority figures. The theory does not fully address this powerlessness that people supposedly naturally possess (both before, and, as it turns out, after critical reflection occurs). But if transformative learning is to be truly

emancipatory, then this prior powerlessness should be made more explicit, and a need for emancipation outlined. Emancipation of why we are, or have come to be, powerless, would make transformative learning more credible as a tool for empowerment and emancipation.

Other ways of knowing

Mezirow's early writings had defined action in transformative learning as merely making a decision, whether or not there is an immediate corresponding change in behavior. Mezirow (2000) has since stated that there must be a corresponding action to a disorienting dilemma. The reasons Mezirow gave in 1989 writings for not taking action included psychological implications, and an absence of required skills. These facets, however, may be the very things we should have already overcome through our process of perspective transformation.

Mezirow seemed to imply that there are some assumptions that we cannot overcome. There are some assumptions that are impossible to critically examine, because they remain forever hidden from our awareness because of psychological processes such as repression or denial. However, without an acknowledging of an intuitive or inexplicable force within each learner, Mezirow's theory seems inadequate to address such deep structures within a learner's experience. There are no available tools with which to draw out such hidden impulses or beliefs.

Learning has been seen as an individual process, regardless of group or discussion work used in teaching methods (Cranton, 2006). Traditional learning theory focuses on the individual person, not that person learning in and from relationships with others (Cranton, 2006). Our Western society values this individualism, and it affects every

aspect of our life, including how we think about learning (Cranton, 2006; Brookfield, 2005). Some progress has been made beginning with Gardner, Kornhaber, and Wake's (1996) multiple intelligences, and Goleman's (1998) emotional intelligence. Even though programs and workplace education explain how to work together in teams, the emphasis is still on the individual's learning, and not his or her learning in relation to others (Cranton, 2006).

Other theorists emphasize relational or connected learning (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Tisdell, 2000a, 2000b). These writers propose that women tend to learn differently—they learn through relationship with others, and by connecting with each other (Belenky and Stanton, 2000). They maintain that Mezirow presumes relationships of equality, especially in discourse situations, but in reality most human relationships are asymmetrical; this has serious consequences, especially for women (Cranton, 2006).

A more inclusive approach is integrative thinking (Cranton, 2006), culled from Belenky's well-known earlier research (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Belenky and Stanton (2000) drew on that early research to create six developmental stages of knowing for women. They are silenced knowers; received knowers; subjective knowers; separate knowers; connected knowers; and constructivist knowers. The distinction between separate and connected knowing has the greatest implications for transformative learning theory (Cranton, 2006). Connected knowers do not look for flaws in logic in order to create knowledge; rather they suspend judgment in an effort to understand others' point of view from that person's perspective—in effect, they seek to see holistically, and not analytically (Cranton, 2006).

The original reliance on an outside source for validity of our own thoughts and

feelings reflects the way Mezirow diminishes a learner's innate, indigenous (intuitive) way of validating his or her beliefs. Mezirow (2000) does eventually reluctantly acknowledge intuition as a force for knowing, but he posits it as a personality trait, one that each person chooses to use at different times. Thus, the insights that come solely through this means are not, according to Mezirow (2000), transformations of frames of references as he defines them. This oversight or prejudicial stance further limits an available and innate resource available to all learners. Such a mindset also further discourages certain learners (especially men) from accessing this source of learning and understanding.

For Mezirow (2000), validation must come from a source outside ourselves. He suggests that we gradually find ever larger and more diverse groups of participants who can, and want to, validate our beliefs for us. This may place the individual in a powerless situation, as he or she waits to be given a certain definition of reality. It would follow that his or her identity relies on being similarly validated by an outside source. These outside sources may be the power structures that Mezirow does not directly address. Although he does stress the importance of the individual, he betrays a profound emphasis on a required social shaping by the discourse group. The individual who undergoes a transformation seems like more of a product of the social context more than Mezirow seems to acknowledge.

Mezirow (2000) maintains that we can critically learn about our lives when we see the extent to which our instinctual feelings and automatic emotional responses to situations are socially learned. Midlife often brings a shift in perspective, accompanied by questions such as, "Am I in a job I really enjoy?" and "Does the kind of work I do

reflect my values?" (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). A further clarification (or reconstruction) of one's values may ensue, leading one to question all kinds of ideas (Mezirow and Associates, 2000).

Mezirow (2000) does acknowledge that such questioning may make adults feel extremely vulnerable, especially if the values they had created and adhered to for many years are not found to be inadequate, unsatisfactory, or unworkable. However, he largely discounts the importance of emotions in helping us to navigate the threatening and emotionally charged experience of transformation (Taylor, 1998). Feelings may be the very impetus to prompting one to critically reflect on life situations. In the studies involving emotions in the transformative learning process, there is little talk of the guilt, fear, abandonment, or uncertainty surrounding a transformation. Instead, theorists seem to say that transformative learning naturally leads to self-confidence in the new roles and relationships (Taylor, 1998). But without acknowledging the interim emotions, an educator will be unprepared for the effects of her attempt to facilitate transformative learning situations.

Taylor (1998) maintains that a more in-depth study of emotions could lead to understanding why all disorienting dilemmas do not lead to transformative learning, and whether our perspectives continue to change, regress, or remain static. Educators facilitating a self-evaluation search should have a working knowledge of group dynamics, organization development, conflict resolution strategies, and an understanding of personality types. This safe environment would help learners to trust the process and appreciate the outcomes of transformational learning.

Although Mezirow's theory was based more on rationality and logical thought,

others (Taylor, 1998; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Collard & Law, 1989) have commented that this is not enough. We also must recognize a spiritual dimension to the learning process, a dimension that can permeate the learner's whole self (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). This kind of learning increases one's sense of power to make a difference and to act in the world, and leads to a greater sense of purpose and meaning (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). Some authors have said that spirituality even can help to create a community (hooks, 2003; Palmer, 1998).

Spirituality draws one toward a sense of greater authenticity, or a more authentic identity (Tisdell, 2003). The term, "metanoia" describes this "change of heart," about one's view of him- or herself and the world (Tisdell, 2003). Such a move toward authenticity represents a changed perspective, or having a sense that one is operating from a sense of self that is self-defined as opposed to being defined by other people's expectations (Tisdell, 2003). When one has grounding in one's own spirituality, there is a greater sense of embracing an identity more congruent with who one is (Tisdell, 2003). This knowledge of oneself seems imperative in finding one's calling, vocation, or at least one's own notion of what is meaningful work.

Neurologist and author Antonio Damasio (1999) wrote that rational ideas are better learned and understood if they are anchored in one's entire being; otherwise they are stored as short-term facts to be forgotten after a test. Engaging another dimension, the spiritual, will increase the chances that new knowledge is actually constructed, thus having the potential to be transformative (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). As educators, it is our responsibility to demonstrate authenticity and openness, and also to help learners to trust in their own spirituality and rely on it as an aid to learning.

As Tolliver & Tisdell (2006) note, many adults explain that spirituality is a major organizing principle that gives their lives meaning and informs their life choices. In order to truly integrate new learning—and by extension, new identity—we must acknowledge and honor this sense of spirituality in our lives and in our learning. Often the transformation of meaning schemes that Mezirow (2000) spoke of naturally connects to the spiritual and can lead to transformation on either individual, or sociocultural levels. Hart (2000) discussed that evolutionary consciousness is grounded in spirituality—I add that this is in contrast to organized religion per se, which acts as a power structure; whereas one's individual sense of spirituality is more intuitive and personally informing.

Spirituality is important in understanding power in social change. Abalos (1998) talks of reclaiming the four faces of one's being—the personal, political, historical, and sacred. Although he writes of transformative learning for culturally marginalized communities, the process is helpful for any learner. Spirituality for Abalos (1998) is affected by and created by one's community, and should reflect a celebrating of that community. When learners share their experiences from all four integrated faces, other learners can begin to see from multiple perspectives (Abalos, 1998). This spiritual involvement and broadened perspective promotes greater creativity (Wuthnow, 2001).

It may be that spirituality is the force that fosters critical reflection, as spirituality represents not only positive understandings, but also struggle and confrontation of the more shadowy aspects of human existence (Bennett, 2003; Fenwick, 2001). To ignore this facet of learning is to effectively withhold vital information or solutions from learners, and keeps educators in the role of gatekeeper, furthering the power differential between learner and instructor.

Dirkx (2006) explains that critical reflection, as described by Mezirow as central to transformative learning, calls into question and invites exploration of alternative ways of being-in-the-world. Learners make explicit, and then reflect on their assumptions; this process may elicit various emotions, such as guilt, fear, shame, a sense of loss, or general anxiety (Dirkx, 2006). Further, Dirkx does not think that the process of Mezirow's critical reflection language seems well suited to working with unconscious processes and dynamics. A better way is to communicate through images, which would enable us to see beyond the learner's literal concerns and understand their underlying and deeply emotional issues (Dirkx, 2006). Ultimately, whichever process or mindset we choose to utilize in the educational setting, we must remember that the educational experience is never value neutral (Ettling, 2006). The position, perspectives, and power of the instructor are always present in the classroom (Ettling, 2006).

Conclusion

Given these drawbacks to Mezirow's theory of Perspective Transformation, it still is useful in a discussion of work transition and identity reconstruction. The theory does account for and engage the change in perspective (including one's identity) that occurs when one makes a work transition. Many factors that contributed to our initial or primary career choice become constraints if they inhibit growth and integration of new information and experiences. The educator who challenges, stimulates, and provokes critical thinking is also fostering emancipatory learning (Cranton, 2006). As learners reformulate and then validate the meaning of their experiences, they grow aware of how and why their assumptions have constrained them and influenced their decisions.

Transformative learning occurs when we ultimately judge our premises to be distorting, inauthentic, or invalid. Mezirow's theory is effective as a framework for self-examination and for implementing change. And, his theory is useful especially as concerns mid-life career change—a time when one's employment options and opportunities may not reflect one's growing and changing values and beliefs. Next we will examine what constitutes meaningful work to us, and how we align that definition with a new set of values we have recently transformed.

Theories about Meaningful Work

Vocation or Calling

One of the most compelling struggles of the adult's life is the struggle to be something more than the person others have made—that is, to construct and then live up to a set of our own expectations (Daloz, 1986). This set of personal expectations can be interpreted as having a spiritual dimension, encouraging us to acknowledge and then follow our particular “calling” that is assigned to, or meant for, only us. One's identity is indicated within one's calling or vocation, as according to Jung, the self “calls” the individual to his or her vocation (Green, 2003). The idea of work as a vocation includes social-psychological and spiritual dynamics in shaping the character of the person to fit the dispositions required to live out that vocation (Daloz, 1986).

To actualize one's vocational call, one must develop a progressive life strategy which is congruent with the spiritual ideals, inspirations and functional concerns of the vocation (Zirlott, 1999). One of the obstacles to achieving such work/self integration is the ego centered concept that runs throughout adult development theories, namely those of Erikson (1950), and Levinson, et al. (1978). Adults need some radical event to break

into their lives to disengage the egoic illusions of the solitary achieving egos—perhaps something like Mezirow’s disorienting dilemma, a trauma, or some other crisis occurring at mid-life. The resulting openness will serve to emphasize the whole person, and can widen our potential for meaning-making. Green (2003) cites one’s calling as a journey of individuation that is too great for the conscious personality; the experience is therefore retained in the form of images with symbolic meaning.

Popular literature acknowledges that one’s vocation represents a congruency between an individual’s understanding of who they are—their identity—and how that relates to their soul’s expression at work (Klein and Izzo, 1999; Levoy, 1997). From Watson’s (2001) study, authenticity was one of the ways the soul manifests outward expression. Four themes were related to the forces that animate and deepen the soul's essence from within: trust and integrity, courage, creativity, and passion/meaningful work. Given this relationship, further study would examine the ethical implications of organizations using soul as a management tool to increase worker productivity and profitability (Watson, 2001).

Vocation, as Kierkegaard considered this ideal, was explicitly religious and included a "conversion" with the goal of alleviating the temporal suffering of others (Green, 2003). Answering one’s calling could therefore also lead to a social awareness rather than a matching of one’s skills and interests. What results from following one’s call, then, would be a sense of one's interconnectedness to humanity and the wider cosmos (Green, 2003). For Nietzsche, being "called" to serve others requires freedom from resentment and learning to love complacently (Green, 2003). Neufeld’s (2004) study examined and challenged how concept of "vocation" can be experienced and

utilized in an ethical way in our increasingly depersonalized and technologized postmodern world. The event of being called to a certain vocation, and the process that ensues foster personal healing, as the ego's relationship to the greater Self is re-organized (Green, 2003). It is only after we connect with our self or higher identity, that we are free and feel compelled to serve our society.

In Scott's (1999) study, Christian faith provided an identity that shaped the way people thought about their work; in addition, their faith was therapeutic in helping them deal with difficulties at work. In the study, conservative women said that motherhood is their most important "work," yet they were also most likely to feel called to their paid work. Qualitative analysis suggests that conservative women use "calling" as a legitimization for paid work--a role which their religious gender beliefs de-emphasize. The study further shows that religion influences production by shaping the construction of meaningful work, as well as decisions about work and family.

Greene (1999) used the stage model of development to study women in mid-life who became Episcopal women priests. For these women, pragmatism and spirituality combined, and their values and relationships remained relatively consistent throughout their lives. Lips-Wiersma's (1999) study revealed a spiritual component that is related to one's calling, or meaningful work, and examined whether this spirituality determined work behavior. Lips-Wiersma (1999) argues that the concept of meaning-making is central to spirituality, and has three core elements, namely purpose, sense-making and coherence.

The findings of Lips-Wiersma's (1999) study show that spiritual belief strongly determines career choice, transition and experience. The research participants shared

four purposes, 'developing and becoming self', 'union with others', 'expressing self' and 'serving others'. When individuals are able to express these purposes fully, then the workplace becomes aligned with spiritual beliefs. The study also found that career transitions are made through an ongoing sense-making process as a result of which the individual may decide that the four purposes are no longer in balance and action is required in order to continue to live meaningfully. This sense making is a result of ongoing interaction between the individual and his or her work environment. Coherence resulted from an individual feeling that his or her work is aligned with a bigger (divine) plan.

Horn (2006) studied seven individuals who ranged in age from their forties through their mid-sixties and who were either self-employed or had high autonomy in their jobs. Meaningful work depended on having an integrated life. Horn also wanted to know how and in what ways meaning in one's work would impact the gestalt of an individual's life. Seven universal themes emerged: a metasystemic approach to life; an openness to significant life events that dissolves fear; a pioneering and non-linear approach to life; a diverse constellation of skills; appreciation for and development of a wide breadth of knowledge across multiple disciplines (often combined with the wide constellation of skills to pioneer or create new skills and knowledge); creative expression as reflective practice; and a deep connection to spirit.

The individuals in Horn's (2006) study had so integrated their lives that meaning in work was an integral aspect of their lives. They in turn created new meaning and new skills for themselves and others. In addition, these individuals will leave an organization in order to become self-employed in order to create a fully integrated life. Religion or

spirituality in work had been found related by Max Weber, although he predicted a diminishing importance of religion with the modernization of Western societies (Scott, 1999). In light of the recent research, it seems the opposite is happening. In addition, although there have been mixed results in empirical research in this area, the research has often excluded women (Scott, 1999).

When we follow our calling, we not only find our identity, but we also foster positive adult development that can continue into midlife and beyond (Fannon, 2007). Fannon's (2007) participants experienced being "called" as being a physical or emotional experience, a spiritual rather than religious guidance. Participation in one's calling gave people feelings of being accepted and welcomed, and gave them a sense of belonging.

Work as Identity: Development, Social Aspects, and Women's Experiences

Career identity is one part of career motivation, with the other three parts being resilience, insight, and identity (London, 1998). As London (1998) explains, career identity directs one's energy and behavior toward a specific set of career goals. Overall, resilience creates the foundation that allows meaningful career insight to develop. Insight, in turn, allows selecting a career direction that uses one's abilities to the fullest. When barriers arise, individuals may be suddenly confused about what is happening and whether they have the ability to meet the demands of the situation. As a result, they may need to change their career identity and insight (beliefs about their career goals and personal strengths and weaknesses). Disillusionment at one's prior career results in a pedagogical entry point for adult education (Lange, 2001).

Also included in career identity definitions are the following: demonstrating job involvement (e.g., working long hours); professional behavior (e.g., describing oneself as

a professional in a particular field); improving one's skills; striving for advancement (e.g., requesting to be considered for a promotion); seeking recognition; trying to lead; and finally, striving for money. Career identity is the extent to which one defines oneself by work. It consists of job, organizational, and professional involvement; and the need for advancement, recognition, and a leadership role.

People who are high in career identity are likely to define themselves by their work, and to be loyal to their employer. Schein (1978, 1990), argued that although a person's initial career choice is based primarily on his or her interests, a stable career identity is formed by young adults over time through the integration of an individual's interests with his or her abilities and values. This happens as they gain a more accurate and stable view of their career identity.

When our work matches our self-concept, we have a job fit and also, by extension, we have created meaningful work. Today's workers have a sense of entitlement to and expectation of meaningful work (Scroggins, 2003). Scroggins' study used various self-concept-job fit tests to find that self-concept-job fit was a significant predictor of meaningful work and also of individuals' intentions to leave the organization.

Another factor that makes formation and maintenance of a stable sense of self is culture change. The nature of society diverts the attention of children and adolescents elsewhere—mainly to short-term, impulse-oriented activities, from which pop culture enterprises generate profits for a new self-interested people (Cote, 2000). Such a rapidly changing culture offers little support for forming an identity (Cote, 2000). Cote (2000) continues that to be effective in the identity markets of modern society, one must first

establish a stable sense of self—one that is bolstered by social and technical skills in a variety of areas. This search for a stable sense of self may appear as a pervasive expressed need for “meaning” in people’s lives (Greene, 1999).

Adult development theories can serve as a guide, rather than a prescription for successful attainment of adulthood. People are increasingly leading lives based on individual preference, as they achieve adulthood gradually, and in different areas of their lives (Cote, 2000). Therefore, the social markers that had indicated achievement of adulthood status may be no longer as relevant. Adults can understand where they may fit into the new cultural standard, and from there, understand where their developmental tasks may lie. Stereotypical interpretations in adult education literature suggest that disillusionment is a natural stage in development, and is symptomatic of a midlife crisis. However, midlife crisis theories do not account for the larger social context that shapes this "psychological" phenomenon; disillusionment involves not only identity but also ethical questions (Lange, 2001).

The relation between work transition and an individual’s identity was studied by Mattes (2003), whose participants’ career change was prompted by an event. These individuals already had a strong sense of identity manifested in resourcefulness, a creative spirit, and a belief system that pulled them toward a more satisfying life. “Meaningful” and “satisfying” were terms that were often used. The career changers felt that the career change would indeed make their lives more satisfying and happier than they currently were. The event cited in Mattes’ (2003) study may have been similar to what Mezirow (2000) terms a disorienting dilemma. This disillusionment expresses itself as the inability to serve one’s greater world through a job and results in alienation and a

lack of wholeness (Lange, 2001). The remedy for the disillusionment is to be found in restorative learning, a dimension of transformative learning (Lange, 2001).

Those who make a work transition may do so because they already have a strong sense of identity (Mattes, 2003). The Identity Formation Phase, although not specifically within meaningful work, was identified as a phase in the career transition process (Schoening, 2009). When individuals claimed their identity within their work, they found or created meaningful work. Such adults may have already been in the process of re-evaluating the meaning of work and self-definition, and felt a need to define a meaningful contribution at work and home (Catsouphe, 1998). Other authors have found that we develop several identities to facilitate career development and to cope with career transitions (Gerstman, 1998). First, though, one has to endure and overcome the turmoil involved in a transition in order to clearly develop any new identities.

A search for meaning often includes the opportunity or drive to serve one's society. The creation or realization of meaningful work may contain this social component, as may responding to one's calling. This process may be in line with women's developmental models. Women reach higher levels of development as they simultaneously form more meaningful connections with others (Spaite, 2004). Women gain their sense of being by continuously forming connections to other people, whereas Erikson's original (1950) hierarchical model aspired toward independence and a more detached, individualized experience. The career and leadership opportunities available to women offer them not only notoriety but also a chance to create for themselves meaningful work (Huss, 2006). Career identity has been linked to male identity development; as such, its importance to female identity formation remains quite limited.

Gender differences emerged from Mattes' (2003) study: women's career paths were circular, not traditional as were men's. Studies such as these on career change and especially on gender differences (and the needs of both genders during and after career transition) are important for companies and employee retention. Employers must be willing to challenge mid-life employees with a creative environment in order to prevent individuals from leaving the company.

Work as Expression of Personal Values

When we can identify with our work, we have the opportunity to use that work to express our personal values. The meaning of work was one body of literature that Modica (2007) used to examine high performers who found their work meaningful. The positive meaning of work drove high performers, satisfying innate psychological needs for purpose, learning, and personal growth. Meaningful work also allowed people to express their personal values through their work. Meaning-of-work theory notes that when we have satisfaction at work and can self-identify with our work and/or the organization, we have a perception of meaningful work (Modica, 2007). Our work can express our values without being termed our "calling" (Edwards, 2005). As long as the work is meaningful, discontent and attrition are reduced; this has implications for the role of continuous learning and outsourcing practices in employees' perceptions of meaningful work (Edwards, 2005).

Krahnke (1999) further studied how work reflects values. When certain key concepts are present, workers find the optimal meaning of work; experimenting and discovering one's essence and being of service to others while doing something we enjoy with both visible and invisible guidance (Krahnke, 1999). Work that enables us to

express our values is important, but so too is being seen and recognized for our values. Being valued for our contributions may lead to meaningful work, even in the face of gender barriers. In Silverthorne's (2002) study, professional women reported that gender discrimination was not a deterrent to professional growth and commitment to careers if the work experience is meaningful.

This could be loosely translated as—if not a change in one's identity—recognition or realization of one's identity as empowered within or because of the crisis situation. Aspects of a changed identity may emerge when an individual is forced to figure out life's real meaning and how to live according to new values and changed perceptions. In the process, control is surrendered and one accepts responsibility for one's life experiences. This may help to further empower the individual: if an individual recognizes his or her part in the creation of past experiences, he or she also may also feel in control about future experiences. Overall, though, individuals must recognize how sociocultural elements such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation have influenced their individual development and career choice (Baumgartner, 2001), as well as their productivity and enjoyment of their work.

Work attaches us firmly to reality; it gives us a secure place in the human community (Freud, 1961). Occupational conditions contribute to the formation of our values, orientation, behavior, identity, and meaning in life. Yet these are the very realities that become distorted and lost during a career transition. Freud's notion of work-as-reality meant a general work-productiveness which would not preoccupy the individual to the extent that he might lose his right or capacity to be a loving being (Erikson, 1963). For some individuals, values include these aspects of relationship and

love.

Both work and love can serve as vehicles for personal identity, and both depend on social interaction. Kacerguis and Adams' (1980) study of 88 men and women dealt with the relationship between intimacy and identity. Advanced ego identity correlated with advanced intimacy development for men and women. Occupational identity predicted intimacy development in both men and women. The study found a clear relationship between one's forming a career identity (and re-forming it, for each career change) and one's ability to accomplish advanced adult developmental tasks.

Work and life/love intersect for certain people, especially during transition stages (Merriam & Clark, 1991). Transitions involve a change of interpretation of our situation—a perspective transformation. Our old perspective will not be effective when attempting to interpret a new set of circumstances, such as functioning in a new career. What individuals most need in these transitional situations is situation learning, with its emphasis on the reflection on experience. As we become better situation learners, we have more choice about what we want life to mean for us, and this ability can be useful at each career transition. This may lead us closer to realizing our purpose within work.

Cote (2000) maintains that identity problems seem to emerge when there are insufficient restraints on behavior and experience. Without adequate structure and guidance (such as may exist when one embarks upon a different career), people tend to be confused or lose their sense of place in society. They then take longer to become “mature” members of the human race. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III--Revised (Perry, et al., 1985), the official publication of the mental health industry, defines identity disorders as subjective distress over an inability to reconcile

aspects of the self into a relatively coherent and acceptable--to self and society--sense of self. This disturbance is manifested as an uncertainty about a variety of issues related to identity, including long term goals, and career choice.

The socially-influenced self-concept is the core that coordinates and manages our ability to design our life career paths (Chen, 1998). The world and the self interact to make us who we think we are. This may explain why a second career choice (at mid-life) may be more realistic and satisfying, because we have noticed how our world has shaped us, and we can discard aspects of that identity based on our deeper knowledge of self.

Internal and external factors were linked to several aspects of identity transition in Spaite's (2004) study. Women endorsed multiple identities—both career and non-career related—that influenced how they adapted and coped with the demands of their training process in the new career. The women defined both hidden and known aspects of their personalities that were crucial to their well-being. Those who were unable to enact their acknowledged identities were negatively affected in their capacity to learn and function during the training process and afterwards. Brewster (2000) found that women who occupied work roles that could accommodate midlife developmental tasks were more likely to stay in their jobs. Women who could not realize aspects of the midlife self (perhaps the authentic self, or integrated self) in their work were more likely to leave their positions in the corporation during this time of transition.

Does this finding reveal that the workplace may guide or inhibit—or at least interfere--with an individual's ability to accomplish various higher developmental stages? And what effect does a rapidly changing workplace have on our development as adults? For example, one study found that women made more radical job changes than did men

(Sterrett, 1996). Women may need to continually reinvent their career identity, do it to a more extreme degree, and do it more often than men do. There is clearly a need for more adult development models that account for this shifting social structure in the world of work and career.

Feminist Theories

Feminist approaches to learning are a way to understand the connection between work transitions and women's learning or re-learning their new identity. Most feminist theorists would agree that feminist theory means "women generating knowledge *about* women and gender *for* women" (Jackson & Jones, 1998, p. 1; italics in original). The end result is social change and an end to societal inequalities. Although there are many schools of feminist thought, they have in common the notion of the self, as it relates to power, voice, and experience (Collins, 1989; Tisdell, 2001).

Alcoff (2000) posits feminism as utilizing women's lives as the model to expose weaknesses in social structures and theories, and forcing the issue of reconstruction. For most feminists, a very elaborate relationship exists between the voice and consciousness among and between women (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Ultimately, feminism encourages women to deconstruct patriarchal narratives, in order to make sense of new ways of learning, knowing and being within society. My study was framed in feminist post-structuralism and its emphasis on the non-unitary self and constantly-shifting identity.

For post-structuralist feminism, there is no coherent, stable, fixed self; instead, it is positioned in social discourse (Foucault, 1980). This contrasts with the notion—especially in career searches—of finding a true career to match one's "true self." This core or unitary self is that proposed by humanistic psychology—a self that can be developed through rational means into an authentic self, as per Carl Rogers' (1956) definition. This core self is coherent, cohesive, and integrated. Conflicts arise when the individual deviates from this core self, or when external circumstances challenge it. Although psychoanalysis would claim that no one can be completely self-aware, learning opportunities exist which can help adults to increase their levels of self-awareness.

The Non-unitary Self and Constantly Shifting Identity

The non-unitary self is defined by Clark (1999) as being consistently challenged by society and is split between an experience and the interpretation of the experience. What a woman feels about herself is not totally in her control; it is largely shaped by her contexts and experiences. As a woman gains experience at challenging her external shaping-forces, she begins to understand how these forces have shaped her notion of self or identity. However, Western culture has limited women's ways of knowing, learning and being (Alcoff, 2000), and therefore also limited her view of her own identity. Women therefore require knowledge of positionality (Tisdell, 2001)--where people are "positioned" based on race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion and so on relative to the dominant culture—to assess and process how their external factors have shaped and continue to shape their identity.

Feminist post structuralism rejects the notion that there is one single truth; just as rationality is not the only way of knowing, so is the linear self not the only way of understanding one's identity. Rather, the non-unitary self is defined as a natural, healthy and fluid sense of self (Ewing, 1990). It is a self that is continually evaluated (constantly changing) as an individual examines or deconstructs the way race, class, sexual orientation, and religion have affected or defined one's identity (Ewing, 1990, Harris, 1996).

Non-unitary notions of self are the key to understanding the meaning that women give of their career choices, challenges, and eventual changes (or non-changes). The unitary self has been reified in adult education (Clark & Dirkx, 2000). In contrast, postmodernism endorses the notion of non-unitary self, a self that is distinctly and

continually affected by social forces. Traditional psychological models urge us to gain strength to oppose external forces, so that the core self can survive. However, this enlightened, highly developed self becomes more and more divorced from society (Tennant, 2000). Given society's time and energy demands made on the individual, there seems little opportunity, or even desire, for education to challenge or question our external society.

Butler (1999) sees identity as a verb; something we do, an ongoing process. Therefore, it is never, or can never be fixed. This stands in opposition to the idea or assignment of finding a true career, one that will best express one's true or core self. Real life examples of externally imposed identity serve to challenge this notion of self: stereotyping is an imposed identity that affects how others treat us, even if we do not agree with the stereotypical identity that has been given to us (Nash, 2005). We then act (or react) to the role assigned us, whether consciously or not. In terms of career, we may choose a career based on our familial socio-economic level, our race, our gender, or other outside influences. Identity is thereby continually constructed not only by ourselves, but also (and maybe especially), by others in our external environment. But, we can use learning to challenge, form, and re-form our relationships with our external environments, and thereby reconstruct our sense of identity (Foley, 1999).

Learning and Women's Identity

Feminist theories in adult education

In order to understand how women create their identity, it is important to understand the ways that women learn and the circumstances that affect their learning. Women's freedom to be independent learners is often constrained by gender inequality;

therefore, their freedom to be independent learners will also always be constrained.

Learning is more than merely gaining knowledge. Our roles and responsibilities, our coping mechanisms, and dealing with challenges, all become part of the learning process. Our experiences help us construct who we are and what we “should” be doing. Gaining knowledge allows us to interpret our past experiences in a new way—and thereby re-define ourselves.

Learning experience occurs on the continuum of previous experience and always brings about personal growth, as we form new perspectives (Dewey, 1938). Learning and experiences help to form our identity. It is the sum of the personal and social consensus of “how do I perceive myself?” and “how do others perceive me?” Through interactions with our environment, our identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed. This notion is part of the anti-essentialist stance that examines gender in social and cultural relationships (Harding, 1996). Women’s locations—geographically, emotionally, socially, physically, etc.—become women’s identities. This is significant to realize in terms of geographical locations, and/or whether employment opportunities exist for women there in certain geographical locales. Place is not independent of learning; it constitutes human behaviors and identities (Harvey, 1992, 1993; Domosh & Seager, 2001; McDowell & Sharp, 1997; McDowell, 1994).

Women’s learning has been described as being relational and connected (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Connected Knowers, as Belenky and Stanton (2000) describe them, try to understand how the other person feels, rather than debate him or her, as in the heart of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. Therefore, it is important to understand the situation that affects women as learners, or those places that organize the social norms

and expectations that regulate one's identity. As individuals give meanings to their particular places, those places influence and help create an identity. This stance assumes personal power to choose which social norms will shape us. Such an act requires awareness of our external shaping forces.

The constructivist notion maintains that even our core self, our essence, is historically constructed (Fuss, 1997). This facet reminds us that to understand women's identity, we also need to look at the social structures from which they emerge (Thompson, 2000). Emphasizing our social contexts does not presuppose that we are incapable of acting on our own behalf, that we are unwitting victims of our society, always at the mercy of others. We are none of those things if we are aware and conscious of those constructs of society that have served to shape our identity thus far. The paradox is that once we realize that our society has shaped us, we become more in control of decision making and choice in our own lives—to direct our identity where we would like it to go. This could imply that our primary career has helped to shape our identity thus far. But when we realize and examine why we chose that career initially, we are ready and able to use more reasonable and informed approach about a second career choice.

Our primary career identity was shaped by a specific history, mindset, emotional climate, and personal story—with or without our knowledge of the underlying workings of our external environment. If we do not examine our outside influences, these unexamined capitalist hierarchies will be naturalized and maintained into an unequal social relationship (Ebert, 1996). An understanding of the power our external environment has had on us can lead us to a more informed, more inclusive career choice. With our choice, we can attempt to satisfy the many identities that have formed since we

made our primary career choice. Satisfying more aspects of our identity will lead, we hope, to more satisfying fit between career and worker.

In this way, I disagree with Stalker (1996)'s stance of women as passive victims of patriarchal society, incapacitated by lack of agency and personal power or consciousness in their learning and living. Women are oppressed, but by gaining awareness of this oppression, they claim power over their situation. True, empowerment needs to occur on a much larger social scale, but it must occur as well in the minds of individual women. Otherwise, there is a danger of relying too much again on outside forces (even if those outside forces are women fighting for women's rights), and thereby further distancing us from ourselves and our personal power. Distancing ourselves from our experience in this way further removes us from our identity.

By examining our social system we can ultimately gain more personal power and choice in career and other decision-making processes. But even as academia approves of women as study subject, and as women gain status and validity as subjects of study, there is still no guarantee that society at large will accept women on this level. Also, as educational systems absorb large numbers of women as students, and as we as educators study women's learning and accommodate them in our programs, there is still no guarantee that the economic society will absorb and accommodate women as equal workers.

It seems that women as learners and women as workers remain separate entities. That is, the linear model of education ideally leads naturally and almost effortlessly to a gainful occupation; but for women this may not be so. This becomes especially pertinent as larger numbers of women are becoming educated, and numbers of employment

opportunities may be dwindling in certain areas. The danger is that we will attribute this scenario necessarily to male-dominated patriarchal society and attack from that stance. Meanwhile, the “real” reasons for the inconsistencies (whether they lie in the system of global economies, personal thinking patterns, feminist infighting, etc.) will go unexamined, unchallenged, and will maintain an unequal status quo system that further denies women status on equal footing.

The Self and Society

We are affected by our interactions with others in regard to our positionality. Positionality refers to the external forces that have shaped the identity that we claim as our own. As it shapes our thinking and acting in the world, it alters our way of seeing our individual identity (Tisdell, 2001). This positionality also affects learning and behavior. Feminist poststructuralism is concerned with the socially constructed nature of our identity around systems of power and privilege (Tisdell, 2001). Our identity is constantly shifting around our understanding of or our consciousness about our own race, gender, class, etc. We gain power as we become ever more conscious of how systems of privilege and oppression shape our identity and behavior. Tisdell (2001) states that our external constructs do not merely shape us as an object, but they also affect what we see, and how we construct meaning.

Foucault (1988) believed that power shapes our “knowledge” of the self. The Freudian view is that knowledge gives us power over the self. The self to Foucault becomes a kind of currency through which power over the mind is defined (Garrick & Solomon, 2001). The “technologies of the self” that Foucault describes, allow us to act on our own bodies and thoughts, and to construct a way of being. Rose (1989) claims

that even though thoughts, actions and feelings may appear as part of the intimate self, they are still socially organized and managed or governed.

The work culture is the governing body in this scenario: the aim is to produce meanings that allow workers to make a contribution to the success of the organization (Garrick & Solomon, 2001). So, the norms of the workplace and the organization shape our sense of self as a good worker; conversely the workplace may infer to us that we are not good workers, and that we need to either work harder or else change careers.

However, the work culture sometimes may be an environment of gender discrimination, as in Eden's (1992) study of women engineers, who chose to change careers not based on the content of, or satisfaction with, engineering. Rather, the workplace environment had become so constricting that the women felt forced to change careers. Similarly, Dingle's (1987) study highlighted gender-related social barriers that caused women to transition from the corporation to become entrepreneurs. In these instances, the work culture inhibited the formation of a new career identity.

The work culture has a built-in rewards system that potentially excluded these women engineers. The reward for compliance or belonging to the culture of the workplace is an enhanced self-image. Society bestows upon us a cycle of self-affirmation or else withholds it from us: our culture directs how we view ourselves. Once we belong to the work culture we get an improved self image, which means a deeper dependence on the workplace (and on career) for our definition of our self-image. That way, the bulk of our self-concept is built on or made up of our work selves. And, since the workplace is where we gain our financial rewards for survival, we gradually learn to put most of our being into that definition of ourselves.

A transition period terminates the existing life structure, and creates the possibility of, or permits space for, a new structure to be developed. Even if there is no change in external circumstances, there is a change that occurs in the meanings that one attaches to one's external circumstances. We reappraise our situation through perspective transformation (Mezirow, 2000), and are led to a new cycle of life, and to further developmental levels (Borysenko, 1996).

Learning in Relationships

Relationship includes the ability to experience, comprehend and respond to the inner state of another person. It represents a high level of psychological development and learning in either gender. In the process of describing and exploring feelings (through or via relationships), one begins to know the other and the self. Relationships make women feel recognized, noticed, and competent. This sense of competence is transferred to other relationships. Reciprocity in relationships leads to self worth, and learning occurs in moving from one's own perspective to another's. Being in a relationship involves the capacity to both identify with a larger self as well as hold the other as part of the self—in effect, to see oneself reflected in another person.

An early explanation of women's development of self was the self-in-relation-theory of Surrey (1985). This self was experienced in a way that was not addressed by psychoanalytical and developmental theories of that time. Women's sense of self was said to be organized around making and maintaining relationships, leading to a strengthened conception of self. For women in transition, this relationality may be more necessary and its effects more pronounced. For example, women in Golia's (2000) study reported that they experienced change as part of an interrelated cluster of change, and not

as a singular event. Change was complex and multilayered, much as their relationships were.

The most predominant effect Golia (2000) found was the way change altered the women's identities; the women became stronger, more confident individuals. Change, in that study was complex, ongoing, and most importantly, nonlinear. This is in direct contrast to traditional theories (Erikson, 1950; Levinson, et al., 1978) of adult development as being linear and sequential. For example, Erikson (1950) held that intimacy comes only after the “closure” of identity; for women, a relational (and ever-changing, ever-forming) pathway is continuous, and the connectedness is prominent at all stages of life. For women, relationship—and not individuation and separateness—is the goal of development.

Relationship and identity development occur in synchrony (Gilligan, 1982). When we make a work transition, and make the corresponding change in identity, we may require a time of reflection and integration. When we relinquish our internalized old self-image, it feels as though we are abandoning the persons or institutions from whom that self-image stemmed. There is a need to accommodate psychologically before becoming comfortable with our new identity in the career (and also in our life as a whole, and how those relationships relate to the new career).

Successful change involves a process of changing the relationships and the self-images embedded in, or defined by, the old form of relationship. If women can see the goal of change as changing relations (and the image of ourselves in relationships), rather than becoming alone or independent, they can be better able to cope with career changes and other changes. An explanation and validation of this process would enable women to

see that their coping mechanisms may be quite normal, and that they are in fact developing in a healthy manner. Women may have different definitions of career success, which would direct them to choices that may not appear to career counselors as successful or logical choices.

Women may sometimes choose a career based on the hope or expectation that relational values will be satisfied in their future careers (Crozier & Dorval, 1999). Relational ways of being are not gender-specific, but gender-related: women are simply more likely than men to endorse them (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). Various authors have endorsed a relation model for women's development (Jordan, et al., 1991). Still others have acknowledged that relational values are central to women's career identity (Jones, 1997; Lalande, et al., 1998; Richie, et al., 1997; Schuster, 1990; Young & Richards, 1992). Relational ways of being may be the core or essence of the career experience of women (Lalande, et. al., 1998; Schuster, 1990; Richie et al., 1997). An important factor in considering a career for women is the opportunity to maintain relationships and connections with others on the job (Crozier & Dorval, 1999).

Values are a critical component of one's sense of identity (Josselson, 1987). Our behavior is usually guided by a small number of values which we rank hierarchically. The work role is one expression of one's values (Brown 1996). And values at least partly contribute to a person's career pattern and satisfaction (Super, 1957, 1980, 1990). Gender, culture, and socioeconomic level have an impact on the development of values, as seen in Brown's (1996) framework. Life satisfaction depends on values being satisfied in a variety of life roles; however, society may limit the availability of opportunities to

satisfy our values (Brown, 1996).

Women's Career Change

I chose women participants because their story has not been adequately examined in the arena of work and career. American society has comfortably believed that women were merely casual workers who entered the workforce only until they married and had children. Research notes that employers offered women only those jobs that were easy to enter and required little training; thus there was little reason to study the career development of women and their experiences at work (Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960). Debold, Tolman, & Mikel Brown (1996) suggest that women tend to typically align themselves with normalizing discourses about gender, power, and morality; to not do so is to call ones' femininity into question. My participants have up to this point in their lives avoided (whether intentionally or not) fitting into the normalizing discourse. The burden of fitting into such a model is significant for these women, especially as they face the additional pressure of creating or discovering a meaningful work transition.

Lerner (1986) posits that gender has been chiefly responsible for fixing women's place in society. There is a need for restructuring of thought and analysis that humanity consists in equal parts of men and women, not simply by 'adding women' to research (Lerner, 1986). Also, as women remain unaware of their own history of struggle, they remain in a position of subordination (Lerner, 1986). Women have both suffered from and participated in the creation and continuation of the patriarchal model. Their acceptance of and compliance to the regulations created out of patriarchy continue women's subordination. Sometimes, resignation in this way is merely a strategy to avoid (further) victimization (Debold, Tolman, & Mikel Brown, 1996.)

My study offered a way to understand women in relation to their work. I think that all people do choose a career, even if they were heavily influenced by external forces. In the latter case they have chosen to be coerced. We need a change in the system that will address the non-work issues in women's lives, the factors that may prevent women from obtaining career fulfillment. That way, all aspects of the career decision issue can be addressed simultaneously, in order to enable people to achieve their potential, and by extension, achieve a healthier life/work balance. Without an understanding of the totality of a person's experience—what motivates, discourages, and inspires us--career assistance will be at best incomplete, and at worst may drive the person into another crisis or transition situation.

Literature Review

Identity Creation and Learning Identity

Crittenden (1999) writes that no matter what sphere a woman chooses to focus on, family or career, she is thrown into an identity crisis; feminism's success makes us call these parts of our lives into question. Women may choose to focus on relationship or career at various times. Crittenden (1999) suggests that although feminism does not banish or reduce any innate desires for marriage, it has failed feminist women at this intimate level. Feminism's focus on external, large social issues and work equity may have given little similar advice toward personal relationship issues. However, our identity also consists of our choices in personal life, not just what career or calling we will ultimately choose (or eventually change). As Jung (1956) wrote, true personality always has vocation and believes in it; there is no escape, and he who hears the voice of the inner man is *called* (italics in the original). With no similar "calling" toward a relationship many women may feel deficient in their personal lives.

Changing one's identity may be more than just a personal prerogative; in today's world it may be a necessity. The critical question is which identity an individual will choose in the new career. To exercise control over one's career (and, by extension, one's identity), a worker must be emancipated from the organization; he or she must be loyal only to him or herself as an individual. The current trend of portfolio and temporary workers shows that the need for individually defined career identities is mandatory (Kerka, 1999). Our portability and transferability as workers is tied to this skill. With a more flexible and entrepreneurial view of work and workers, organizations may increase employee retention.

A means to understand the adaptability of the individual is to conceptualize the identity as always in flux. The non-unitary self is one that has a fluid and healthy sense of self, continually evaluated as to the products that have defined it (Wicke, 1991). This is the self that is constantly challenged by the patriarchal society. As Clark (1999) states, what a woman thinks about herself is not totally in her control. This self is distinctly and continually affected by social forces (Clark & Dirkx, 2000). Integration is the key to legitimacy, as all conceivable transformations of identity (roles) that person has, does, and may play in his or her life becomes grounded in everyday life in society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this way, an “individual can live in society with some assurance that he really is what he considers himself to be as he plays his routine social roles (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 101).”

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) explain that ontological learning is the process in which individuals create and transform themselves as they interact with others, sign systems and the world. They maintain that even academic learning is ontological (and not epistemological), because it involves change in social being—our identity—as well as change in knowing. Wortham (2006) notes that individuals are constantly and inevitably changing and are becoming different types of people as they learn new things.

Part of the changes in our identity comes from others’ reflecting our identity (and the change) back to us. Moustakas (1956) explains it as fulfilling a primary responsibility to be who we are, to place ourselves authentically in the universe and accept the consequences of our choice. Affirming our own value in this way comes first; recognition and valuing of others comes later, even though our own self-respect is dependent on the response of others (Moustakas, 1956).

This creation of identity occurs not only across relationships, but also occurs over time and across a series of events rather than one pivotal event (Holland & Lave, 2001). That is, over time the identity thickens as it becomes more consistent (Holland & Lave, 2001). Career transitions can affect how and to what extent our identity alters. Brown's (1998) study of identity revision in women's voluntary career change was situated in the literature on adult human development and identity, the feminist critique of human development, gendered roles, and the relationship between identity construction and revision and work. Participants made career changes as a reflection of identity revision; the identity and the career change may have reinforced one another.

Brown found an emerging developmental dynamic in the experience of these women, which would support the development of a normative model of identity development that includes work as an integral rather than tangential arena for women. Work was considered as part of a complete, normal life, rather than an isolated event. Women's identity proved to be a more expansive structure, one that includes developmental options from which women have been systematically excluded.

Many studies have suggested the necessity of a "congruent" sense of self. But how does the individual in work transition recognize this "self?" Is it merely a subjective affirmation that the new career is "right" and is a "good fit?" How much of this "fit" is dictated by our society, by what we feel we "should" feel good or right about doing? There was little or no mention in the literature as to these steps that lead to congruence.

Does congruence merely mean that one is content (even if not happy) and no longer desires a work transition? Or has the mid-life work transition consumed so much time, energy and spiritual drama that though the new career is not perfect, at least it is

better than the previous one, and is more comfortable than the turmoil required in finding the new career. If this is so, then mid-life career changers may merely settle for their new career rather than risk making another work transition. The literature rarely mentioned individuals who made multiple work transitions, and their reasons for doing so. Without this information, educators may not know the efficacy of services and programs offered to these adults during their transition situations.

When midlife women make career transitions, identity shifts are revised or negotiated, and relational processes affect the transition (Motulsky, 2005). These two facets—developmental and relational processes—are critical to understanding how transition promotes growth for some women, while others feel paralyzed or psychologically distressed. This shows that even a universal theory for all women would be inadequate or misleading, since the change equals happiness formula does not apply to all women, any more than it applies to the general population of all adult career changers. Identity is created by a particular set of situational, social and historical circumstances and thus changeable as those circumstances change (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Unfortunately, actual practice in adult and continuing education shows a limited understanding of women's learning, or else that understanding is based on outdated information and perspectives; women are described simply as 'collaborative learners', and no attention is given to diversity among women (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Occupational identity

Constructing an adult career identity is a complex process, and conventional career theories do not adequately incorporate the psychological, sociological, and cultural perspectives of development required for careers in the modern workplace (Lloyd, 2007).

Traditional developmental models would have an individual identify one career and then execute it; however this procedure is no longer relevant for our new economy (Lloyd, 2007). There is a need for an interdisciplinary approach to adult career development, one which allows the interface of workplace culture (along with stable and clear career goal formation) (Lloyd, 2007). There is an interactive influence of identity, support and stress when one is encountering a work transition (Stoner, 2007). This dynamic needs to be more fully addressed in our changing employment climate, as career opportunities and workplace communities continue to change (Lloyd, 2007).

Stoner's (2007) Collective Identity Scale (CIS) was developed to represent a multidimensional measure of identity that can be used to measure any identity type. One of the findings shows that identity and support can, independently, moderate conflict-outcomes relationships. The findings of the study showed that those low in organizational identity has an increase in depressed mood at work, and had an increase in burnout as role conflict increased. Although co-worker support was important, it was significant that, contrary to the hypothesis, individuals with high organization identity increased in burnout as role conflict increased. Equally surprising was the finding that work-family conflict increased at a greater rate for individuals with a supportive family than for those with an unsupportive family.

Isbell (2006) studied whether there is a significant relationship between primary and secondary socialization and occupational identity and a significant relationship between occupational identity and career confidence. Findings indicated that there are three separate constructs that constitute occupational identity in music majors: musician identity, self-perceived teacher identity, and teacher identity as inferred from others.

Influential experiences were more predictive of occupational identity than influential people. Self-perceived teacher identity was the only significant predictor of career confidence related to music teaching (Isbell, 2006).

A three-part model for accomplishing career changes begins with acceptance (Barbulescu, 2008). Being accepted in new work domains depends on job candidates' ability to mobilize contacts with first-hand knowledge of the desired work domain. From there, anticipatory socialization can be created, leading to role knowledge and creation of occupational identity. Job seekers who have a lower endowment of social resources initially can compensate by constructing an occupational identity. Once formed, the desired occupational identity sets in motion a cycle of insider mobilization, learning, and career change success.

Visualization is important in the process of Barbulescu's (2008) paradigm, adding to motivation. That is, if the occupational identity becomes a central part of how an individual job seeker imagines him- or herself to be in the future, there is more commitment to the role and more willingness to explore the tasks necessary to make that visualization a reality. Crystallizing one's occupational identity was a resource for breaking into a new career.

Career development and identity

In order to fully understand one's experience during a career change, it is important to note the changes our identity undergoes. The literature mentions that individuals search for meaningful or purposeful work that would be more congruent with one's sense of self (Brown, 1998). Identity therefore cannot be excluded from the equation of career change. Career change is not merely an individual experience; there

are cultural and societal containers or narratives that inform an individual's experience (Brown, 1998). Our societal influences may also be those involving personal relationships. For example, in one study, personal authority was associated with vocational identity and career decision making self-efficacy, whereas conflict in the family of origin was associated with lower career decision-making self-efficacy and greater levels of dysfunctional career thoughts (Dodge, 2001).

Catsophes's (1998) study subjects were between forty and fifty years of age and had family responsibilities. They had not experienced a disruption in their external career such as job loss or work transition. In the process of reevaluating the meaning of work and self-definition, individuals had a transition in the centrality of work. That is, the overall context of life roles was not limited to the work role. Individuals developed a skills-based professional identity to replace one based on positional hierarchy. There was a felt need to define a meaningful contribution at work and at home. This required a reevaluation of standards and expectations, and resulted in a more serendipitous view of change. In Carr's (1997) study, participants' adult occupational aspiration (stated at age 35) was examined with their occupation at midlife (age 53). For women, falling short of one's adult aspiration was associated with poorer mental health.

Marcia's (1993) four ego identity statuses (Identity Achieved, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Moratorium, and Identity Diffused) were assigned by assessment of commitment and crisis. All subjects showed signs of Moratorium status (inconsistent in commitment and high in crisis). These crises affected their vocational ambivalence about choosing and then leaving their professions. There was a clear desire for a more "meaningful life" in a healthier and more natural surroundings. The study supports the

recommendations of Levinson, et al. (1978), and Gould (1978), that professions and industry design career paths to fit the changing needs of developing adults. That is, career needs may change as developmental changes occur. Employees can be incorporated into the company at different levels, or encouraged to explore other industries where their developmental interests can be expressed.

In addition to the facet of adult development in identity construction is the notion of gender. Gender's effect on women in the workplace and their retention rates has not been adequately addressed. This is especially important, considering that many state-funded career change classes are geared toward promoting non-traditional careers, especially for women--careers that women may not be adequately socialized to enter. Work culture may be a more important motivating factor for one's choice to make a work transition than personal reasons (for example, inadequate fit for one's personality type, or family/work/time conflicts). Such a study could lead to improvements in managerial issues that relate to women workers. Again, though, the traditional literature continues to put the responsibility for career change on the individual, neglecting the responsibility of others in the work arena.

Work Transition and Adult Development

Although anticipating and adapting to a new career identity can be beneficial, Erikson (1978) warned that too heavy a reliance on the occupational role can over-define one's identity, leading to identity confusion. Adults form and reform their sense of self not only in response to crises, but also in response to other life experiences such as work. This process affects the person's subsequent career decision making abilities and outcomes.

Career transitions are becoming a common occurrence in the capitalist culture, and they affect how individuals experience their worlds (Cote, 2000). One effect of frequent career changes has been a loss of structure and direction that once marked achievement of the identity stage. Personal freedom suffers when individuals are not able to maneuver the changes affecting their lives (Cote, 2000). Erikson focused on the identity stage of development more than on any other stage of his theory. To him, the identity stage is a time for healing old wounds and building future strengths. This improvement of one's strengths can be helpful in re-forming one's identity during a time of career transition.

In the 1970s, traditional adult career paths gave way to economic and organizational changes; since then, the vocational psychology field has required a greater understanding of adult career development (Ebberwein, 2001; Greller & Stroh, 1995). Prior knowledge about career choices at adolescence no longer is adequate to understand adults' career choices--especially adults in work transition situations. Further research on the subject could utilize a contrasting of career development theories to determine their relevance to the midlife career change of the participants, and of society at large (Rhodes, 2000).

Some traditional theories of career and adult development (Super, 1963, and Levinson, et al., 1978), which center on age-stage models, do not apply to the career progression of most adults today. In fact, even as early as 1996, literature cited radical change in the work world as becoming the new norm (Sterrett, 1996). To better equip and service adults through a work transition, it is imperative that new career change models be developed—models that recognize the shifting social structure of today's

employment environment. More knowledge must be obtained concerning transition behaviors, attitudes, and emotions, and the contextual issues that affect progress through a career change (Ebberwein, 2001).

As people change careers, they evaluate the interaction among internal and external influences in their career decision. A person's life can be seen as a string of career decisions reflecting the individual groping for an ideal fit between self and work. As an individual seeks to build a personal identity that incorporates parental models, he or she also retains elements unique to self. Because we draw our primary support from the arena in which we locate our identity, lack of satisfaction in the work arena would make it unlikely that we would locate our identity there (Hochschild, 2003). The resulting confusion and inaction manifests in doubts and dissatisfactions with current resolutions of self.

Work transitions involve a period that usually incorporates identity re-formation. Forging an identity is not an isolated, individual, personal exercise; it involves the relationship we have with other people. For Erikson (1968), the problem of adulthood is how to take care of those to whom one finds oneself committed as one emerges from the identity period, and to whom one now owes their identity—that is, those who can reflect one's identity back to him or her for validation. When we fail to include other people in our definition of adulthood, the question of identity is a self-indulgent luxury (Erikson, 1968). Relational theories and theories on women's identity can give insight into other aspects of development, as well as identity formation. Women, especially, tend to accommodate their relationships with others, even in career decision-making.

Our personal investment in who we are has been termed identity capital (Cote, 2000). Cote (2000) explains that such investments potentially reap future dividends in the “identity markets” of late modern society. To be a player in those markets, one must first establish a stable sense of self, which is then bolstered by social and technical skills in a variety of areas. The nature of society has become characterized by technological change, restructuring, and changing work relationships (Greller & Stroh, 1995). Such an environment offers little stability on which to form an identity (Cote, 2000). These patterns of unstable or less stable identities may be the norm in the future (Josselson, 1987).

Super (1986) suggests that career development follows the principles of human development (which are largely based on men’s experience), with each career stage having its own developmental tasks. However, women’s career development has not been fully supported by those adult development strategies. Schlossberg (1985) advocates not one, but four, ways of viewing adult experience: The cultural/social context; the psychological developmental stages; life events or transitions; and change throughout the life span. Levinson et al. (1978) and Gould (1978) recommend that professions and industry design career paths to fit the changing needs of developing adults. This would include all adults, not only male, white, and middle-class. Attention to this detail would encompass the various stages of the adult lifespan.

Part of the lifespan has been influenced by societal changes, creating a new phase of life called “midcourse.” Although the age range for it is from ages fifty to seventy, it represents a larger shifting of all phases of life—which has major implications for the study of lives and our traditional notions of age/role/phase range (Erikson, 1950;

Levinson, et al., 1978). “Midcourse” is a term coined by Moen (2003) that represented a period where individuals think about, plan for, and actually disengage from their first career and raising children, and enter another, different career, develop new identities and establish new patterns of relating. Adult education acknowledges various adult development theories in gaining an understanding of the adult as learner. Early theorists of adult development such as Levinson, et al. (1978), and Erikson (1950, 1963) have the tendency to adopt the familiar markers of adolescent separation and growth stages. But women’s mid-life years appear more as a time of return to the unfinished business of adolescence.

To early developmental researchers (Levinson, et al., 1978; Erikson, 1950, 1963) women are seen as deficient; after all, girls create the self only as they mesh their identity with intimacy through relationships. The resulting self is one that is then vulnerable to the issues of separation that arise at mid-life, that Gilligan (1982) originally proposed. This construction, though, posits women’s development against a male standard and ignores the possibility of a different truth. Therefore, investigating career change in terms of identity formation must include a discussion and investigation of learning and also of adult development. Without a critique of developmental theories as expressions of power relations, women may negatively interpret their version of knowledge (Debold, Tolman, & Mikel Brown, 1996.)

Taylor (2000) acknowledged several dimensions of development from the learners’ perspective. Namely, the exploring experience through making meaning of life stories within contexts; challenging oneself to learning new realms; accepting responsibly for choices and distinguishing what one has created for oneself from what is imposed by

social forces; and experiencing oneself as a part of something larger, or—seeing that they are not alone in their circumstances, but are contributing to a collective project.

Part of this developmental process involves Kegan's (2000) epistemology in which individuals create distance from their own perspectives so that they can recognize their incompleteness and embrace contradictory systems simultaneously. Women who were raised during the sexual revolution may have heard and lived a code of conduct that is incompatible with the expectations of the patriarchal society they inhabit today.

Mezirow (2000) maintains that development in adulthood may be understood as a learning process, moving one toward a fuller realization of agency. The ability to test our assumptions is dependent on others and, by extension, on wider pattern of relationship and power (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). This may explain why some people move uncritically through life stages—schooling, marriage, work—but other people experience tremendous reflection and turmoil at such changes.

Alternative and Adult Development Theories

Traditional notions of adult development are no longer adequate to accommodate today's changing economic and employment environment. In general, theories that are based on psychological maturity draw from models espoused by Maslow (1956) and Rogers (1956). The drawback to the stage theories is that they assume societally normal individuals who are operating in a stable environment. Instead, today's adult requires a theory that would reflect a holistic process of human growth. Such a theory would include a process of how individuals make sense of, construct, and enhance their vocational life in the current world of work.

Ralston (2004) believes that adult development is a new and not well-developed science. He thinks it is possible that growth continues throughout adulthood, and occurs in a series of experiences rather than isolated events of behavior and attitudes. More current and inclusive theories of adult development can be helpful to understand our behavior, attitudes and motivation during work transitions. Although the qualities promoted in developmental theories are important aspects of any individual's career search, reliance on certain adult development theories may exclude certain individuals and their actual life course. In addition, the concept of what it means to be an adult is a specifically recent and particularly American phenomenon (Erikson, 1978).

Although based on a model for adolescent development, Licoan's (2009) study of the progression of this particular model is important to identity development in general. Erikson's (1980) theoretical framework for conceptualizing the formation of identity in adolescence emphasized that identity is a multidimensional construct and proposed these three dimensions of identity, ego, personal, and social. Marcia's Identity Status Model (1993) was the outcome of the first empirical research based on Erikson's theory, and addressed the previous lack in noting the effect of the social environment on the individual.

Further paradigms have been developed which incorporate ethnic identity and cultural identity, as well as Erikson's original acknowledgement of gender differences in identity (Licoan, 2009, Hissong, 2005). The outcome of this study brings to light that a woman needs time to go within and develop a relationship with self. This process demonstrates the importance of the notion of non-unitary self in terms of coming to

know, learning about, and engaging in personal health and well-being.

Stage theories

Not all the literature agrees on clearly defined stages in adult development, or a necessary crisis period in mid-life (Greene, 1999). Instead, adult development theories can be categorized according to the direction of the lens from which development is viewed. The psychological/socio-cultural lens focuses on the individual's internal processes of development as the individual interacts with the environment (Merriam, & Caffarella, 1999). Gould's (1978) model operates from an irony-structure to bring order in life, resulting in a new skill as well as a new theory of oneself, or new identity, in relation to the new skill. Stage/phase theories are popular because they appeal to the desire for stability and predictability. For example, Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development requires that an individual master a psychosocial task during each of the eight stages of life, three of which occur during adulthood. All stages, in turn, add to and influence one another.

Erikson (1950) focused on sequenced stages that are not based on chronological age. Each stage contains a crucial issue that must be successfully resolved before the individual can advance to the next stage. Included in these stages is the issue of identity (Who am I?), and ego integrity (Am I satisfied with my life?) Vaillant (1977) added career consolidation as an additional development stage in Erikson's progression, occurring between Erikson's intimacy and generativity stages.

Sequential adult development theories, such as Erikson's (1963) model imply hierarchical stages which build upon one another. Each stage represents a crisis or issue to be overcome, a challenge to be conquered. These crises can be related to

unemployment or other work transitions, rendering Erikson's model useful for adults in career transition. Knowles (1990) viewed development as a series of tasks that produce a readiness to learn; this results in a teachable moment. Each stage of development has a list of life tasks (Knowles, 1990).

Women's developmental models

Gilligan & Richards (2009) explain the advent of research in the 1970s that finally acknowledged the omission of women from its research studies. They cite especially the illumination brought about by the study of girls' development.

Adolescence is a time when psychology comes into tension with the requisites of patriarchy, its gender norms and roles and values (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Girls' resistance to this developmental stage was to the split between voice and relationship: they realized that their honest voices were jeopardizing their relationships with others and also their culture (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Longitudinal studies that followed girls from childhood to adolescence showed a trajectory of a healthy resistance to losing voice (and thereby losing relationships) turned into political resistance against patriarchy; one point of resistance was to the equating of selflessness with feminine goodness (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). To those who did not challenge the patriarchy, society awarded gender success: loss of woman's personal identity.

In the study, when resistance could not find a channel for expression, it turned into dissociation or various forms of indirect speech and self-silence: depression, eating disorders, and other forms of psychological distress that seemed to stem from outside adolescent girls (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Thus is the dilemma of women in patriarchy; it was "necessary not to believe or to know what was happening in order to

join a culture that mandated repression” (Gilligan & Richards, 2009, p. 195).

The traditional models of development saw women who did not conform as resisting separation or maturation; in fact, the women were resisting loss or trauma (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Traditional models of development are being challenged by new research in developmental psychology and neurobiology, which challenges the underlying assumptions on which patriarchy rests and relies (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). What was previously viewed as the ideal course of development can be seen as a distortion of our nature and our development—a distortion that causes trauma (Gilligan & Richards, 2009).

The traditional developmental model focuses on independence instead of, or as more developmentally successful than, relationship. However, neurological studies reveal the split between reasons and emotion to signal trauma or injury to the brain (Damasio, 1994). This disconnect from what we feel and therefore know, weds us to a false story about ourselves (Damasio, 1999). Damasio (1999) explains that a core sense of self, or “autobiographical self” is registered in our bodies and in our emotions; it is like a film running continually inside us. Our awareness of watching this film extends our core sense of self through time and history leading to memory and to the creation of our identity (Damasio, 1999). To divide our mind from body, our thought from emotion, or self from relationships erodes a resistance grounded in the core self, and causes us to lose touch with our experience—and therefore our identity (Gilligan & Richards, 2009).

We register our experiences in our bodies and our emotions; we register the feelings of what happens (Damasio (1999). However, in a culture that disallows our discounts the emotion and bodily aspect of the self, we are limited access we otherwise

would allow ourselves. Our psychic wholeness hinges on our ability to resist wedding ourselves to the gender categories of patriarchy; this resistance is grounded in our neurobiology, say Gilligan and Richards, (2009).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) acknowledge women's experience as a specific type of adult developmental theory, the other categories being sequential stage theories and life events/transition theories. Two of the most important theories of women's development were initially created by Gilligan in 1982, and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule in 1986, and more recently with Belenky and Stanton (2000). Their theories focus on the relational aspect of adult development.

These original theories suggested integration of five categories of knowledge as a developmental ideal for women. Women's relatedness to others is required for women's development and identity. This is important to acknowledge especially in a work transition decision-making process. For women, making a career choice usually means acknowledging the many relationships that must be reformulated and adjusted when a decision is made. Relational theories allow women's career decisions to be more productive, fulfilling, and satisfying for all those who are affected by the transition.

Integration

A more holistic approach to adult development is the integrated approach. Mind, body, and socio-cultural influences all affect development. Through this lens, the life course is seen as being composed of changes on several levels across time. Changes follow their own timetables; stress results when the timetables are asynchronous (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). These expected changes and timetables are socio-culturally directed.

I included Borysenko's (1996) literature because it addressed the aspect of adolescence and how that experience must be integrated into a complete adult development. Our external culture will shape a new adult developmental theory; our external environments must be accounted for in the theory. Borseynko (1996), for example, believes that healing from abuse is a developmental stage in the life cycle of women, since emotional abuse and poor parenting are practically endemic in our culture. Emotional healing is a predictable part of the closing cycle of young adulthood, based on clinical experience of women abused in childhood. These women had coped well until their thirties, only to "crash" in their late thirties and early forties and then begin a cycle of healing (Borseynko, 1996, p. 128). Traumatic and painful memories which remain repressed inhibit an adult's development; if these items are not addressed, no further development will be possible.

Levinson (1996) spoke of women in transition, and the growing fierceness (clarity of vision) evolving from a woman in her early twenties, into her midlife transition. This fierceness does not compromise with or tolerate situations that are undesirable. Women's awareness and realizations at midlife forge a fierce, steadfast resolve to take back their lives and their power. This fierceness requires emotional maturity to make the transition to the next stage a successful one. Otherwise, evolution through the stages will occur, but possibly with negative side-effects.

When a woman is emotionally mature and psychologically healthy, this newfound boldness can be channeled into social and personal causes that further feminine values of relationality and interdependence (Borseynko, 1996). When a woman is emotionally immature, however, her fierceness may express itself instead as increased self-hatred,

fear of aging, or an unfortunate need to control other people (Borseynko, 1996). Rarely is this fierceness revealed in male-oriented adult development theories. Men either do not possess this growing fierceness, or else they possess it throughout their lifetimes, so it is not an issue to be examined.

The self-examination involved in making a work transition results in two outcomes: a clear set of inner values; and then changing one's outer life circumstances to be consonant with those new values. This may also entail changing one's identity simultaneously as one's values change, in order to reflect these new values. When our external world reflects and extends our internal values, we reach a state of integrity or wholeness. Although there is stress involved in arriving at this point of satisfaction, there is even greater, chronic stress when one is out of tune with one's core beliefs.

That stress is not only a facet of being out of tune with one's beliefs; it may occur even as one is pursuing one's core purpose. Wendover's (2006) phenomenological study explored the doctoral experiences of midlife women to more fully understand the ways in which their self-efficacy guided their persistence through degree transitions, especially their dissertations. She drew on Bandura's (1986) efficacy theory and Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory to reveal that self-efficacy led to students' successful transition to their dissertation, and that support was necessary (but not always available) during this transition time.

Development and Transitions

Life events and transitions can also be examined by using adult developmental theories. A person's coping skills; the available social support networks; and the type of stress or crisis all impact the individual route that a person's life course follows (Bee &

Bjorkland, 2000). The life events/transition perspective explains that life events generate transitions, and these together determine human behavior. Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) maintain that the more that an event changes an adult's roles and assumptions, the more of an effect the transition will have on the person. Transitions, more than chronological age, seem to be a more realistic basis for understanding development.

Transitions are value-neutral; that is, they merely provide an individual with an opportunity to evaluate and control one's own life. Transitions can be the cause of adults' desire to learn and grow (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg also claims that there must be balance in a person's resources and deficits in four categories of coping. Though the timing and intensity of an event is not controllable, it is possible to control how that event affects us. Psychological/cognitive models assert that adults reach integrated development through participating with their environment. This participation can include the adult's procedures for overcoming crisis situations. Emphasis on such models would lead educators toward transformational learning strategies to aid learners in critical reflection and discussion.

Gould (1978) stressed the stages of adult development as the progressive struggles for freedom from the internal constraints of childhood. People at all ages are "stuck" and need help with the underdeveloped aspects of self. Gould considered development to be a continuous process to develop some aspect of self; whereas Erikson held that a developmental stage is complete when each necessary crisis is resolved. Other theorists (Kohlberg, 1970, Loewinger, 1976) focus on adults' progression from dependency on outside authority and judgments to a higher stage of self-responsibility.

In Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe's (1965) transitional perspective, cultural norms dictate age-appropriate behavior. Other theorists (Lowenthal & Pierce, 1975; Schlossberg, 1984; 1991) say that major life events or transitions are more important than the age of the individual. Those theorists examined the different ways men and women handle transitions. Women generally had less positive self-images than men, and felt less in control of their lives, and therefore less likely to plan for transitions. This may mean that women would have more difficulty than men do in making work transitions, and especially in terms of the reaching the ego identity/career identity stage. The studies, however, did not elaborate on the external, societal factors that cause women to have less positive self-images.

Levinson's (1978, 1996) theory of the human life cycle as an overlapping sequence of eras, with six developmental periods, and an alternation between stable and transitional periods provided a backdrop for Brewster's (1999) study of women executives who either stayed or left the organization. Their decision to stay or leave was an important developmental task of adulthood and the decision was a crisis situation that preoccupied the women (ages 40-45).

Developmental tasks from Brewster's (1999) study were identified for executive women at midlife: (1) accepting the consequences of life choices; (2) mourning the loss of youthful fertility; (3) continuing work on separation-individuation; (4) reclaiming relationships; (5) defining success on one's own terms; (6) assuming positions of mature leadership; (7) expanding the life-structure to allow for Generativity, creativity, and caring. Those executive women who remained at their jobs were those whose work roles could accommodate midlife developmental tasks; women who could not realize aspects

of the midlife self in their work were more likely to leave.

People may need to experience a fundamental change in their core sense of self in order to maintain important life changes (Heatherton & Nichols, 1994). Change is often precipitated by problems associated with the behavior people wish to change; negative consequences increase the motivation to change (Heatherton & Nichols, 1994). A crystallization of discontent (Baumeister, 1994) is formed by negative events linked together to form a large pattern of dissonant thought. This largely negative atmosphere leads people to ignore the positive and focus on the negative aspects of the situation. Defining the situation as negative is an impetus to change the intolerable situation. The old identity may also be viewed as something negative, and the new, envisioned identity as more positive and therefore more desirable.

Life change is easier when new activities and new relationships help create a new sense of identity—an identity with altered sources of life meaning (Baumeister, 1991). As we aim to adopt and accept a non-stigmatized identity, we must also renegotiate our public persona (Stall & Beirnacki, 1986; Klingemann, 1991; Miller & C'deBaca, 1994). People who have transformed their identities sometimes experience their perceptual styles suddenly changed and their lives taking on new meaning. From the studies mentioned above, society plays more than a minor role in the transition process, and in the changing of one's identity. Inner work is no longer the only (or the major) factor necessary to effect identity change.

Our external environment can facilitate change: a change in external environment can lead to a new beginning in a novel setting; this allows for one to assume a new, changed identity. The new identity is accompanied by new behaviors which become part

of the self. By associating with the new external environment, we are more likely to change (or to accept the change as a positive event). In contrast, people who do not change are more likely to cling to their current role or identity. This clinging may prevent them from changing, or from even wishing to change, by not allowing them to view their current circumstances in a negative way (Heatherton & Nichols, 1994).

Healthy individuals now decide to integrate several career identities during the transition to later adulthood or the transition to midlife. An understanding of transitions (and of multiple career identities) can facilitate career development and help cope with career transitions (Gerstman, 1998). The knowledge of one's self as an integrated being is essential to identify the needs and goals for a life-long commitment to learn and to learn successfully. Since adults grow and develop continuously, it is necessary to see one's self as a whole person, in order to accomplish a transformation successfully (Lukenchuk, 2001).

Single Women Participants

My reason for choosing single women as participants in my study stems from my own experiences as a single, educated woman at midlife. Women such as I seem so far from the norm of mainstream (patriarchal) society that people grow curious as to what motivates our life choices, and why it is that we cannot yet be recognized by the larger society as "normal" adult members of society. In addition, because I subscribed to the fluid nature of self, I did not label these participants as "never married", which implies an extreme or expected absolute. The term speaks to limiting an individual to a concrete, immobile age/stage developmental pattern.

We would not describe someone who is not college educated as “never went to college”, mainly because our boundaries for college education have adapted to a changing society and its modern standards. However, the adjective usually given to this particular group of women has not adapted to the advances in adult development research, identity development, or gender equality. It is for this reason that I use the term “not previously married” in my study. This term describes women’s current status, without placing my own impressions or expectations on their future status.

My participants consisted of particular single women who enacted a work transition. The literature does not exhaustively deal with the issue of single women who make work transitions. That is, since these women do not have a spouse or children to factor into their career decision-making process, they may have more freedom to base their career choices solely on the career itself--its duties, requirements, tasks, pattern of ascension to leadership or promotion. Perhaps single women could place greater meaning on career and finding their individual purpose, chiefly because they do not have a spouse or their own family to contribute meaning in that aspect of their lives. I wanted to understand how these women reconcile their career ambitions with their goals for a dating or marriage relationship. The literature does not adequately investigate the influence of marital status on career decision-making.

The modern “problem with no name” is exactly the reverse of the old one: we now recognize that women are human, but we blind ourselves to the fact that we are also women (Crittenden, 1999). Gender, like identity, is a type of social relation that is constantly changing, created and recreated daily in interactions and institutions (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Therefore, any study on women participants must include a discussion

of women's experience, chiefly their experiences with patriarchy. Patriarchy is an anthropological term denoting families or societies ruled by fathers; where some men are set hierarchically over other men and all men over women (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). It also separates fathers from sons and places both women and children under a father's authority (Gilligan, 2002). We cannot achieve a democracy until the persistence of patriarchy becomes a focus of resistance (Gilligan & Richards, (2009).

Patriarchy precludes love between equals, and so precludes democracy that is founded on such love and freedom of voice that democracy encourages (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Patriarchal modes of authority are sustained through the repression of free sexual voice—a voice not constrained by the Love Laws of patriarchy (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). Roy (1998) described the Love Laws as those that constrain whom and how and how much we may love. These patriarchic values and assumptions assign shame to any sexuality that resists their premises; this shame extends to what our bodies tell us (Damasio, 1999; Gilligan, 2002). Once again, we doubt our experience, and have difficulty incorporating all aspects of ourselves into a coherent identity.

Patriarchy requires the traumatic disruption of intimate relationships and this trauma is designed to suppress personal voice and relationships (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). The choice of marriage also affects one's identity: Berger and Luckmann (1966) view identity as subjective, and therefore precarious, since it is dependent upon the individual's relations with significant others who may change or disappear. These changes and disappearance may be especially prominent during times of transition. Our identity, once crystallized, is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

A popular book on single-hood by Crittenden (1999) posits that women neither adopted nor rejected feminism; rather it had “seeped into their minds like intravenous saline into the arm of an unconscious patient. They were feminists without knowing it” (p. 19), and so, probably, were their mothers. Women today, continues Crittenden (1999) have heeded their mothers’ advice to do something with their lives and to not depend on a man to take care of them. In effect, the message was to not make the same mistakes their mothers did; and so, the women of today have made different mistakes (Crittenden, 1999).

Today’s women are more likely to be divorced or never married at all than women of previous generations; are more likely to bear children out of wedlock; and are hoping to do everything only to ask why the pieces haven’t added up the way they’d like (Crittenden, 1999). She further explains that the single woman over thirty may be in every other aspect of her life a paragon of female achievement; but in her romantic life, “she must force herself to be as eager to please and accommodate male desire as any 1920s cotillion debutants (p. 68).” As Hochschild (2003) has written, the speed up in society has mostly been absorbed by women: women have changed, but their partners have not.

Also, marriage has not changed to accommodate independent women--women who have gradually adapted to a male-dominated work culture and society. Crittenden (1999) maintains that the fierce independence a woman pursues throughout her youth is not going to be easily surrendered at the altar, and women worry what marriage will do to their personalities—their identity. Such women who have the identity of a liberated creature will be entirely unprepared to take full charge in traditional home life—no

matter how helpful her husband might be (Crittenden, 1999). Other studies have found that young women who had higher educational and occupational achievement ambitions planned to marry at older ages than did their male peers (Johnson & Mortimer, 2000).

Marital status has a direct impact on women's career choices, whether consciously or not. Marini (1984) and Martin (2000) both found that educational attainment and fertility timing are interrelated for women in the United States, and that the effects are bidirectional. Other studies (Brown, 2002) indicate that educational attainment has a delaying effect on childbearing, but entry into parenthood also limits women's educational attainment. This entry appears to affect both genders; however, earlier age at entry into family roles promoted men's earnings and limited women's earnings (Marini, Shin, & Raymond, 1989).

The choice to have a family also has an impact on career decision-making. Even when labor force experience, hours spent at work, and other relevant factors are controlled, women who have children suffer a wage penalty compared to non-mothers (Waldfogel, 1997; Taniguchi, 1999; Budig & England, 2001). This penalty is larger for white women than African American women, for women with lower levels of education, and for women who bear children relatively early (Singleton, 1998).

Ben Zvi Sommer (2008) studied 217 female college students from public and private universities. Progressive attitudes had been integrated into students' expectations, leading to a desire to have it all--a career and a family. However, when the time comes, young women tend to choose one over the other. Ben Zvi Sommer (2008) found one possible explanation for the discrepancies between intentions and behavior; female college students are not fully aware of some reality factors which limit their ability to

fulfill their aspirations. In addition, the researcher also tested effects of self-esteem and feminist identity as covariates, finding strong support for the effects of the husband flexibility fixed effect and the self-esteem covariate.

Women who are married to academic partners undergo career socialization differently than single women or women without academic partners (Thomas, 2004). The study sought to address why and how advantages take place for academic spouses/partners, in order to find the extent to which women could form their own definitions of academic career success. Another purpose was to determine if having a male academic spouse/partner is the closest thing to an "old boy's club" that exists for academic women. The presence of the male partner made the married women less willing to challenge traditional and patriarchal notions of academic career success. In addition, the women with partners did not distinguish themselves as a group with non-traditional definitions of career success as did single women and women with non-academic spouses/partners.

When the issue of children enters as a factor in work transitions, an added stressor is introduced. Multiple role juggling has frequently been linked with work-family conflict, and work-family conflict has been shown to cause negative emotional consequences in women who juggle multiple roles (Insko, 2008). The women psychologists in the study exhibited common themes: The themes highlighted the importance of both career and motherhood to the participants' identities; the ways in which career and motherhood often clashed with, yet also often informed, one another; the changes the participants had experienced in both their intimate and social relationships since having children; the feeling of inadequacy as a parent despite having

extensive training in human development; and the ways in which juggling multiple roles had led to personal growth (Insko, 2008).

In addition, the women, because of their profession, expected perfection out of themselves as mothers and worried immensely about the ramifications of their parenting choices. In another study (Paulson, 2007), participants' decisions not to continue in the teaching profession were prompted by outside agents, including parents, spouses, and other significant persons. Although participants expressed disillusionment with teaching, often appearing before the end of one's teacher education program, in every case the decision to abandon teaching was not made until initiated by an outside agent. This suggests a positive relationship between occupational identity and family, social, and cultural influences.

Mid-Life Age Range

This study investigated particular women participants at mid-life. During this age range, participants have had a primary career, may have family responsibilities, and may be experiencing a transition period (as per the descriptions in Levinson's (1978), and Erikson's (1950, 1963) adult development stage models.) Although participants may not have followed the linear stage models, nonetheless, those models provided a framework for delineating participation in those particular studies. The drawback of these theories is that women may also measure themselves against this irrelevant standard, and in so doing, create a competitively negative outlook on their own identity.

The literature reveals that mid-life is an ambiguous term, one whose definition depends on whose research is being discussed. In general the age range stretches from age thirty-five to before age sixty. Further, it must be kept in mind that these age ranges

may be archaic, based on dated models of the nature of work. That is, age sixty may have been a time limit for development based on a required retirement age. These ages may shift in the future as more “baby boomers” and retirees remain employed.

Developmental theories such as stage models (Erikson, 1950; Levinson, et al., 1978, for example) that are based on hegemonic age-range achievements seem to be heavily dependent on an individual’s employment history, abilities, and general employability factors. The current shift in the demarcation of the “end of working years” may eventually cause a parallel shift in the stage theories of human development. Although some women do place importance on career, they also place importance on other areas of life that occur outside the career arena. These other areas of life represent major factors in the career decision-making process that women experience.

Single women at mid-life may also have another obstacle to overcome in terms of developmental health. If a single woman chooses career over a significant relationship, she may—voluntarily or involuntarily--forego marriage, and thus never reach one of the adult development markers that Levinson (1978) suggests is required for optimal (or societally legitimate) adult development. However, if she chooses a relationship and neglects or denies her need for meaningful work, she may also not reach a level of optimal or full development (in terms of career fulfillment or achieving one’s purpose in life).

The literature is not only unclear or indefinite in terms of women’s relationship to career, but there is a skewed image of the “mid-life woman”: She is either married or divorced, or is classified as a single mother (Brown, 1998, Carr, 1997, Catsoupes, 1998, Dingle, 1987, Ewen, 1993, Greene, 1999, Huck, 1992, Hunter, 1985; Jaffe, 1985; Lacy,

1986; Levine, 1986; Mattes, 2003; Pope, 1988; Rhodes, 2000; Smith, 1984; Stapp, 1986; Temple, 1994; Vanderveen, 1994; Vitalis, 1987). It follows that career choices are either based on women's new-found independence (from their partners), or on providing for their children alone, without a partner's income and support. However, this dynamic may be altered when mid-life women do not have other significant people to consider in their decision-making processes. Such single women may naturally become more risk-taking in their career decision-making—and thereby perhaps more self-actualized.

The phenomenon of mid-career change has become more prominent since the 1970's, and mostly occurs at midlife (Levinson, cited in Peterson, 2000). Peterson (2000) studied a group of male ministers as to the psychological turmoil generated by mid-career change, as well as those individuals' appraisal of stress. The study, although it included only male participants, was important in that marital status, as well as gender, impacted the decision to leave one's occupation and also gave insight into how vocational commitment may change across the life-span. Relational life is also a goal that must run alongside, or sometimes compete with our career dream (or purpose). Midlife represents a crucial point for the interaction of Career Dream and Relational Dream, even if the combining of the two Dreams is delayed until mid-life (Bovee, 2002).

Walser (2000) looked at involuntary career change by federal workers, and found that a mid-career renewal stage does exist. Factors that were important in the successful transition included support received from others; level of commitment; values; and sense of control over the outcomes possessed by the co-researchers. Although theirs were involuntary career transitions, it is interesting to note whether the renewal stage also exists as a goal or eventuality for voluntary career changers. Ultimately in Walser's

(2000) study, the sense of control led to liberation from the past and exploration of new career paths.

The Third Shift

Some areas of power are subtle yet insidious, especially the idea of a “third shift” (Hochschild, 1987), an additional time demand that depersonalizes employees. The workplace requires a careful scrutinizing of time, as efficiency, speed, and accuracy become a requirement and an expectation in the workplace. Gradually, we improve our efficiency, to the extent that we take on that time-conscious mindset at home; we also need efficiency in order to accomplish all the tasks that beg our attention after a long workday. Women gradually may learn to view the workplace as an oasis of calm in contrast to the family and home demands that are socially and traditionally required of women. This may lead to a desire for both men and women to work ever longer hours to avoid dealing with the third shift that awaits them at home (Hochschild, 1987).

The third shift also represents the emotional work that women (and men) must accomplish in order to explain to themselves and their children why they do not have much time for their families. In a study of industrial workers at all levels, Hochschild (1987) found that all workers were aware of, and annoyed by, the all-consuming focus on time—saving it, conserving it, controlling it—in their daily lives. But although many talked of taking shorter hours or adjusting their schedules, none did so, either because of financial need, social pressure, or a desire to avoid the third shift.

Another instance in which power invades our lives is in the emotional realm. The company not only desires our time, our abilities, but also our emotions as a canvas on which to etch an appropriate representation of the company’s values (Hochschild, 1983).

Modern work requires us to coordinate self and feeling so that the work seems to be effortless (Hochschild, 1983). Roughly a third of all workers in America have jobs that demand emotional labor; about half of working women have such jobs (Hochschild, 1983). Educators may either overlook or dismiss consideration of a power component in a career search. After all, power may exist not only in institutions, beliefs and particular superiors; it could also exist in our concept of time.

Educators may fear repercussions from their superiors, or they may fear questioning their personal perceptions of power in their own lives. But in a self-evaluation search, power is one of the contexts that must be confronted, or at the very least, acknowledged. Any subsequent action will depend on the expertise of the educator, and whether he or she can encourage a social critique without seeming to indoctrinate the learners. Again, as Mezirow (2000) suggests, the main task for educators is to create a forum where all voices can be heard, including those that critique the issue of power (including the power of the educator).

Middle Class

The notion of middle-class that I mention in my study is informed by feminist poststructuralism, especially as it emphasizes positionality. This refers to where people are positioned relative to the dominant culture, based on their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc. The dominant society here is the patriarchal society, the one in which my participants are positioned. This understanding of middle-class was important in that women's constantly shifting identity is based on their ongoing understanding of their positionality.

Another reason for choosing middle-class as an aspect of my study is because of

current economic trends. Organizations will be faced with the dilemma of how to retain their midlife workers, as the replacement younger work force gap continues to widen (Wong-Fong, 2008). Many of these seasoned professional workers that organizations must retain are women who are contemplating making a voluntary work transition (Wong-Fong, 2008).

Chodorow (1999) described women of the middle class as having positions of significant power, as they could frequently represent their husbands in every respect. Historically, such women's role as future wives in diplomatic marriages demanded that they be given the best available education. This is in contrast to girls' moving from high school into college; they continue to embrace more simple and more conventional ways of being and knowing as they reconsider their prelateship with themselves and with authorities (Debold, Tolman, & Mikel Brown, 1996). They strive to be seen as a "normal" female "adult", which implies acceptance of ones' patriarchal-dictated role. My participants, however, seemed to bypass this; or, they did but now are reconsidering and reconstructing how to incorporate themselves into a patriarchal society and/or to attain normalcy.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of identity construction among particular single, mid-life women who have made a work transition. For this study, phenomenological methods were the most appropriate means of studying the nature and meaning of identity. This chapter includes the purpose of the study, a review of the guiding research questions, and a brief description of the theoretical perspective of the study, research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Questions

van Manen's (1997) emphatic cry is that the question be lived by me the researcher, and I must "pull the reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the human scientist does (p. 44)." The overarching concern of my study was to find out how or whether specific mid-life women who enact a work transition re-construct the meaning of (or make sense of) their new identity. My study was guided by the following: Is there a renegotiation of one's identity when making a work transition? That is, do individuals need to see themselves--define their identity--differently in order to accomplish the tasks required in the new career? And also, do individuals need to integrate their work and personal identities to experience success in both spheres?

Primary research questions were the following:

1. What—if any--effect does the work transition experience have on identity? Identity here means one's definition of oneself when living out certain roles.

- 1a. What support or outside affirmation--if any--was received by peers, family members or others concerning participants' decision to make a work transition?
2. How does identity affect the meaning that these women make of the new career role? That is, how does one's identity affect what the new work role means to the participant?
3. How are various aspects of identity re-negotiated over time in the new career in order to reconcile a more whole or complete sense of self within the new work environment?
 - 3a. What aspects of identity construction remain difficult, and are these struggles dependent on length of time spent in the previous career?
4. Does one need to define oneself differently in order to accomplish the tasks required by the new work role responsibilities?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my study was to learn about the aspect of the social world of women who have made a work transition at mid-life (between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five years old), and then to generate what Geertz (1983) termed "thick description." In order to accomplish this, I focused on certain types of questions, for example: How did you feel when you changed from one career to another? What specific actions did you do, or what resources did you consult when you made your work transition? What reactions did other significant people in your life have to your choices and actions in terms of your career, and eventually or simultaneously in your personal/home life?

My questions were generated to specifically draw out the women's consciousness of these events and the effects of their decision-making. I asked questions about participants' personal experiences about the process and outcomes of their work

transitions. By focusing on these questions I learned how participants came to define their identity in new or different ways than they previously had defined them.

Phenomenological Approach

Background to Phenomenology as a Research Method

At the root of phenomenology as a research method are questions. These questions provide focus, and they account for the researcher's passionate involvement with the object being experienced. My question involved examining how participants reorganize or reconstruct their identity in the process and realization of making a work transition. As in any phenomenological investigation, I as researcher had a personal interest in what I sought to know; my participants and I shared in the confusion (Moustakas, 1994). This is what differentiated my study as a heuristic phenomenological study rather than a transformational phenomenological study.

Heuristic investigations involve extended interviews in the form of dialogues with research participants as well as with oneself (Moustakas, 1990). My analysis of my own life situation enabled me to craft my interview questions in a way that would address what women in our circumstance may encounter. I did not consciously ask myself these research questions; but having lived through the same phenomenon as my participants had, how could I not be aware of these questions in my own life? My own thought and reflection on the phenomenon was ipso facto the creation of interview and research questions.

Although my personal experience with the phenomenon was not representative of or generalizable to the story of all the women in my study, it proved to be a starting point to approach the gist of the phenomenon. Although I refrained from adding my story

during our interviews, as Moustakas (1990) notes is typical of heuristic research, I did explain my situation and our commonalities after each of our first and second interviews had ended. In this way, I could bracket my experiences from influencing participants' responses, and I could also maintain or even grow the trust factor into our future interactions. Participants could see that I was in the same or similar situation as they were, and that we were working together as co-researchers toward an understanding of our common phenomenon. Participants could understand that they were not alone in the struggle. Moustakas (1990) says this is a form of verification—sharing with participants the meanings discovered in the verbatim transcribed interviews.

All heuristic research begins with an internal search to discover; an encompassing puzzlement and a passionate desire to know (Moustakas, 1990). In fact as Moustakas (1990) notes, the question that informs the study is strongly connected to the researcher's own identity and selfhood, fueled by an intentional readiness to discover the meaning of one's own experience of the phenomenon and that of others. From this question, excitement and curiosity of the researcher inspire the search as personal experience brings the core of the problem into focus (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) adds that in heuristic research, we as researchers are not only intimately related to the question but we must learn to love the question; "It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breathes life...because the question itself is infused in the researcher's being (p. 43)." There is a thirst to discover, clarify and understand crucial dimensions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic phenomenology differs from transformational phenomenology in the area of bracketing. The detachment that is necessary in transformational phenomenology

is opposed to the connectedness and relationship that imbues the search to know that is characteristic of heuristic methods (Moustakas, 1990). Whereas heuristic research allows more flexibility and input from the researcher him- or herself, transformational phenomenology does not allow as much. That is, phenomenology ends with the essence of the experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in that experience (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985).

This connectedness is important in order to provide the tacit and intuitive powers necessary to provide a creative synthesis that marks the final phase of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1990) say that it is impossible to separate the inquirer from the inquired. Such a constructivist view places an individual and his or her world as co-dependent. That is, the viewer is not separate from what is viewed. What I or participants see will shape what we will define, measure, and analyze (Charmaz, 2000).

My life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's can be; however in the study, I did not write purely private autobiographical facts of my life (van Manen, 1997). Following van Manen's (1997) suggestions, I crafted my interview questions in such a way that they focused on a particular situation or event. For example, I asked participants about their own career transitions—including the reactions of others, and the outcomes of the transitions. Subject and object were integrated: what I saw was influenced by how I saw it, and also by seeing it through participants' perspectives during our interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Their experiences became the primary data in developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

In phenomenology, descriptions of experiences—not explanations or analyses—are at the heart of this research method. These descriptions keep the phenomenon alive, accentuate its underlying meanings, and enable the phenomenon to linger, and to retain its spirit as near to its actual nature as possible (Moustakas, 1994). A work transition is not merely a switching of skills or job responsibilities; it is a complex set of changes occurring within the individual and his or her environment. The change can be so profound as to affect one's identity, or one's way of viewing his or her self-concept. The words of my participants showed how our identity is a vital, living and changing organism. As per van Manen (1997, 2003) I avoided causal explanations and abstract interpretations; my role was to simply describe participants' moods, feelings, events, and experiences.

My aim was to allow participants to explain their own narratives of their work transition experiences. In this way, they may have felt understood, heard, and acknowledged. I remained attentive, and did not discourage participants from speaking about painful experiences. I needed to allow participants to explore feelings and reflections that they may have up until now ignored or repressed. This opening of their experiences to themselves, their own consciousness, may help them in future career decision-making processes. Phenomenology was the best method to use, since a preconceived, experimental design would have imposed on the participants, and statistical methods may have distorted the full meaning and richness of the human behavior being researched (van Kaam, 1966).

The phenomenological approach as outlined by Giorgi (1985) guided the way I structured my interview questions (See Appendix B). In Level I, the original data is

comprised of naïve descriptions obtained through open-ended interview questions and dialogue. For example, I asked basic questions concerning participants' backgrounds: educational level, family message, parents' education, etc. Level II has the researcher describing the structures of the experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the participants' account. The second interview provided a more thorough investigation of those cursory topics we had discussed in the first interview. The second interview represented not only a deeper level of trust in me by my participants, but also served as a form of closure to their narrative. This may have allowed them more access to their emotional states; it may have been their final opportunity to discuss this topic with someone who would understand their situation, and someone who was as concerned about the phenomenon as they were.

The steps that I utilized for this phenomenological study were based on those of von Eckartsberg (1986). Step 1 involved formulating the problem and question—the phenomenon—in such a way that was understandable to participants as well as the reader of the completed dissertation. To accomplish this, I framed my interview questions to adapt to a general understanding of the phenomena, rather than word the questions in terms of identity formation, or learning identity. I did this so that participants would be encouraged to explain their narratives without focusing on certain outcomes. I also needed to word the questions in a way that allowed participants to gradually understand the phenomena.

In Step 2, interviews and dialogue by the co-researchers provided the descriptive narrative. Here I allowed participants to explain their full story and experiences, feelings, and actions or reactions. Through crafting the interviews into two separate events, I

allowed for a basic trust level to be built first. The second interview occurred usually at least a month after the first interview. This time frame allowed participants to have time for reflection and to introduce additional insights we may not have discussed at the first interview.

Step 3 consisted of reading and scrutinizing the data to reveal their structure, meaning, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence. I was able to envision themes as they emerged, and see commonalities among various topics. The emphasis was on the structure of meaning and how it was created.

Phenomenology is distinguished from other research methods in other ways, namely in the following areas: intentionality, intuition, reflection, the Epoche, the lifeworld, and bracketing.

Intentionality

Intentionality required me to attach to the world in order to be in the world in a certain way in order to know the experiences there (van Manen, 1997). For my study, this meant that I attached myself not only to the phenomenon itself, but to the lifeworlds of my participants. My questions needed to be crafted in such a way that participants would be able to see the relationships between their career choices, needs, decisions, and the wider scope of their lives. They needed to see the role that everyone and everything had played in the formation of their identity to this point, as well as their new identity after the work transition. These factors included the influences of their family, gender, class, values, media, culture, economy, etc.

Intentional acts are distinguished from feeling acts in that intentional acts are objectifying while feeling acts are non-objectifying. Smith (1981) gave an excellent

illustration of the intentional act of perceiving. He wrote that the night sky may produce the feeling of wonder. The perception of a night sky may remain when the feeling of wonder disappears. The night sky remains open as an independent intentional experience, while the feeling-act of wonder may or may not continue to exist. Our perception creates the object, and enables it to exist in our consciousness. Participants' perception of the phenomenon of their work transition experiences makes it real and an object in their minds. From there, they can reflect and analyze the phenomenon as well as their relation to it and within it. This allows them to be free from emotional attachments to the phenomenon; for example, feeling guilt at not fitting in socially at a certain age period, or worry over their ability to accomplish several important life goals at once.

When the phenomenon becomes an object it becomes a valid item for study, discussion, and problem-solving. In addition, as a phenomenon, it becomes an object that the participant does not struggle with alone. This could provide not only relief from the immediate tension and expectations of resolving the phenomenon. The importance of the topic for the participant could also add the trust level that developed before and during the interview stages.

The object (or phenomenon) that appears in perception varies in terms of when it is perceived, from what angle (or, I would add, what theoretical lens), with what background of experience, and with what orientation of willing, judging, or wishing (Gurwitsch, 1967). No matter what angle one views an object the object will continue to present itself as the same object. So, no matter the different ages, backgrounds, or religious traditions of the participants, the phenomenon remained constant. The

differences occurred in how participants viewed their coping skills, level of hope, personal power (or lack thereof), and other means of dealing with the phenomenon.

At first, functioning intentionality is completely anonymous and concealed. Then as we uncover the meanings of phenomena, we move them toward an inclusive totality of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Through synthesis of participants' experiences and responses, the object or phenomenon becomes more vital, more imperative—and more able to be conquered or acquiesced to. As we form a perspective about the phenomenon as an item to be dealt with emotionally, intellectually, and practically, we increase our personal power and our belief and hope in our ability to overcome the issues the phenomenon represents. If not for this forming of the phenomenon into an object, participants would be left with a dizzying array of seemingly unrelated personal problems, physical symptoms, emotional upheaval, and feelings of individualized failure at unrealized goals.

Intuition

Intuition, to Moustakas (1994) is the beginning place in deriving knowledge of human experience, free of everyday sense impressions and the natural attitude. Our intuitive knowing of ourselves and what presents itself does not betray us. Through an intuitive-reflective process, all things become clear and evident, through a transformation of what is seen (Moustakas, 1994). Participants, in the act of accepting the assignment to be a co-researcher, had an intuitive feeling that theirs was a situation that was at least problematic and confusing.

As Moustakas (1994) notes, as we come to know a thing, we also come to know ourselves as the being who intuits, reflects, and understands the thing. My participants,

in telling their narratives, were able to stand outside the phenomenon and notice themselves as that being who can eventually understand their situation, and how the phenomenon operates in and affects their lives. From there they may be able to gain personal power to create a solution and to achieve their goals in all aspects of their lives. Previously, participants may have had a general sense of unease, without a clear idea of what the object (phenomenon) of that unease was.

Intuition functioned during the data analysis phase, especially as I re-read the interview transcripts. Intuition guided me in noticing the significance of the pauses between participants' utterances. I noted, too, the lengths and frequency of pauses during certain topics being discussed. Other non-verbal incidents that occurred during pauses (clearing of the throat, sniffing, sighing, the behavior of one participant's dog, etc.) also became apparent and important on an intuitive level as I reread the interview transcripts. My noting of the emphasis participants had placed on certain words throughout their interviews reinforced my intuition about certain topic areas. In some cases, these emphases gave me clues as to the progression and eventual development of themes that would best reflect the phenomenon.

Reflection

In the reflective process, the individual constructs a full description of his or her conscious experience; this is called a textural description and it includes thoughts, feelings, examples, and ideas about what comprises an experience (Moustakas, 1994). The very act of seeing and of being conscious of a thing, leads to further seeing and possibly to confirmation (Moustakas, 1994). During this time, the phenomenon as a whole remains the same (Moustakas, 1994). Reflection occurred throughout various

phases of my study. For example, during the first interview, I noted those interview topics that we could bring further into focus during the second interview. I also recorded various reflections and insights within my researcher journal (See Appendix C).

This reflection was easy, because as Husserl (1980) notes, it is something everyone does constantly in everyday life. Participants were given journals in which to write extraneous thoughts that may have been generated from our interviews. I also provided some ideas for journal topics to assist them in the process of writing (See Appendix B). Once a participant's ideas were written and processed, she could later reunite with what she knew, drawing her more closely to situations of her own lifeworld (van Manen, 1997). It was in this narrative mode of knowing and thought that participants could feel free and powerful enough to construct an identity, and know their place in their culture (or, "social meaning," as per Bruner (1996), and Jovchlovitch & Bauer, (2000)). In addition, reflection guided not only the formulation of my topic, research questions, and interview questions. It also assisted me throughout the data analysis process (for more information, see the section on Reflective Processes in this chapter).

Epoche

Epoche is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from the everyday, ordinary (common sense) way of perceiving things. The concept of Epoche in phenomenological research implies that the researcher still exists, but exists as the doubter and negator of everything (Husserl, 1970b.). The Epoche challenges us to create new ideas, feelings, awareness and understandings, "to come to know things with a receptiveness and presence that lets us be and lets situations and things be, so that we can

come to know them just as they appear to us (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86).”

This process requires sustained attention, concentration and presence.

Throughout my study, I had to refrain from imposing my notions onto participants’ interview responses. And since Epoche requires a new way of looking at things, I also had to refrain from using my preconceived lenses to look at the data as I tried to understand the phenomenon. I also needed to maintain my personal distance from how the phenomenon presented itself in my own life and experiences.

The Epoche is a necessary first step; the next step is the transcendental-phenomenological reduction, which transforms the world into mere phenomena, leading us back to the source of the meaning and existence of the experienced world (Schmitt, 1967). Following this phase is Imaginative Variation, its aim being to grasp the structural essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994). The outcome is a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it.

Lifeworld

Husserl (1980) introduced the concept of life-world as that realm of original self-experience that we encounter in an everyday sense. This life-world is in contrast to the position stated by Galileo, that of an objectivity of science that passes as reality (Gurwitsch, 1967). In the case of my research study, participants explained what meaning they had made of their experiences, as well as the essence of those experiences. “Lived experience” or “life-world” describes the events in our day-to-day world to which we do not have immediate access. These are items that we may have in pre-consciousness, or things that we may not notice as extraordinary.

My participants may not have noted their particular circumstance—for example, simultaneously experiencing mid-life, changing careers, developing or ending relationships, and developing depression symptoms. When these women had not considered these items as extraordinary, they never really saw them. Therefore, they were even less able to interpret the meaning of these events in their lives. In order to access or understand these events, we have to suspend our scientific interpretation of the world (Spiegelberg, 1982). We need instead to decide what these events mean for and to us. Only in this way can we form a decision-making model and create for ourselves a self-efficacy to accomplish our chosen goals. Among these goals is the identity we wish to construct.

van Manen (1997, 2003) posits four aspects of the life-world. Lived space is within our reach, and it includes felt space. The work culture and the feelings participants had there are part of the lived space of participants. This includes both the physical attributes of the workspace, as well as one's physical sensations while in that workplace. Lived body is how workers non-verbally express themselves in the work culture. It is available information that can be seen; but again, the interpretation of it is not always without judgment.

Lived time is a subjective vision of time. It describes how people feel about the speed of time of their experiences. Participants described their relationship to time, the sense of loss of time, and the feeling of time pressures that characterize the modern workplace (Hochschild, 2003). Participants may experience past time, as they compare old careers to the new career, or compare the current work culture and relationships with co-workers to those of former workplaces and co-workers.

Lived human relation depicts the interpersonal activities that occur in the workplace, as well as at home. It represents relationality, and how we maintain this—or not—in the space we share with others. As others reflect our identity to us, and comment on our job skills and competence, our career identity may be further strengthened (van Manen, 1997, 2003).

Bracketing

Because phenomenological research requires that the research question grow out of an intense interest in the topic (Moustakas, 1994), there needs to be a check on how much of the researcher's interest leaks into the data analysis and overall research process. I accomplished this through using bracketing. Bracketing helps us clear the world of ordinary thought and gives us a purified consciousness through which to view the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I as the researcher was an intimate part of my study itself, because my personal history brought the core of the problem into focus.

In phenomenology we orient ourselves to the phenomenon, implying a particular interest or point of view in life (van Manen, 1997). This cannot be wholly avoided, but it can be lessened through becoming aware of and making explicit the beliefs I have about my topic. Awareness of my researcher identity enabled me to put aside what I knew about the experience of work transitions and identity construction (van Manen, 1997). The researcher identity described my positionality as being white, middle-class, single, heterosexual, educated, and a woman. However, I could not forget or try to ignore everything: my presuppositions may still and always enter into my reflections anyway (van Manen, 1997).

These presuppositions and assumptions predispose us to interpret the

phenomenon before we have even comprehended the phenomenological question (van Manen, 1997). Therefore, it is better to make our beliefs and biases explicit, coming to terms with our assumptions in order to hold them deliberately at bay—and even to turn this knowledge against itself, thereby exposing its concealing character. When I wrote my ideas, reflections, and assumptions in my researcher journal (See Appendix C), I could then return to the task of analyzing the interview transcripts from a clearer perspective.

I used bracketing during the interview phase as well. My interview questions were more structured than the informal conversational interview that Moustakas (1990) suggests is most useful for a heuristic inquiry. I primarily asked questions and did not engage in conversation and dialogue; that is, I did not say, “Here is what I did,” or, “Here is what happened to me in that situation.” By bracketing my own personal experiences of work transition and identity reconstruction, I could better develop trust with the participants. That is, if they suspected I was in a relationship and they were not, they might have been hesitant about sharing details of their single-life experiences. Similarly, if I shared my work transition successes, participants may have felt ashamed to share their transition failures. For this reason, I chose to only reveal my own experiences after the interview process was completed.

Another instance of bracketing occurred during an interview with one of my participants. I did not further question her as to the nature or cause of a particular situation she had mentioned concerning her family of origin. To further investigate that aspect would have eroded the trust that was developed and that enabled the two interviews to be completed. All participants were allowed to evaluate their level of trust,

and they answered the interview questions according to these levels of trust. I only sought responses that clarified the phenomenon rather than the causes of the various aspects of the phenomenon.

Another way that bracketing functioned in my study was through constant attention to my researcher identity and how that identity may affect my perceptions. The researcher identity (part of which appears in the introduction to this study)--like my interview field notes and researcher journal--provided a background into how and why I became interested in the phenomenon, as well as my reactions to the phenomenon in the course of my daily life. My researcher journal contained insights I gained from the interview experiences, popular culture, life experiences outside academia, and any other resources that influenced the meaning-making process of the study findings (See Appendix C). Some of the researcher journal insights may be written into the results chapter of this dissertation.

Sociological Imagination

The sociological imagination, writes Mills (1959), “enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals (p. 2)”. By answering my interview questions in a narrative form, participants could feel empowered, as they came to realize they are not alone, not deficient, and ultimately not hopeless. They would not have to feel that they were personally defective or wrong because they felt unsure or undecided about a career--even if their culture would deem them so. This is the premise of the sociological imagination: viewing one’s problems in the lens of larger societal problems. In so doing an individual no longer needs to feel isolated with a unique problem.

In my study the sociological imagination operated somewhat discreetly to the participants. That is, I did not want my participants to reflect on the meanings of their interview responses. Instead, I asked them to merely talk to me about their experiences with work transitions. Therefore I did not ask questions such as, “How do you understand those experiences?” That was my assignment, to interpret the meaning of the participants’ words. Their only task was to explain their narratives.

In describing his sociological imagination theory, Mills (1959) explains that it is difficult to cope with the larger world if we do not understand the meaning of our own lives. We can only understand our own experience by locating ourselves within our period of history, and by seeing how biography and history intersect within society. Therefore, the sociological imagination is the fruitful form of self-consciousness (Mills, 1959). Through investigating the larger picture, as well as our individual roles within it, my participants and I could gain clarity and personal power for making future life and work transitions.

Although the circumstances my participants may have had are not generalizable, the results of the interviews may illuminate common issues that reflect the concept of work transition for mid-life women. Empowerment of participants can take the form of individuals’ feeling conscious of their circumstances, and becoming aware that others have experienced similar challenges. Participants can have satisfaction that they have made a career choice that is suitable and meaningful for them and their newly formed (and therefore integrated) identities.

Data Collection

Participant Selection

Patton (2002) says that there are no rules given for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Instead, the sample size need only be small enough for a rich understanding of the phenomenon under study. It is at the discretion of the researcher as to when to stop sampling: for example, when one reaches “theoretical saturation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Purposeful sampling is based on the belief that one must select a sample based on what one wants to discover, understand and gain insight into. Rossman & Rallis (2003) state that the ideal site for research is one where research is possible, and that offers an opportunity to build strong relationships with a rich mix of people. In addition, such a scenario would ideally have few overwhelming ethical or political considerations.

My sample consisted of women who would provide the greatest opportunity for discovery of the phenomenon of identity reconstruction after a work transition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants were ultimately chosen based on their matching my participant criteria as well as their motivation to participate. And, although I had many responses to my study, I chose those whose work transition was most diverse, and I chose participants who would complete the age-range span I had set as criteria. Participants’ motivation and their interest in my study revealed their sense of urgency and their desire to understand the phenomena as it was occurring in their own lives. This interest, I believed, would add to their truthfulness during the interviews, as well as their trust in me as researcher.

The selection of participants was based on the following criteria:

1. Participant had made a work transition. A work transition could indicate employment

in a different type of career from the previous one. One example of a work transition may be a move from the field of nursing to teaching; from employee to independent consultant; or from line worker to supervisor. A work transition implied any change that offers a different work culture, different interactions with coworkers, and different opportunities for the worker to see herself (or identify herself) in a different way than she did at her previous career.

2. Participant was a woman. There is a need for women to explain in their own terms their experiences of development. When women are studied according to various groupings (for example, working class women, black women, married women, single women), individual women's experiences may not be acknowledged, and therefore may go unnoticed.

3. Participants were between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five at the time of the work transition. This age range is traditionally the time period when an individual may question his or her work, relationships, and other aspects of life. Gilligan (1982), in her earlier work wrote that issues of separation arise at this time. This facet may have had pertinence in terms of participants' desire for marriage at this precise age range, and during their transition experience. Most importantly, women in this age range would have been exposed to the second wave of feminism in their formative years. The sexual revolution and its new ideas and permissions for women may have been especially influential to the mothers of these women, and by extension, to the decisions these participants had made about work and dating relationships.

4. Participant was not previously or currently married. I examined how the particular women in my study maintained their legitimacy in a society that would define, identify, or judge them by their marital status. Although the participants were living in a technologically advanced society, traditional thinking impacted their work and home environments at least to some extent. This traditional thinking draws back to studies that maintained that women were not traditionally expected to choose a career in the same way as men, until they knew whom they would marry (see, for example, Bardwick and Douvan, 1972.)
5. Participant did not have children. In a patriarchal society, women who do not become mothers are considered somewhat deviant, according to early studies that would deem motherhood as women's chief goal in life (Lerner, 1986).
6. Participant possessed a willingness to be a co-researcher in the process of understanding the nature and meanings of the phenomenon. This was accomplished through participation in interviews; agreeing to be recorded; and accepting that the study findings would be published in a dissertation or other publications (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were chosen on the speed of their response to being a potential participant. I gauged their interest and motivation by this factor, in addition to their meeting the criteria listed here.
7. Participant was middle-class. Because I as researcher am middle-class, I did not feel prepared or qualified to study participants of other classes. I could not assume that participants of other classes would also share the expectations that women of the middle class have had placed on them by a patriarchal society.
8. Participant was college-educated. Education is a mitigating factor in the

available paths for women. Women may be influenced by educated female role models who are more progressive than the traditional female role model. It is in educational settings that women are allowed and encouraged to question their traditional beliefs. This may or may not be true of women who are not college-educated.

I employed several approaches to find participants for my study, each time using my standard recruiting script for potential volunteers (See Appendix A). Participants who were recruited through personal and professional contacts were women whose histories I was acquainted with. In some instances, I was not sure of their marital history; but on further explanation of my participant criteria, participants indicated to me that they would qualify for my study. In addition, participants were recruited through verbal, personal, and e-mail contact to academic and professional colleagues. I described my potential participants to them, and asked whether my colleagues knew of anyone who may be interested in participating in my research study.

Potential participants were contacted by phone and a meeting was set-up to discuss the details of the study. This meeting determined potential participants' interest and verified a match to required characteristics. I wanted to ensure that the participants understood the purpose of the study and exactly what would be required of them by participating in this phenomenological study. I informed them of their rights as participants, and they were required to sign the required research consent forms.

Because my study aimed to develop rich understanding of participants'

experiences, I selected those women who would provide me the greatest opportunity for discovering this phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As I formulated my research question, I already knew potential interviewees whom I could approach. My acquaintance with some participants and my own similar experiences of work transitions allowed me to empathize with my participants' situation. Our common experience with transition enabled me to craft interview questions that would elicit understanding of and insight into the phenomenon.

Participants were recruited from various careers, and they differed in the length of time since they had undergone their work transition. I purposely chose this variety in time frames to allow for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon, and to illuminate whether identity formation is in fact dependent on time, or is independent of time. That is, participants' identity may have still been defined by their previous career. For my study, I excluded those women who were merely contemplating making a work transition.

My aim was not to claim that all single, mid-life women are alike. They may have varying levels of responsibilities for family members, and diverse goals for the future (especially as relates to their marital status). In addition to the above descriptions, my sample included only heterosexual women. These descriptors together reflect the ideal patriarchal model or target, and the expectations of marriage and children for women of this group. Women of other group classifications may be seen as already standing outside the patriarchal norm, and so the patriarchy may not focus its expectations as strongly on such women. Again, without being a member of other classifications, I

cannot adequately describe their experiences or challenges.

Participant Descriptions

I will discuss how I chose each participant. And, I will describe each participant's particular situation at the time of the transition, including the reasons they gave for making their work transition.

Participant R

I chose R as a participant because she expressed interest when I told her about my study. In fact, she asked to be a participant. I had met participant R over five years ago at a professional event. We had worked in a common field and shared our enthusiasm, resources, and ideas about our career choice. At first I hesitated about choosing her as a participant, because I thought that our friendship may compromise her openness to some of my interview questions. But ultimately I felt that her interest in my study, as well as her position at the end of my age range would provide richer insights and would make my study more inclusive. Her narratives could offer insight into the process and outcome of career decision-making, as well as overall life satisfaction.

R told me that she was born and raised in a working-class family in a mid-sized Mid-West city, the oldest of six children. R also said that she recently turned fifty years old. During our interviews, she mentioned how this milestone increased her reflective nature. She currently works for a senior housing company, and said she usually changes jobs after five years being at a position. When I first met R, she had been operating her own business in her spare time, but found that self-employment was not what she had expected. She said that it did not offer the freedom and time flexibility that she had in her current position. Her work transition was driven less by financial reasons (she

indicated to me that she is comfortable financially), but more by a quest to find work that would incorporate not only her skills and education, but also her newfound values, one of which included recycling. She spoke often during our interviews about wanting to find her “passion” in life, a career that would reflect her values and interests.

Participant K

Participant K was a thirty-nine year-old Japanese woman whom I met at a student research conference two years ago. We were both part of a panel discussion of our research projects. She asked me about my topic and continued asking me many questions about my study. I was very surprised at her interest in my topic; I had assumed that the phenomenon was something only experienced by American women. (Before meeting participant R and V, I had assumed it was a phenomenon experienced solely by women in rural Mid-Western America). When I described my ideal participant, K excitedly said, “That sounds like me and all my friends back in Japan!” I was shocked to hear her describe the same situation of educated Japanese women who were still single at mid-life.

K’s description of her life and that of her friends in Japan opened me to the possibility that my phenomenon was happening among single women whether or not they were physically present in the United States: Patriarchy was physically present in the women. I realized that my topic was something that spanned geographical boundaries. It could be a phenomenon common to any women who are part of a patriarchal system. My decision to include participant K in my study actually increased my own interest in how wide-spread my phenomenon could be.

K told me that she has been in the United States for her Masters Degree and internship since coming here initially at age twenty-eight. When I interviewed K, she

was working part-time in her area of study. Like the other participants, she “just kind of fell into” her primary career, because it was something that she was capable of doing and others’ opinions told her she may excel in that area. K’s transition was caused by her not feeling she was being paid enough at her job to reflect her educational level. She said she enjoyed her work as well as the relationship she had with her co-workers. She said she felt some hesitation at leaving or making a transition, thinking that perhaps a different career would not have as positive a work environment.

K told me that she was planning on entering a Ph.D. program, but was still unsure of her topic area. She also wanted to (or felt she must) discuss this decision with her boyfriend. K was the only participant who was in a relationship at the time of the study. She explained that she and her boyfriend had been together for over two years. It was interesting to note that she laughed as she described her siblings: one of her brothers is fifty-one years old—“the same age as my boyfriend!” K laughed. Her boyfriend, she told me, had not been previously married, and has a twenty-one year old son.

Participant V

I had known participant V for almost ten years. We had participated in professional conferences together and knew each other as acquaintances. Ours was not as open a friendship as I had with participant R. For that reason, I wondered if I should add V to my study. However, when I described my study to her, she was enthusiastic about being a participant. She had been laid off from her current employer, and was taking Masters Classes at the time I talked to her about my study. I had not known her relationship or marital history, so I did not consider her as a potential participant at first. However when I told her the description of my ideal participant, she volunteered for my

study.

V said she had recently turned forty, and during our interviews she turned forty-one. She told me that she was raised in a large East Coast city, the only girl in a family of five boys. During the course of our first interview, V revealed to me that she had been and is currently being treated for depression. She added that the time pressures about getting to work, responding to friends' invitations, and other tasks involved in a work transition were exacerbated by her depression. She asked me whether there was any research that had been done on career change and depression. V was also the most vocal about being conscious of the fact she was not yet married. She, more than the other two participants, also mentioned the compliments she receives about looking younger than her forty years.

I chose V as a participant because she had already navigated the milestone of turning forty years old. And, although I had no knowledge of her background prior to our first interview, her interview shed light on many aspects of work transition at mid-life: depression, unresolved childhood issues, childbearing choices, as well as the normal career decisions one must make. Her interviews and personal interest in my study also convinced me that there is a definite relationship between work transitions and depression—one that has not adequately been explored in the literature. Its absence was a stark reminder of the lengths educators still need to travel in addressing the needs of all types of learners during transitional phases.

Phenomenological Interviews

The aim of a phenomenological interview is to determine what the experience means for the person who has had the experience, and who is able to provide a

comprehensive description of it. From individual descriptions, general or universal meanings (essences or structures of the experience) can be derived (Moustakas, 1994). Typically in phenomenological investigation, the long interview is the main method of data collection. Participants' responses helped improve my understanding of these particular women and how they make meaning of their work transition experiences. The women's responses and reflections provided insights that these women can use to further process their experiences. My role in the interview process was to keep the meaning of the phenomenon open, and keep myself and my participants oriented to the research question (van Manen, 1997). I had to develop a moral obligation to my participants because of this shared caring and interest in the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997).

My study addressed the following: feelings about one's workplace; participants' emotional responses to careers they have had; age at the time of the work transitions; family circumstances; and educational level (both of the participant, as well as that of her parents). These questions may be able to illuminate a relationship between adult development theories and the outcome of a work transition. I asked open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B) in order to lead to an emergence of meaning, and possibly to new and clarifying questions. The participants and I together tried to make continuing sense of what we were saying to each other (Mishler, 1986).

Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for the participants. I used Patton's (2002) general interview guide, while also not excluding the addition of spontaneous questions throughout the interview process. Progressive questions, such as: "What was your job before your work transition?" led to follow-up questions such as,

“And then what happened?” In this way, participants were free to construct their narrative without being confined by dates, timelines, or other intrusive structures.

I allowed participants to ground their experiences by asking “How” questions: “How did you get from that career to the new career?”; “How did you feel about the act of making a work transition?” I also allowed participants to talk, as opposed to merely answering my questions. In this way my interpretations of their responses gave me clues as to what questions to further ask, rather than relying on an inflexible interview script.

Participants provided me the foundation or background of their experiences. From that information, I interpreted participants’ responses, which led me to which questions I should ask next. To prevent participants from interpreting their own responses, I refrained from asking them “Why” questions. For example, these were typical questions that I asked: “Tell me what you did...”; “What was your previous job and how did you move to another job?” I did not ask participants to tell me what each response meant to them. In effect, I did not expect or allow participants to interpret their interview responses; that was my task as researcher.

During the interviews, I left space for silence, rather than fill awkward silences with comments or questions. van Manen (1997) advises it may be more effective to remain silent when the conversation haltingly gropes forward, because out of that space of silence can come a more reflective response from the participant. In most cases, I did not ask participants to elaborate. And one participant’s silences and also her attempts to avoid silence were what van Manen (1997) describes as epistemological silences--the kind of silence we are confronted with when we face the unspeakable. Polanyi (1958, 1969) has termed that a tacit form of knowing where we sense “that we know more than

we can tell (1969, pp. 259-207).” In certain instances, my silence helped to maintain the trust level by allowing participants to reveal only what they were ready to share with me.

Data collection in naturalistic inquiry can be in “any surrounding that allows the people to tell their own stories (Shkedi, 2005, p. 7)”; the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the research setting. One of the second interviews was held at a restaurant because the participant suggested that location. I doubted that place would be a good choice for the interview because of the lack of privacy and the extraneous noise. But the participant said she felt that it would be a good excuse to get out of the house. Her depression had kept her inside all day, and she was the one who suggested not meeting at her house, but rather in a public place. I did not try to talk her into staying and meeting at her house. I felt that if she had suggested this meeting place, she would be more comfortable there than somewhere I chose for the interview. In all instances where I met in person with participants, I allowed them the choice of where our interview would occur.

Interview Questions

In phenomenology, reality is dependent on the interpretation of a conscious human being (Garrison & Shale, 1994). My interview questions were crafted to direct participants toward being conscious of the steps they took in making their work transitions, as well as the feelings they experienced at various stages of the process. I was aware that the participants may not have experienced the phenomenon in clearly delineated stages. Nonetheless, participants must have an awareness of their own lives, in order to take nothing for granted in their answers to my interview questions (Garrison & Shale, 1994).

Some of my questions were formed through reflecting on an incidental meeting I had with a participant who turned out to be outside of the qualifying age range. She revealed narratives of her friends, experiences she herself has had as a single educated woman, and an analysis of the questions that I had already created. Her input was invaluable as a peer review for the ultimate formation of my interview questions.

I formed my questions to ensure that I checked my own susceptibility to the stereotypes that evolve into expectations and then judgments about single women. My conversation with that potential participant led me to examine my assumption that these women's ultimate goal is to get married. From external appearances, I suspected the women wanted education and career; they had already accomplished those things in their lives. But I wanted to protect against influencing their answers in terms of any leading questions about their impending or eventual marriage and/or children. Throughout the interview process, I allowed participants to reveal their desire, or lack thereof, for those personal life goals.

Part of reconstructing identity is listening to our own innate messages, rather than to societal expectations or tradition. I asked, "How do you define happiness?" and "What does happiness mean to you?" I inferred that the restlessness or confusion they were feeling was because the women wanted to assimilate into the definition of normalcy in their society; they ultimately wanted to be acceptable adult members of the patriarchal society in which they live. This society maintains certain expectations (based on traditional theories of adult development) for healthy adults, chiefly that they eventually will get married—regardless of whether they remain married. Even I as researcher am not immune to reliance on these stereotypes, as I realized when re-reading an excerpt

from my researcher journal (See Appendix C). My prior assumptions may have been incorrect, or could have been accurate. I was merely interested in how these participants live within that message.

An example of a question which related to this was, "Do you like being single?" I also asked questions about a detailed plan of what the participant would do in an actual situation. I wanted participants to form their responses in a personal, practical way, rather than in a manner that was driven by societal expectation. Also, I asked questions about participants' family influences: education, work, and home life. These questions revealed an approach to life, and showed how each participant's approach differed. The type of work the parents performed may have influenced career decision-making, for example, in the instance of an entrepreneurial family versus a working-class family.

Questions about time/biological pressures were designed to see whether career decision making does in fact coincide with adult development. Part of planning is visioning or imagining. Questions that reveal this aspect are, "As a young person, what kind of work did you think you would be doing as an adult?" These questions revealed a lack of planning in the first part of participants' lives, and an awareness now of their skills, coping abilities, and level of hope. With these in place, career decision-making can more adequately and satisfactorily be accomplished.

My questions were organized into categories: family background, education financial beliefs/messages, etc. (See Appendix B). This was an attempt to keep questions organized and to make sure that I asked everything that was pertinent. It also gave me a sense of early identity formation in the participants. In the interview situations, I did not

prod participants into telling me more about certain situations. I merely allowed the participants to tell me as much as they wanted to reveal.

This strategy proved to be important in maintaining participants' trust in me while discussing several topics. If I had pressured participants to reveal more personal information I would have destroyed the level of trust that had been developed. What was being revealed to me in the interviews was based on participants' level of trust in me, rather than on an arbitrary interview protocol or goal. Interview question formation was also accomplished through keeping a researcher journal, where I included my reflections on how my interview questions may relate to and intersect with films, video, news, and daily happenings in my own life.

Completed interviews were transcribed in a collaborative relationship with the participants. In order to honor participants' stories, I needed to learn their language, in all its nuances and idiosyncratic vocabulary (Shkedi, 2005). For example, when participants made a habitual sound, or when they chose to acknowledge and talk to their pets that were also present at the interview. In an interview, we bring to bear our own tacit as well as explicit knowledge in order to understand the situation and that of our participants (Shkedi, 2005). Arskey and Knight, (1999) say that interviewing is a powerful way of helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit—to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings.” Where needed, participants provided me with additional clarification. Being aware of non-verbal cues helped me to better assess the emotional aspect of the participants' decision to make a work transition. Further, where the words of participants were not congruent with their non-verbal communication, I asked participants for clarification.

As stated in chapter one, the objective of this phenomenological inquiry was to concentrate on the inner experiences that occurred (or continue to occur) in the lives of these participants as they made their work transition. Following the concept of emergent design (Lincoln & Guba, 1990), what will be learned at a site will always depend on the interaction between researcher and context, and this interaction is not fully predictable. Again, the fact remains that my interpretations, my own history, even my physical presence affected the interview event.

Data Analysis

My study employed thematic analysis as the main data analysis strategy. Thematic analysis is “a process of encoding qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vi.)” and requires the identifying, analyzing and reporting of themes found in the data. Themes here denote patterns that I found in the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). These patterns enabled me to organize, describe, and interpret the various characteristics of the phenomena.

Following van Manen’s (1990) explanation of themes as allowing us to “get at the notion we are addressing (p. 79),” I re-read the transcripts with intense focus in order to get “a rich and detailed, yet complex, account” of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Each further reflection (for example, by re-reading the interview transcripts) modified my conscious experience of the data, and offered me a different perspective on the phenomenon. After the first reading of each transcript, I made highlighted indicators of phrases, words, images that struck me as pertinent to the phenomenon (See Appendix D). My reflection became more exact, and I was able to more accurately and completely present the phenomenon through use of themes. As Moustakas (1994) noted, things

become clearer as they are considered again and again. Illusion is undone through this type of correction, as we approach from a different vantage point or with a different sense or meaning.

As I re-read the interview transcripts I made a second highlighted copy of each interview (See Appendix E). I also physically cut and sorted the particular transcript sections, rather than use a computer program such as N-Vivo. I chose to analyze the data according to my own tactile and kinesthetic learning style. In this way, I was able to see consistencies in categories. I could note the differences in participants' mentioning of money or other topics. With this process I was able to be more flexible in changing or combining themes into sub-themes.

The highlighting a second time enabled me to also see a consistency in V's speech pattern that I had not noticed on the first reading. For example, V's nervous laughter and stuttering (or repeating sounds) on the second reading made me recognize a common pattern. This type of response usually occurred when V quickly jumped to unrelated topics. She jumped within the sentences to and fro, almost stuttering, as she reiterated to me part of her educational history; the college period was when she had attempted suicide; and also when her brother had completed his suicide attempt. I noted that V was not using this behavior to try and evade the subject; on the contrary, she was very open with all her information. It seemed to me a way to protect herself from having to feel those feelings again; it was easier to be agile with her speech than to sink into a feeling mode through a lot of silence.

This deeper looking at the transcripts also led me to look at those subjects that V discussed right before jumping to other topics, or laughing nervously. For example, she

talked of having emotionally stayed at age fourteen, because as she said, that was the age the abuse had started. And, she talked of “you know, like life is just going along, in a straight line,” then she laughed. I had thought originally that it was a strange place to laugh, especially as it came after she had talked about feeling numbed by her experiences at the time.

This was an example of how I allowed the participant to be herself, and to not read anything into the initial analysis of the transcript. Although my process of reading, re-reading, highlighting, re-highlighting, cutting with scissors, sorting, and typing still more may have seemed tedious and unnecessary to others less inclined to this way of operating, for me it was necessary. Some of these insights were not even noted until after I had read and physically handled the slips of paper cut from the transcripts.

I was most acutely aware of myself as a researcher during V’s interviews and also as I read and re-read her interview transcripts. I wondered, for instance, about V’s laughter at what I would have considered inappropriate times during her narratives. But again, I allowed her to explain herself; and I allowed myself to consider that hers may have been her normal style of speech and her normal way of adjusting to uncomfortable topics being discussed. I wondered, too, on later listening to and reading of the interviews, just how appropriate my own laughter was in response to hers.

I wondered whether I just laughed along with her at these inappropriate times in order to mirror her, to make her feel comfortable with me, and therefore to have her continue to trust me. After all, this really was our usual way of relating: she always did make me laugh easily. So, for me to not laugh at those times, to not in essence ‘share’ this laughter with her, may have made her suspicious of me. I was glad that in the actual

interview I had not thought so deeply about my reactions and behavior. It was only in the re-reading of the transcripts that I saw the oddity and incongruent nature of my own behavior.

I allowed V her speech pattern and did not inject my sympathies, even though it may have seemed almost cold, especially as she related her own suicide experience and that of her brother. She spoke non-stop, almost as though she did not want me to interrupt, even to add reassuring sounds. She delved into the topic, as though if she spoke any more slowly or thoughtfully, she may have to re-experience those painful feelings. V explained, almost casually jumping into the description of looking at herself in the mirror, “thinking, ‘O.K. if I can be sitting here putting a neck to—putting a knife to my neck, *something’s not right.*”

My intense attention to detail helped me in the reading of the transcript, because I had typed in where the pauses between phrases and words occurred, as well as their length. In this particular story there had been no pauses. It was, I thought, as though she was protecting me from having to comfort her, and to prevent her from having to need or ask for any comfort. This seemed a logical explanation, because in her description of her therapy support group activities she was working very diligently on overcoming her past --including all the associated pain. This was seen throughout her interviews, as there were no tears, no emotion save the lightness and laughter, however inappropriate it seemed to me. Her later mentioning of how other people who had not suffered depression would not understand, would not know how to comfort her, assured me that she was not expecting me to offer my sympathy.

My tending to detail helped me to correct any illusion I may have had throughout the data collection process. Regardless of my interpretation of participants' behavior during the interview, or their particular choice of words or natural speech patterns, I forced myself to remain open to them, and to see situations from their viewpoint, rather than superimpose my preconceptions on them (Fontana & Frye, 1994). In the case of V's revealing her brother's suicide, her sexual abuse, and her own suicide attempt, I did not react or console. I merely allowed her to reveal as much information as she felt comfortable revealing. According to van Manen (2003), researchers need to extract, understand, and describe participants' feelings, mood and emotions, while remaining somewhat distant. van Manen (2003) says that researchers accomplish this by bracketing.

Researchers "bracket" their presuppositions, reflect on their described experiences, and then intuit the essential structures of participants' experiences (Cohen & Omery, 1994). In the case of R, I was hesitant about asking her whether she had wanted children; I felt that would be too personal and may be hurtful. However, I did ask her the question, and found that her answer was honest, direct, and she did not display any hurt feelings about my asking such a question. I realized that bracketing sometimes requires that we take the role of objective researcher—even in a heuristic phenomenological study—and not act in ways prescribed by polite society. And at other times, we must react as we would in our normal interactions, in order to maintain the trust level between us and participants. Bracketing helps us to navigate the appropriateness of each way of responding to and initiating interactions with participants.

During this process I also reminded myself to not make assumptions about these

women's ultimate goals in life; some may have chosen marriage, and some may have chosen a meaningful career or purpose. It was interesting to note that with K, I felt no hesitation about asking personal questions such as whether she wanted children and marriage. This may have been due to the distance between us—we had known each other for a shorter time than I had known R and V; and also I do not share a common heritage or religion with K. Whatever the reason, I knew that I had made the right decision in choosing K as a participant. Her involvement was important in keeping me courageous enough to ask the personal, private--but necessary--questions that would best reveal the phenomenon.

Data Analysis Procedure

My data analysis process followed a form similar to that suggested by Giorgi, et al. (1979). In this model, 1) The researcher reads the entire description of the experience straight through to get a sense of the whole. 2) The researcher reads the same description more slowly and delineates each time that a transition in meaning is perceived; these become a series of meaning units or constituents. 3) The researcher eliminates redundancies and clarifies to herself the meaning of the units by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole. 4) The researcher reflects on the given units (which are still expressed in the concrete language of the subject) and comes up with the essence of that situation for the subjects. The researcher interrogates each unit to discover what it reveals, and transforms each unit into the language of psychological science. 5) The researcher synthesizes and integrates the insights into a consistent description of the experience or phenomenon.

The unit of analysis was the individual interviews. As soon as the analysis stage

began, there was ongoing communication between the researcher and the text (Graneheim. & Lundman, 2003)--much like reading a book is a shared activity between the author and the reader. After each interview, I listened to the recording of the interview from my digital voice recorder. I then transcribed the complete interview on a WORD document on my home computer (See Appendix D for an excerpt).

There was a three-step process to the transcription typing event: First, I typed every word, non-verbal action (such as clearing of the throat, sighs, various length of pauses between participants' words, etc.), and all pertinent information (such as what was going on in the background, whether it was a song on the radio, or a dog's barking). If there was something that I did not understand, or a sound that was not clear, I rewound the recording and listened until the typing of each comment was complete. I continued this process for each of the six interviews.

I chose to transcribe the interviews myself rather than hire someone else to do this task. The meticulous nature of this procedure resulted in an average of nine to twelve hours of typing for each of the six interviews. Yet this process allowed me to focus on all the nuances of the participants' comments. Those instances were typed into brackets as they occurred. Typing the transcripts myself also allowed me to become closer with the text and to uncover any more subtle meanings or interpretations that may have been missed with only a cursory or single reading of the text. Graneheim and Lundman (2003) say there is a disadvantage in the transcription process in non-verbal communication. Meaning is created by how a message is communicated, that is, the voice or implied feeling that emerges from the reading of the text (Dowe-Wamboldt, 1992) since these may influence the underlying meaning.

Watzlawick et al. (1967) state, “the nature of a relationship is contingent upon the punctuation of the communicational sequences between the communicants (p. 59.)” In the second step, I reviewed the entire text, following along with the typed words as I listened again to the digital voice recorder. This gentle listening allowed me to make any further corrections, or to include any additional pauses or phrases I may have missed on the first listening. I then made the necessary corrections or additions to the document.

In the third step, I mailed the completed transcript via U.S. Postal service to the participant whose interview I had transcribed. I asked participants to indicate those places in the document where my typed transcript differed from what they had meant to say. They noted these changes or additions in highlighter pen and returned the transcript to me, either by postal service mail, or in person. In this manner, I relied on my participants to verify the accuracy of my documentation of their stories.

The fourth step occurred as I made the necessary corrections to their transcript. I listened again to the recorded interview, and compared that to the corrections they indicated. Most of their corrections were grammatical; however when I checked the transcript against the spoken word, I found the transcript to be correct. In other words, their corrections did not involve any changes or corrections to participants’ meanings or explanations they gave during their interviews. One participant was especially concerned about all the *um*’s and *ah*’s that she read in her interview transcript. I assured her that they were unimportant and that she need only consider and re-read the meanings she had revealed to me during the interview.

In the case of this participant’s hesitation about her voice recorded interview, I did not indicate to her that these hesitations may have been extremely telling in the overall

meaning of her experience. She may not have agreed, and my explanation of this fact may have influenced her follow-up interview responses as she may have wanted to censor herself. In one instance, I included the behavior of this particular participant's dog that was present during our first interview. The dog may or may not have been moved to its behavior because of nervousness, anxiety, or in response to an unusual characteristic exhibited by its owner. This complete and meticulous reporting in the transcript became a form of bracketing, as I included everything I heard, not knowing which would be important and which not, for the final analysis. These steps completed the gathering of the interview data source. I repeated this process for each of two interviews for all three participants, for a total of six interview transcripts.

I assigned a different colored highlighter for each participant's transcript: R was green; K, pink; and V, blue. I read through the first interview transcript of each participant, and highlighted those phrases or words or non-verbal indications that spoke to me as being relevant to explaining the meaning of the phenomenon (See Appendix D). Intuition guided me as I wrote notes in the margins as to the categories that were emerging (See Appendix E). Some of these categories reflected the grouping that I originally made in the interview guide: family messages, money, education, etc. (See Appendix B).

Other categories emerged throughout the interview transcript, as they were reiterated by participants (See Appendices F and G). Some of these newer insights of categories included: time; control; purpose; visioning; passivity; decision-making; mother's progressiveness; and conflict in the home of origin. I printed another copy of each transcript, and copied the exact highlighted notes from the original transcript. One

copy served as an overall picture of the interview. With scissors, I cut the other copy into sections, according to which categories were written in the margins.

I then took these sections of paper of the categories and typed them into a WORD document (see Appendix G). Each category had a specific heading, for example, education. Each utterance that related to education was typed under that category into the new document. This process of typing required that I again read the transcript and absorb even more nuances of what participants had meant in their interviews. It may have seemed an unnecessary step, but it was immensely helpful as it gave me another visual reminder of how much one participant needed to explain, for example, about finding her purpose in life. Another participant had much to say in the category of education. These WORD documents became a resource as I could easily find their quotes to type into the results chapter. This process of analysis involved a back and forth movement between the whole and parts of the text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

This process yielded categories, from which I was able to uncover various themes about the phenomenon. Categories, according to Graneheim and Lundman (2003), are seen as the content aspect, while themes represent the relationship aspect. From the WORD documents containing the various categories, I reread the documents and devised themes according to the emerging patterns I noted in the categories (See Appendices H and I). From these, I developed meaning units, or codes (Baxter, 1991). I will expand on the development of themes in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The data analysis process I used was similar to what Strauss & Corbin (1998) call open coding, or the process of grouping statements into categories of equal meaning value. Linking the underlying meanings together in categories is a theme. Polit and

Hungler (1999) call a theme a recurring regularity within categories or cutting across categories. For example, the theme *in control* could mean control in terms of participants' education, money issues, independence, etc. van Manen (1990, p. 87) considers a theme to be that which describes "an aspect of the structure of experience" and says that a theme can not be an object or a thing. A theme answers the question "How?" and occurs on an interpretative level (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

The first step I had done in the data analysis process was horizontalization, or listing every expression (including pauses, length of pauses, sighs, when participants moved to a whisper, clearing the throat, etc.) relevant to the experience of the phenomenon. As Moustakas (1994) notes, every perception adds something important to the experience. I had read each transcript and highlighted (with a different highlighter color pen for each participant's interview sets) every phrase or word that indicated something important about the phenomenon. As I highlighted these codes, I had written additional notes in the margin, also in the same highlighter color. Some of these notes included one-word identifiers, such as "Money" or "Mother's working," which later I developed into codes.

This procedure was completed for each of the six total interviews. This enabled me to generate initial codes. Codes, says Boyatzis (1998) are "the most basic segment or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon (p. 63)." By using this process, I could identify which data were meaningful, and then create strategies for interpreting this data. Next, I sorted the interview text into these five content areas: family (including early messages while growing up); work (including work culture and work history); personal reflections, (on

singleness, for example); decision-making processes (personal as well as career); and money (including early family messages about money, and current relationship with money) (See Appendix F). These areas framed the process for the creation of meaning units. A meaning unit can be words, sentences or paragraphs that contain aspects related to each other (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

Codes, according to Coffey and Atkinson (1996) are “tools to think with (p. 32)” and labeling a meaning unit with a code allowed me to think about the data in new and different ways (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003). Because of the complex and intertwined nature of human experience, mutually exclusive categories are not always possible to create (Krippendorff, 1980). Experiences related to family and/or singleness became sorted into both categories of family and singleness. Krippendorff (1980) further explains that a category answers the questions, “What?” and acts as a thread throughout the codes. Categories (or codes) are what the text says. I had evoked these experiences of family and/or singleness by asking participants, “What kind of messages did you get growing up about getting or being married?” I then developed these codes into themes, according to my interpretation of the meanings of each of the codes.

As Moustakas (1994) notes, meaning directs a person to gaze at an entity and to be guided by it; the object of a conscious act and its meaning are inseparable. From these highlighted notes came the segments of meanings. I chose to use thematic analysis as a coding strategy (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two ways to create codes (Boyatzis, 1998): one being theory-driven code (or prior-research-driven code); and the other data-driven code. I used data-driven codes, where themes were dependent on data. In my study, these included the interview transcripts, as well as my field notes

which included my reactions to the interview as well as a description of the location of the interview. A data-driven approach focuses on revealing the meaning of “what data says”, and is relatively free from previous theories or notions (Boyatzis, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I chose against using solely theory-driven codes mainly because some of my findings were a surprise to me, and I would not have been privy to them, or would not have had a reason to investigate them before embarking on my study.

I initially believed that using solely data-driven information as a tool of analysis would be best for my study. However, I wondered to what extent my theoretical lenses influenced everything in my study, from the choice of topic to the type of interview questions. For example, I specifically chose patriarchal topics in my interview questions, such as participants’ views on their mother’s work outside the home; the role of the church and religion; the family messages about the necessity of marrying at a certain age or at least marrying eventually. Therefore, I did not use data-driven nor theory-based codes exclusively. I applied each where necessary. For example, questions about money messages were influenced by the topic of independence (financial independence). However as the themes emerged money became more representative of the concept of *being in control*—a concept which represented more far-reaching aspects than merely finances would have.

van Manen (1997) maintains that grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a process bound by rules, but rather it is a free act of “seeing” meaning. A theme to van Manen (1997), then, is merely a means to get at the notion we are addressing, and this provides control and order to our research and writing. Following this ordering analogy, themes may be explained as the structures of experience—the experiential

structures that make up the experience of identity construction after a work transition
(van Manen, 1997).

Development of Themes

A theme is an aspect or quality that makes a phenomenon what it is, and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is (van Manen, 1997). I expected that through reading and re-reading the transcripts, my typed notes about the participants, my researcher journal, and all pertinent notes, themes would emerge naturally from the data. These processes of reviewing all documents were helpful in taking the next step of developing codes and themes. Through the discovering of themes, the researcher begins to find what reality is to the participants. Gurwitsch (1967) observes that through the perceptual process, compatible and interlocking aspects of the thing appear. In addition, new perceptions always hold the possibility of contributing knowledge regarding any object.

van Manen's (1997) process guided me as I began to use a holistic reading approach, asking myself which phrase would capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole. This approach includes listening and reading the texts several times to note those phrases that seemed particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described. Throughout the process I lived the question, became the question through this going back again and again to the things themselves until the essential nature was revealed (van Manen, 1997).

The first step that I took in the process of developing themes is that I asked myself what was the meaning of the anecdote, remembering that themes are not objects encountered at certain points in a text—themes are intransitive (van Manen, 1997). Since

themes give shape to the shapeless, they can never completely unlock the deep meaning or the full mystery of the experiential meaning of a notion (van Manen, 1997). That is, my input and experiences as researcher will always forever cloud the meanings I see in the participants' transcripts and anecdotes, regardless of how much bracketing was incorporated. I also created sub-themes from more complex phenomena or themes (See Appendix J), since one theme always implicates the meaning dimensions of other themes (van Manen, 1997).

I placed each piece of paper representing a topic area into a separate basket or container. I was able to continue to physically touch, see and understand the volume of comments that each participant had said about each topic, as I focused on brief ideas based on the data. This was in contrast to my original understanding or assumptions about the phenomenon. For example, I thought there would be many more comments made by participants about the topic of singleness than there actually were.

From these piles of topics, I typed into another WORD document the complete and exact words of the participants about a particular topic (See Appendix G). These fell under each specific heading of money, family, education, etc., and included sub topics. Some of the sub-topics included, under family, for example, Family's messages about money; family messages about education; mother's working outside the home (when participant was a child), etc.

From these documents, I grouped common utterances. I deleted overlapping or repetitive statements, to leave only the textural meanings (Moustakas, 1994). From those, I extracted those statements which concern descriptors of women's identity or view of herself after the work transition, as well as her view of herself in her previous

career. These descriptions included the thoughts and feelings of participants. This further sifting of the data helped me to clarify the essence of each topic and helped me to generate the eventual themes.

Development of Sub-themes

From these I developed the core themes which provide insight into the lived experiences of these women. These were clustered into themes. Because the links between these categories can be very subtle and implicit, Strauss & Corbin (1998) recommend a paradigm, which is used in a flexible way, “to sort out and organize the emerging connections (p. 128).” For example, being in control was a necessary step to having feelings of self-efficacy. This led to capacity for career decision-making, which led to developing identity. In some instances, this identity development led to more self-efficacy in terms of worthiness of marriage.

I was flexible in finding the groupings of common themes. For example, the *in control* pile could also include interview excerpts about education and money. I could more easily see how topics overlapped. For example, *belonging* could involve *peers*, *religion*, and *support*. And as I sorted V’s piles of excerpts, the categories of *decision-making*, *passive*, *in control*, *want*, and *hope* all seemed to be relevant to each other. I then looked to the groups of the other participants’ excerpts to see if this could be true for theirs, as well.

The *in control* pile, on closer reading of the excerpts, pointed to an end goal or being in control was just as a means to finding one’s *purpose*. In this way, I was able not only to see the larger themes, but also the sub-themes and how they related to finding one’s purpose in life (See Appendix J). From this analysis, I devised that the creating of

a new identity depended for these women on finding their individual purpose—whether that was represented by meaningful and useful work (work that utilized their education and work skills), a marriage, having a child, or a career that would allow them to contribute to society.

In addition to this spontaneous grouping activity, I also looked more closely at some of the groups, such as family. I asked myself, “In which participant stories did money and control (of money) intersect?” The in control pile, on further consideration, yielded the outcome of transitions causing one to feel out of control (of time, especially), which led to depression (in V, for example), and causing her to lose focus. This lack of focus prevented her from having effective decision-making abilities. I also saw from the *belonging* pile that this was an important factor in developing one’s identity: one must feel a sense of belonging somewhere. And, participants’ repeating the word, “I want” in terms of their future career and type of work, indicated that they do have a vision of their *purpose*. Or, at the very least, they now have a clearer direction toward their purpose. That would prove to be sufficient to develop or form that new identity that is required for self-efficacy in performing the behaviors necessary to make that identity a reality.

Theme analysis, as van Manen (1997) terms it, refers to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work—in this case, the interview transcripts. After reading the interview transcripts, I found common, arbitrary categories such as *independence*, *support*, *money*, and *education*. But on further reading and sorting of these categories, other more clear categories developed as my understandings deepened about the participants and their words and situations. Other categories that I had originally described under the word,

money were now reflective of *worth* as I delved into their meanings of the participants' words (for example, V's explaining her feelings of having to depend on her parents financially, and the amount of debt she had incurred.)

The category of peers revealed not that but rather a more common (to other categories) word descriptor of *belonging*. I found that *belonging* was an important factor contributing to developing one's identity. As I continued to sort and consider the overall picture, I saw that many of these categories overlapped, especially as I sorted participant V's transcript responses. For example, V's responses showed only one excerpt about *money*, and none concerning *independence*—categories that I had arbitrarily chosen. These categories appeared for V, but under a different name or description. I noticed that for V, (and later, I realized, for all three participants), *money* represented something larger than an amount; it represented something more profound and influential. *Money* was a sub-category of *independence*, and it pointed toward the more commonly appearing theme of being *in control* (See Appendix H).

To help find these nuances, I looked at what the stories about *money* were intersecting with in the narratives. There was never a goal of having a lot of *money*; *money* was a factor that represented something else as a goal, and *money* was a tool to attain another goal. This was true even for V, for whom a certain amount of money was needed to repay the debt to her parents. *Money* represented an ability to gain other things: *maturity, independence, an ability to focus on her decision-making*. This would help V to accomplish her sequential goals and to ultimately realize her *purpose* and *identity*.

Other categories, on later readings of the data, became relevant to each other. For

example, the categories I termed *decision-making*, *passiveness*, being *in control*, *want*, and *hope* seemed to be related to each other. These commonalities led me to see that all were leading in a certain direction, toward being *in control*. Originally I had thought that all of these categories I found were separate and could stand alone. However, I realized on further readings of the data that these categories were, in effect, interconnected. That is, *education* was not merely a *family message* in and of itself that participants had received. Instead, it was a promise to these women by parents, all (except K's father) who had not gone to college, of more money. And, money meant *supporting* oneself, or *gaining independence*. This, in turn, would lead to being *in control* of one's life.

I arbitrarily grouped the responses into *in control* and *passiveness*—mainly to sort out this new facet—the negative aspect of *passiveness*--from what I had previously thought was a positive aspect. Because of the many instances of *indecision* mentioned throughout participants' interviews, I looked more deeply and discovered that new theme of *passiveness*. I noted that many of my themes could be interpreted both positively and negatively. For example, *education* could be a form of being *in control* of one's life, and therefore be something positive. But also, for these women, *education* was a passive endeavor, as they did not choose education, as much as it was chosen for them by their family and its messages. R said that, "My parents were very adamant about all of us going for a degree, or some sort of further education." They also reiterated to her that "one's education and the health benefits (at the job) were self-imposed on the other." V said, "My father told us, 'You *will* go to college!'"

The sifting and sorting revealed that the most overarching factor—the one that all other categories revolved around—was the issue of being *in control*. It was required in

order to have or form feelings of self-efficacy and purposefulness. The category of being *in control* became a focal point, even as *passiveness* was an issue in the lives of the participants. The *passiveness* was in opposition to the main goal of being *in control*. Being *in control* would then lead one to the ability to create one's *identity*. This is because being *in control* leads to the ability or at least the motivation to discover one's *purpose* in life, which contributes to forming one's *identity*. Being *in control* is attained through *support/belonging/peers*, *education/independence*, *learning* (about oneself and about life), and *focus/decision-making*, among other things. I made a type of flow-chart organization to understand how themes were leading to or indicating other, larger concepts (See Appendix I).

The final step in the analysis of the data was to organize the themes into a description of the phenomenon. Although phenomenological essences cannot be grasped by a single statement, they can be ascertained by a "fuller description of the structure of a lived experience" (van Manen, 2003, p. 92). van Manen also uses "free imaginative variation" (p. 107); this means we reflect on whether the phenomenon is still the same even if we imaginatively change or delete a specific theme from the phenomenon. I selected a theme, for example feelings of *belonging*, and then verified whether that was an essential theme or an incidental one. In addition, I integrated categories around a central category, or the main theme of the research; this served to pull the categories together to form a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Bracketing in the Data Analysis Process

It must be noted that all description is ultimately interpretation (van Manen, 2003). This can be controlled by employing bracketing. This occurred in my study in the

data collection stage, as I conducted interviews in terms of “open-ended exploration of the phenomena” (Stanage, 1987). Questions were not wholly predetermined, but flowed within a clue-and-cue-taking process (Ray, 1994). Bracketing can also be applied to the analysis stage, since data collection is not separate from data analysis. I even employed bracketing in the writing of the results, as I used letters to represent each participant’s pseudonym. I chose against giving each participant a name; I wanted to prevent the reader from associating a meaning with a particular name. In this way, the reader would also be able to set aside his or her preconceived notions about the participants and their experiences.

However, no matter how much I employed bracketing within the research method, my own interpretations, presuppositions, biases, and background ultimately filtered into the research activities, descriptions, and findings. van Manen (2003) argued that we cannot completely bracket everything we know (or find out) about the phenomenon under study. Spielberg (1982) believed that bracketing does not mean ignoring or deleting the information bracketed; rather bracketing serves to separate the nonessential in order to calculate it later into the study results.

A form of bracketing and standing sufficiently outside the phenomenon is peer review. Most of my peer review came from discussions with my advisor, as I explained why I did certain procedures during the research. Corrections made during such discussions helped to move me toward more accurate and more complete layers of meaning of the phenomenon. For example, some researchers may not believe pets’ reactions are indicative of participants’ mood or level of unease with the subject being discussed, and may not include these instances in the analysis. However, once I

consulted with peers, it was I who made the final decision as to what to include and exclude from the final analysis.

Corrections, adjustments, and decisions such as those are influenced by an intuitive aspect. In phenomenological studies, intuition is useful in order to capture understandings of participants' words, feelings, and experiences (Spiegelberg, 1982). The literature of phenomenology suggests two interrelated functions of intuition: Capturing meaning and verifying meaning (Spiegelberg, 1982; Stanage, 1987; Cohen & Omery, 1994). Capturing refers to the attempts to describe the uniqueness of the specific phenomena; verifying means that intuiting is the ultimate test of all knowledge. Intuition also is enhanced by the reflective process.

Reflective Processes

The phenomenal experience becomes increasingly clarified and expands in meaning as we enact reflective processes (Moustakas, 1994). Things can emerge in our consciousness in an empty manner and thus our experience moves toward filling them by virtue of looking and looking at them again; the seeing itself brings about a sense of completion or wholeness of perception (Moustakas, 1994). Just as my continuing to look at the data and discover sub-themes, there is always room for these additional meanings, regardless of how often or from what angles an object has been present (Husserl, 1970b.). Some of the reflective processes in my study included the process of writing my field notes; reviewing the interview transcript while simultaneously listening to the recording of the participants' voices; and re-reading and reconsidering the text as I cut and separated the various codes.

These processes also helped me to confirm the codes and make the text real to me; Husserl (1975) maintains that an object has reality in consciousness and “is reality for me only as long as I believe I can confirm it (p. 23).” Qualitative research requires co-operation and understanding between the researcher and the participants, so that interviews are mutual, contextual and value bound (Lincoln and Guba, 1990; Mishler, 1986). Constant reflection is necessary, because there will always be some degree of interpretation and multiple meanings in a text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003).

As an additional means of collecting my reflections on the phenomena, I kept field notes and recorded my reflections after each interview, as well as other reflective moments during my study. These reflections included my impressions of conversations, popular films, popular articles, and other outside data that gave me insight into the experiences of my participants (See Appendix C). This additional data source provided background information that helped to complete the overall picture of the phenomenon.

These field notes in the form of a researcher journal gave me the opportunity to include my thoughts on each interview, including body language of participants, as well as my own apprehensions about the interviews. For instance, should I reveal whether I myself am in a relationship? Or would that influence the participants’ level of trust in me? I included all these reflections in the field notes and/or researcher journal, rather than discuss them with participants. I did not want to influence the pristine nature of their responses.

In similar fashion, when one participant called me to verify our next day’s interview, she asked me whether there was anything she should study or prepare to talk about. I did not give her any interview guidelines to the questions. I wanted her

responses to be fresh, honest, and spontaneous. This strategy proved to be useful, as this particular participant later noted her surprise at my questions. She was shocked that I asked so many questions about marriage and children, especially when my participants were single women.

Her comment—allowable only because I did not reveal my interview questions earlier to her—allowed me insight into participants' lack of planning or visualization about this aspect of their lives. This repository of reflections was analyzed after the interview transcripts were analyzed and codified. I wanted to retain a place for continuing reflection on the insights I gained from the process of re-reading the interview transcripts.

I add again about the multiple copies I made of the highlighted categories, because that proved to be a very useful reflective strategy for me to understand the overall phenomena, as well as—and especially—the participants' meanings, feelings, and explanations. The process of hand-copying the highlighted parts onto a second copy of highlighted notes/categories enabled me to see the changing of subjects, and the instances of rambling, especially in V's transcript. On the first reading, I had focused more on phrases, words, and my (usual, habitual, non-investigative) interpretation or understanding of these common words.

The second reading that occurred via the highlighting procedure, as well as the later sorting into physical piles of categories, led me to re-evaluate V's explanation of contentment. I recognized now how many times she had used the phrase “just see where that goes...” or, “see what happens,” when describing, for example, her current job. I also noted the incongruence of V's claims of perfectionism (as her father also was, in his

career), while at the same time using various phrases that denoted otherwise: “I don’t expect everything to be perfect;” “Don’t expect every day to be honey and roses, but just to be *content* with where I’m at;” or “Just being content with where you are in life.”

This reflective procedure or process helped me to realize just how many *just*’s that V had spoken throughout her interviews. This made me see her “contentment” as something deeper than the surface and mundane understanding I had originally taken only literally. On further inspection, her “contentment” could also be a settling for less, due to feelings of not having self-efficacy (in terms of her having to eventually, as she explained, “meet boys” at the gym, once her other aspects of life--career and therapy--were in order.) Or maybe the “contentment” she felt was from exhaustion at having to confront and overcome such a painful past of abuse.

I accomplished these deeper insights and noted them as I created and read the second highlighted copy of the transcript. For example, where in the first highlighted copy I had written “contentment” as a term for happiness, as having worked through and overcome her issues; now on second reading, I labeled these as instances of being *passive*. Even as I read and completed V’s transcript procedures, it occurred to me that participants R and K had also used terms indicating passiveness. Previously I had interpreted these responses as displaying freedom, a go-with-the-flow, unworried nature. And, both R and K had used the terms “just happened” when describing how they attained their first career or job.

I was surprised to consider that even the category of *peers/support/belonging* that I had created was also subject to re-evaluation. At first reading or first glance, it seemed that the peers and the support groups were helpful to the participants. But invariably all

three participants seemed to have almost blindly followed their peers' advice—even to R's detriment, as in the dating club she had been encouraged to abandon many years ago. So, even this category that indicated a theme of belonging grew, upon further reflection, to reflect an element of this passiveness that seemed to jump out at the later readings of the transcript phrases. This passiveness led to having an effect on participants' lives, as it allowed others to show them what they are, where they should go, what and who they should become. In effect this *belonging*, or wanting to belong to a supportive peer group, led to having participants' identity being co-created by an outside force.

This second highlighting also revealed underlying meaning about this aspect of participants' lives: peers. V had mentioned that she had not had a friend since that time her family lived in a certain foreign country. At first hearing and reading, it seemed sad to me that there was no one who understood V as well as that friend who had mysteriously disappeared from her life in that country. But later reading and reflecting made me wonder whether V had ever sought out such a friend in her adult life. Here, her passiveness started to come into more clear view, as I could see a historic pattern of it throughout her early educational history and family descriptions (for example, her father telling her that she could not go any farther geographically than a certain college, or otherwise she would have to drive there herself).

This process of highlighting a second copy was probably even more beneficial than the re-reading of the transcript or re-listening to it. I could see my initial reactions in highlighted color, and then I could make changes to those initial discoveries. This was the most beneficial procedure I used to reveal the eventual themes, as they literally sifted out through these further considerations of participants' underlying meanings.

Themes could be constructed, because items that did not seem relevant on the first readings became so later. For example, V's descriptions of the abuse starting in high school at age fourteen made me consider that in adolescence, according to some developmental theorists (Erikson, 1950; Levinson, et al., 1978) we form our identity. And, other research (such as Gilligan's early work in 1982) posits that girls' self-esteem, while higher than boys' by the end of grade school, is much lower by the end of high school. This made me see the various prongs of V's experience, especially in light of her now beginning to, or considering, dating. I could see in high resolution that V's abuse could have made her have no identity in the first place, because of the confusion of the abuse at that exact age in her adolescent life.

So, V's is not a re-claiming of her identity after making her work transition. She may be, in effect, only now—after her years of therapy, acknowledging her past abuse, and gaining the courage to accomplish what tasks she needs to do in order to become mature, as is her goal—creating an identity. However sad this seems on the outset to the outsider, it is a very healthy process; perhaps “normal” “healthy” adults also re-create their identity at mid-life, this second adolescence as some theorists (Erikson, 1950) describe middle-age or mid-life. But they are doing so with a faulty identity, one that may have been based on others' perceptions and conceptions about them and their abilities. They will have to, in effect, overcome this high mountain of misperceptions, while V seemingly has none of these other than her abuse, which she is already confronting through therapy.

The second reading also made me reflect on how interesting it was—and significant—that V chose to reveal the abuse in our very first interview. It was in

response to the very first question I asked her: “We’ll start off with talking about--what your work transition was.” It was odd and also flattering that she would reveal this intimate detail of her life, especially since we had been only professional acquaintances. Her choice of or order of revelation of personal details showed me that she did indeed trust me, but it also revealed that this was a major concern in her life right now, and could have been the motivation for her to want to be part of my study. Perhaps abuse survivors are not so eager to take part in a study, or to reveal their pasts. But V seemed to be on a quest. And my study may have provided one more addition to her toolkit for progress toward the growth and maturity that she craved, to not “look forty” but to “feel forty” as she described in her interview.

Second readings and the second highlighting made me realize the convergence of certain categories or topics. For example, there were many things that were mentioned within the category of *time*. Being *in control* was one example. This repeating of various topics also occurred within *in control* as related to the category of *support*. Being or feeling supported allows us to feel we are in control (of our lives, even if we may not be in control of our decisions, as was the case of peers’ influencing of participants’ decisions). In this way, the themes progressed to more developed, meaningful, richer explanations than would have otherwise been possible.

This further delving into the data also served to show the significance of V’s swearing during the interviews. This may have revealed hidden anger or fear, but especially it was an explanation of those items that were highly emotional to V—without her having to reveal to me, or be embarrassed to reveal a weakness or vulnerability in those areas. Because V would not normally swear when speaking with me, her choice to

do so in the interviews showed those places in the interviews where she could not find or use words she may have really wanted or meant to say. I saw that there were words lying behind the more ‘polite’ swear words, and that she was utilizing the socially-acceptable way of expressing her anger—or not having to express it.

Themes of Work Transitions and Construction of Identity

All data can and do have multiple meanings (Krippendorff, 1980; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992); therefore the themes in my study were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Themes allow us to proceed with phenomenological descriptions (van Manen, 1997). Themes are what the text is talking about, and they include not only the subject but also my interpretation of it. That is, my choice of what to include implies ipso facto an interpretation (of importance of certain parts of the interview dialogue over other parts).

In any case, my analysis was my interpretation, how I alone understood the phenomenon of work transitions and how they relate to identity construction in this particular group of women. I acknowledged that there were other ways of understanding the phenomenon; my interpretation was only one of many possible ways. van Manen (1997) calls phenomenological themes not generalizations, but rather “like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes (p. 90).” “Themes,” van Manen (1997) adds, “are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes (p.90).”

In the final analysis on deciding what my themes were, I asked myself for example, whether I could imagine someone going through a transformation and

constructing his or her identity again and again without having *hope* or a *sense of belonging*. That is, would the meaning of the phenomenon of work transition and identity reconstruction lose its fundamental meaning if it were not sustained by *hope* and a *sense of belonging* (as per van Manen's 1997 example, p. 109)?

The following themes that evolved from my data analysis were not exhaustive of the phenomenon; rather, they allow for a systematic investigation to unfold (van Manen, 1997). Every phenomenological description has in some sense this forced quality to its explanation (van Manen, 1997). The first theme that emerged—the one that pointed most directly to an overall goal, was the quest for one's *purpose* or passion in life. This could also be understood as having meaningful work. A sub-theme of this was *sensing unease during transitions*. Participants knew that something was not working, that they were unhappy with various conditions of their current career.

Another main theme was the quest for *control* over one's life. This was expressed in the various sub-themes of: *learning how to be in control*; *the importance of education in gaining control over one's life*; *belonging and support in gaining control over one's life*—through peers, spirituality, or other means; the role of *hope* in gaining control in life; the role of *humor* in gaining life control. One of the surprising themes to emerge was that of *passiveness*—whether in terms of the sub-themes of *money*, *decision-making*, or *support and peers*.

The theme of *learning the stereotypes* was juxtaposed against *learning one's purpose* in life. This theme involved responding to external situations with critical thinking skills, in order to move toward one's authentic calling. A related theme was *learning marriage and singleness* via family messages. *Conflict in the home* was a theme

common to all three participants, which was closely related to the theme of *progressive mothers* and the sub-theme of being “*just*” a housewife.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion: Living in Between the Extremes

Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of the participants—their particular life backgrounds, career histories, and family situations. In all cases, I retained participants' emphasis in the original italics. Following the participant descriptions, I discuss the themes and sub-themes that emerged from my data analysis. These themes were found to lead to the formation of a new identity after participants' particular work transitions.

Participant Analysis

Participant R

I had known participant R for over five years as a result of our membership in a professional association. R was the first participant I interviewed, mainly because of her readiness, time availability, and—I admit—my comfort level with her. She had been one of the first women to contact me to tell me she was interested in participating in my study. R was experiencing a transition, in that she had recently turned fifty. She told me that this milestone had added to her reflective nature about her next steps in her career situation. During one of our interviews, she mentioned that “even if our paths had not crossed, I *still* would have been saying, ‘Hey, I’m turning fifty, what do I want to do when I grow up?’”

This particular age transition also makes R more acutely aware of time. Not in the sense of what she lacked in terms of marriage and children, but something larger and more meaningful to her. For example, R indicated to me that she felt she was beyond the

time frame for having children of her own. Her insights were valuable for understanding career decision-making processes from a wider perspective.

R explained during our interviews that her father was a steelworker, or as she said he would call himself, “Just a dumb mill hunky.” But she refuted this to me, saying that he was a hard-worker, and she told me she even did a study on him for a school project for her Masters degree. Her words about her father indicated to me that she was proud of her father’s work ethic. Her mother was a secretary at the same mill and that is how her parents met, R told me. Neither parent had a college education, but both encouraged R and all her siblings toward the importance of having an education. R told me that all of her brothers and sisters have their Masters’ degrees. R, throughout her interviews, often mentioned money, salary, and benefits, as well as her gratitude for her education.

R explained her parents’ marriage by saying that, “they had a—decent marriage; it wasn’t one of those story-book ones you hear that somebody married their soul-mate or anything. But it was a *good* marriage.” R acknowledged that her parents toward the end (before R’s father died) would “bicker” and argue a little bit: “It wasn’t that they didn’t, couldn’t *stand* each other. You know, they would kinda get on each other’s nerves.” But divorce for R’s Catholic family “wasn’t even an option,” R said. I wondered whether R saw this lack of control in terms of marriage in a Catholic faith, and whether that influenced her to choose independence and education rather than marriage.

R said that although her parents, “stuck together,” her father, “would joke around that he wasn’t happy.” In fact, R said that she “didn’t think they were always very well suited for each other.” R was also the only participant to mention the “Mrs. Degree” that education may provide for women. She explained how, with that status, “You get out,

get married, and then you don't even get to use your *degree* at all.”

R said that she has at this point in her life become clearer about what she wants—not only in a career, but also in a relationship. She mentioned that, “I haven't given up” having children and she said she considers the possibility of being in a relationship with someone who already has children. Relationship status was not something that R offered much information about during our interviews. Rather, she was very motivated, positive, and almost driven in her pursuit of what she called her “passion.” R said that she does like her current type of work, but feels the need to change careers; she said she wants to find her “passion.” R reiterates this word, “Passion” throughout her interviews, and emphasizes the word each time.

In addition, R noted that she wants “to make these last twelve years meaningful” in her work life. This means that her decision-making about her next work transition will be much more focused than her previous careers: She wants to “find something that I want to do. I'm just—for—at this point in time, I'm just not gonna be making a change just for the heck of it.” She told me that her work history usually happens in five year increments. That is the most time she tends to stay at one workplace, even though those positions were at times under one parent company.

Her career decision-making process involves getting closer to this passion, especially as she works with a personal coach. “We're close. Crossing things off the list, so I can *get* rid of the clutter, so I can *focus* on my *passion*. I've almost figured out where I should be.” The quest to find her passion seems to not imply or require a marriage or dating relationship. R said she would have liked to be married, but at this stage realizes that the mate would have to have certain characteristics, for example, “be into recycling”,

and other newly discovered values that R has realized are important to her. R's descriptions of a relationship are not as intense and zealous as are her words describing her work, her interactions with clients, her feeling of contentment with her financial situation, and her activities with friends.

R told me that she lives in an apartment where her mother lives several floors above. R's mother has been widowed for several years. R calls or visits her mother every day to check on her health. R did not seem to be hindered or inconvenienced by this arrangement. Instead, R's apartment—like her demeanor--was pleasant, at ease, not lacking anything, and not filled with anxiety. That was significant in that R was the oldest participant, the one closest to the end age range of my participant criteria.

When I asked her about children, she responded, "If I had to do it all over again, I'd have *two kids*. Definitely." And she added, laughing, "I actually found a poem I wrote to my mom in second grade; it said 'I want to have—two boys and two girls'! I wanted—you know, I wanted four kids." I was hesitant about asking these personal types of questions, especially if I suspected that R had some regrets about the subject. I thought maybe she would have regrets about not being more proactive in this area of her life, as she obviously (by her career and educational successes) had been in her work arena.

But R explained her situation this way: "I'm *aware*?" then she paused, adding, "That I don't *have* them? But it hasn't *changed* anything. It's just kind of that little, 'Oh *yeah!*'" she then lowers her voice, "I didn't get to *have* any'." I wondered at her passiveness in this area of her life. She had used the phrase, "didn't get to", as though

marriage and children were things that we needed permission to be given; rather than something we were free to pursue, like our career or life purpose seemed to her to be.

Participant K

I had met participant K at a conference where we both were round table conference presenters. Her inclusion in my study brought insight into how pervasive patriarchy is in the lives of women, regardless of national borders. K had been unusual in her family because she traveled to the United States to study, and she traveled alone at an age older than Japanese standards would have dictated. She said her family was surprised at her decision to come to the United States. “Especially my mother clearly voice[d], ‘Why would you—go to a different country from ah—w—different country *now?*’ *Now* means my age.” In Japan, K explained, age, “is a very big concept in my—in my society. So thirty-four is—kind of old to make such a big, huge leap or transition.” This was one instance where K had or felt no support for her decision-making.

K further explained to me that she was part of an educated family; she told me that both her older brothers graduated from college, as did her father. K said that her father’s mother was very proud of her father’s education because it was from a very prestigious and exclusive university. K said when she was growing up, she had a desire to go to the university, but her grandmother dissuaded her, saying she should be a hairdresser, because as her grandmother told K, “you like hairs” and because “women are not good at math.” However, K applied to, and was accepted to an international study program. K told me that her mother had a high-school education.

Participant K was a valued addition to my study also because she was the only participant who was involved in a dating relationship. She told me that she had been with

her current boyfriend for over two years. He encouraged her to enter a Ph.D. program, but she did not want to rush that decision. K said she wanted to find out what she wants to study. She also expressed a desire to marry and have children, and had proactively brought up the subject to her boyfriend. They had separated briefly when K moved to another town; the boyfriend assumed that K would be dating other people, and not focusing on her career and education.

Although K's transition was inspired by a desire for a full-time position and a better-paying job. She told me that the pay at her previous job had not increased to the level she had wanted it to. Her relationship also contributed to her work transition at age thirty-six. Before the transition, K said "I was doing routine things," but "the stress was piling up because of the, ah, *time* limitation. And neither he nor I—could push the relationship forward. We couldn't force" that. K said her boyfriend had mentioned marriage previously, and although K felt, "I could not—jump into marriage," she did not want to end the relationship: "I wasn't *ready* to lose it, I wasn't ready to finish it."

K's mother was forty-two years old when she first started working outside the home. At that time, K was eleven years old. K's mother had not worked for wages but for a community activity when K's older brothers were still young. K said her mother was also involved in a religious/political group that was controversial not only within the culture, but also to K's family of origin. K's mother's activities outside the home caused conflict between K's mother and K's father and grandmother.

It was interesting in K's case, because her time living in America had undoubtedly influenced the impact that patriarchy had on her situation in life. But also, her traditional Japanese cultural upbringing had had a major impact on her views and

expectations for her life. K faced time constraints on several levels; not only biological, but also her decisions on education and career were pressured because of her visa status requirements. I had not indicated in participant criteria that women must be American, so my choice to include K as a participant was a natural one. She fit the criteria and her participation added another dimension to understanding the phenomenon.

Participant V

Participant V and I had the longest acquaintance--through professional conference participation, although we did not talk socially on other occasions. She explained during the interviews that she was recently laid off from a fifteen year career at one workplace in a mid-sized Mid-West city. Hers was the longest of any of the participants' time spent at one workplace. She also said that she kind of "fell into" her first career (computers) because it was the college major that came easiest for her, and she did enjoy it.

During the course of my study, V had been working part-time in retail, and later had left that job to interview for another job. She eventually attained that job, but later her job was terminated. She revealed this to me in a mass e-mail to all her friends. She explained in the e-mail that she found she did not like that type of work. She did not explain further, as the end of that job occurred after our final interview. Her job transitions, depression, and time management issues led to a six-month delay in her reviewing and eventually returning the interview transcripts to me.

V explained that her father worked for the airlines, so V and her family had lived in many exotic foreign countries. Neither parent had a college education; however V's mother was unusual in that she had worked overseas when she (V's mother) graduated from high school. V's parents had met at an embassy in a foreign country. V described

her father's work ethic in terms of what others had said about him, that "he was a very hard worker." Although none of V's oldest brothers had gone to college, V said that she and her next oldest brother were encouraged by their parents; especially her father, who told her and her brother, "You *will* go to college!" It was expected of them, but not of the older brothers in the family.

During my questions about her family, V revealed that she was born one year after her older sister died. This, according to Adler (1927) would make V a ghost child. According to Adler, the ghost child is expected to make up for the lack and loss of the deceased child. Even though I was acquainted with V through our many years together in a professional association, I never knew of her background or family issues. That was why I was very surprised that during our first interview she mentioned at the outset that she was recovering from past sexual abuse issues. She spoke about it in matter-of-fact, emotionless terms, and so I attempted to match her tone and hide my shock at hearing this brand-new news about an acquaintance I had known for many years. In V's interviews as in all my participants' interviews, I attempted to match their emotion and energy level; this may have helped to maintain or add to the trust we had developed with each other.

V told me that she had been diagnosed with depression several years ago, after her brother had committed suicide. As she spoke, I was at first surprised by this revelation and then I was flattered that she trusted me enough to reveal an issue this serious. (Especially since neither she nor I realized whether it may or may not have been relevant to the phenomenon being studied.) I realized then that she was highly motivated and interested in my study, perhaps as a means to continue her processing of and

successful completion of her work transition. Her initial willingness and urgency signaled to me that she was grateful to participate. Likewise, I felt my research and interviews were adding to her understanding, so that she could move further onto her sequencing of her life goals, ultimately leading to marriage and children.

Since our prior acquaintanceship did not include emotional openness, perhaps V did not feel safe enough to cry when discussing certain topics. Similarly, I did not feel appropriate in offering comforting words, or even, “Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.” I felt that would have made me less of a rational researcher in V’s perspective, and also it would not have fit our relationship style. And besides, V described these stories so quickly that I felt I had no time to interject at most times during the interviews. Adding my comments during this time may have, I felt, put her off track of what she was going to say. So instead, I simply allowed her to tell her stories uninterrupted.

Though I had hesitated using V as a participant, I recalled that I had not included in my descriptions of the criteria for participants that they must be emotionally healthy adults. Further, I could not have known of V’s issues of abuse and later depression in our initial contacts, because V would have had no reason to explain those to me. She did suspect that her depression was intertwined with her work transition. At the end of our second and final interview she asked me whether I knew of any research on career change and depression—how they may intersect or influence each another. She also explained during the interviews that the depression was what was causing her to be late for work and meetings with friends; and it was causing her to be more unfocused about her goals and decision-making.

V's inclusion in my study shed light on the topic of depression as it contributes to and exhibits itself in mid-life women who make work transitions. Ideally, from Moustakas's (1990, 1994) descriptions, participants should be healthy, mature adults. I maintain that because I am not a professional in the field of psychotherapy, I was not qualified to determine the health or unhealthiness of participants. Even unhealthy participants—as long as their narratives are authentic to the experience, as long as they describe what actually occurred—can still provide rich description of the phenomena. In my study, V's narrative was important in that it opened awareness to the intersection of depression during a work transition.

V's depression dictated where and when our second interview occurred: at a busy restaurant near her house. At first, I doubted meeting there, but V insisted it would be helpful; she said she had not been out of the house all day because of her depression. It was after 5:00 p.m. She arrived about a half-hour late to our interview, pushing my own schedule back. During the interview, my cell phone received a message and V said, “What *are* you looking at?!” almost indignantly. I realized that she really did have no awareness of how her lateness affected others and their schedules. Or possibly she could have felt comfortable enough around me that she felt I wouldn't mind if she were late, and that I would naturally accommodate my schedule to her timeframe.

Age/stage models of human and adult development regulate when and where an individual should be, especially in terms of marital status and career. Specifically, during a transition stage, participants may not be “healthy” according to a traditional, age-stage range model of development (Erikson, 1950; Levinson, et al., 1978). In addition, my participants were already not “healthy” in terms of the appropriateness of their lifestyles

when viewed within a traditional, patriarchal society. V's revealing of her depression, and even (and maybe especially) her own connecting of the two aspects—depression and transitions (work and personal)—was another way to understand what was happening in her life, as well as in other participants' lives.

V's depression was an important facet, and one that I allowed to evolve naturally in the course of the interviews. I did not interrogate further into her explanations of her earlier sexual abuse; her willingness to trust me was based on her being in control of how much information she wanted to reveal. And, the additional information (on the abuse, and also on the background of the conflict in the home between the mother and grandmother) was not relevant to the phenomenon of identity reconstruction, and was beyond the scope of my research. I noticed that as she spoke of her brother who had committed suicide, she added a lot of extraneous information. For example, that he liked spell-check because he was a bad speller.

I noted that as there was 'additional' information that I was not privy to, V would sometimes jump to unrelated stories. For example, she moved from one topic relating to an interview question into relating about her older brother who went to Canada during the draft, but who eventually was not called to go to the war. I interpreted her speech style as indicating her level of comfort with the topics discussed, and I allowed her that. I respected that and did not delve further into areas where she had clearly (to me) constructed a boundary with her verbal and non-verbal behaviors.

Discussion of Themes

In the following descriptions of the themes, I kept participants' emphasis in the original italics. The emphases throughout participants' interviews were organic, borne of

a heart-felt discussion with me of very sensitive and personal topics. In some cases the amount and degree of emphasis is what led me to recognize certain topics as themes of the phenomenon.

Theme 1: The Attainment of One's Purpose

A motivating factor in participants' agreeing to be part of my study seemed to be their desire to find purpose in and within their transition period. Their speed of response to my recruitment materials betrayed their strong desire to find their purpose; or at least to relieve the restlessness of their particular transition situation. This relief came in the form of being given the opportunity to explain their situation, and within that explanation, to learn the answers they had been searching for outside of themselves. This scenario also explained how the background of these women's dissatisfaction and confusion stemmed not from their particular religion, nationality, or class. But rather it came from a shared foundation of living within a patriarchal society—whether that took the form of Catholicism, traditional Japanese culture, capitalism, or another form.

Participants searched for purpose chiefly through meaningful work. Although there are many definitions of work, the one I used in my study was borrowed from Zirlott's (1998) work as vocation--something that unifies the personality and so is congruent with his or her deepest identity. The work shapes us, and we shape it by our presence. The incorrect or ill-fitting career fragments the personality, making it, as Zirlott (1998) terms, a false life strategy. It would follow, then, that someone who is in a career that is not congruent with oneself cannot realize his or her purpose or calling.

Wong-Fong's (2008) study on mid-life career change found that individuals needed to do fulfilling, meaningful work, and to follow their passion. This choice

included moving beyond fears of failure, and moving beyond unconscious scripts influenced by past experiences. In other words, nothing would stop these women from finding their purpose, not even lack of a marriage relationship at this point in their lives. One study posits that the presence of meaningful work events was an important predictor of daily positive affect (Lips-Wiersma, 1999).

Only participant K had received actual verbal messages from her family about achieving her purpose in life. K said that her mother told her, “Whatever you’re *supposed* to do, or whatever the mission you’re supposed to complete in this life, just go for it,’ you know, it was more philosophical than practical,” and, “know your purpose of your life, and then, try to *complete that*.” K added that, “She must have been looking for some kind of—*purpose* in her life,” even though, K added, “there is no way for me to know that.” Even though she did receive verbal messages about purpose and achieving it, K acted on what she perceived to be her family’s/mother’s desires or vision for her life. K’s mother gave K examples of how to achieve her purpose, and “I have been *watching* her um—making transitions—courageously, in a sense. To fulfill her own—dreams, or to follow her heart, I guess. That was the bigger stronger messages I *was* getting from my parents, than the message to get married and have a family or such.”

For K, finding her purpose meant finding some sort of meaningful work—not necessarily or primarily to make more money. When I asked K about family messages she had learned about money while she was growing up, she mentioned that money was not an issue discussed in her home. Also for K, attaining her purpose includes figuring out how to attain motherhood, as this, she said, will help her to become more mature and “learn about life” (as her friends had done, and were doing). The responses K gave to me

were in keeping with her answer to my question, “How would you define happiness?” She answered, “Being focused on something that’s—valuable to me.” It is focus that is needed to arrive at the attainment of one’s purpose.

R named this her “passion,” and every time she mentioned the word “passion” during our interviews, she stressed it emphatically. “I—am on this earth to find my passion,” she tells me, and asks if I saw the plaque she had on her bathroom wall. R explained to me that the plaque read, “if you don’t know what your passion is, realize that—one exists—one reason for your existence on earth is to find it.” R added, “And I *really* believe in that. That just *drives* me, you know, I just want to *so bad* find that *passion*. And I know I’m close?”

She quoted a People magazine story of someone who had a lot of money, but was not living his passion, “He *just—wasn’t—happy*. But he was making—zillions.” He took a lower paying job, “But that was his passion!” R whispered. Even though her interviews were rife with references to money and salaries and benefits, she still does not ultimately equate passion with a monetary amount. It seemed to me that as long as R has enough money to be in control of her life, she can be content. R said her passion or meaningful work will draw on all her prior education and experience and will allow her to offer something meaningful to the world. She said she has at least a vague idea that this career will involve something with recycling, one of her recently discovered values.

Only V did not have a specific term for this kind of purpose. She talked in terms of goals that she wanted to reach with her therapy in order to resolve her past issues of abuse. She said she also wants to find a job that will allow her to pay her financial debt to her parents. Eventually she wants to begin dating again, with the ultimate goal of

marriage. Her goals are in sequential order; she talked of a friend of hers who was doing all types of goals at once, and V said that she herself could not do that. Throughout listening to V's narratives, I did not sense that her ultimate goal was to find her "passion" or "purpose" in life, as K and R constantly reiterated during their interviews. V's goals were more practical and immediate and much less esoteric. She wanted to find work that she liked and that paid adequately, so that she could repay her financial debt to her parents. Once that goal will have been reached, then V could begin the next goal, of seeking a dating relationship and marriage--but not until the previous tasks had already been accomplished.

V's focus on relationship as a goal, as opposed to K's and R's focus on their passion or purpose, shows that V feels her value would be defined or decided most accurately there. This may be the reason that singleness, for V, is a very sensitive issue, as it represents a lack in her overall identity information. In Hochschild's (1987) study, women placed their identities (or identified themselves most strongly) with those places and circumstances where the women felt most valued. I was surprised that V did not focus her identity (or her goal identity) on the career arena, given her detailed explanation of her educational achievements and her revealing her coworkers' and managers' praise of her work skills. This may illuminate that we may place our identity not only on things we already have (career, education), but also on those future areas where we may not currently have any self-efficacy. The ability to visualize our identities into the future may help us develop the necessary self-efficacy beliefs and subsequent concrete behaviors to achieve that new identity.

V's purpose or goal reflects an ideal self; the self that Hochschild (1987) notes we

can become when we have time to be in control of our lives. For V, being in control would mean she has finally reached maturity and the feeling of being an adult. Maturity would mean that V had processed and overcome her abuse issues, her financial debts, and was able to move into a relationship and eventually marriage. For R, who expressed no lack of maturity, it may be her contentment when she finds her passion. For K, it is having a child, as she compared herself unfavorably as immature, in contrast to her educated peers who are married and who do have children. This is the division of themselves into a real and a potential self, “the person they would be ‘if only I had time’ (Hoshschild, 1987 p. 221).”

The search and zeal for finding their passion (R’s word) or purpose (K’s and her mother’s word) are the force that leads these two women to bypass traditional paths of marriage and family. It is as though they do not see the passage of time in their quest for their passion. This was surprising to me that there was a disparity among these women; I had assumed that all would focus on realizing their purpose in life through meaningful and contributing work. However, all three participants were in fact on a quest for their purpose—it merely took on different forms. Again, I must be careful to not continue the stereotyping of women as one group identity. As Gilligan (1982) had noted, the field of psychology has excluded women by grouping them collectively under generalized, androcentric notions of psychological development.

Theme 1a. Sensing unease during transitions

“Please help us,” K had expressed in an e-mail message during the process of this research study. She was keenly aware of the upheaval in her own life as well as the lives of her single friends in Japan who are experiencing transitions. Participants said they felt

unease and societal pressure at this juncture of their lives, as work transitions met with the societal imperatives to marry and have children. Not only that, but each goal seemingly had to be accomplished immediately. Many participants spoke as R and V did, that they “just knew” there needed to be a change. K spoke that way about her relationship status, and the lack of seriousness given it by her partner. These participants had an intuitive sense that they were at an important place in their lives, whether they could envision a reconciliation or solution to their individual situations. However, in the individualized nature of their isolated problem, each may have felt they needed to solve their problems or relieve their unease by themselves.

All three participants expressed a sense of unease and dissatisfaction with their life situations before the transition. This feeling of unease was their indication that they were no longer in control of their lives. It was this unease that indicated to participants that they were not doing purposeful work. “The relationship was kind of *stagnant*,” K said of her transition period. “It wasn’t moving either forward or backward. So I felt like, emotionally I felt like I needed to *change* something to make *something* happen.” Her unease may have been due to the tension between having attained career and educational goals, and yet not having attained those markers of traditionally healthy adulthood--namely marriage and children. Now, during their transitions, my participants reflect on what type of work will lead them towards their calling or purpose.

Participants’ focus on a goal, or, as they variously named it, “my passion”(R) or “purpose” (K), served to relieve the unease they felt during their transition period(s). The unease began with not enjoying the work they were doing. Each participant said she sensed or knew the point where a change needed to occur. V talked about the increasing

financial debts owed to her parents, and that “something had to change” in her life circumstances. R explained her first career transition this way: “I was still below mid-range” in pay, although she was “getting all these wonderful reviews, and I just thought, ‘it’s time to go,’” she whispered. “I knew I needed to leave. It was definitely time to do it. It was definitely time to move on from there.” For V and R, the change that was required would be a change in career; for K—the only participant involved in a relationship at the time of the study—it was both career and personal life. Although the feeling of needing a change was similar, the participants all chose different ways to move from this knowing to actually doing something to bring about the changes.

Purpose was subtly connected to participants’ feelings of restlessness at their prior career. V’s first indication of the term purpose showed in her explanation of her job at a large insurance company. She said that, “it was difficult to just kind of look back and feel like you’d *done* anything, you know; to feel like I’ve made a difference in people’s lives?” That job for V, “wasn’t enough people, it wasn’t big enough.” V said she did not want to feel, “Like a gerbil in a wheel.” R, too, explained that her next career will, “be something—it’s gonna be bigger.” Participants wanted to have work that would make a difference in others’ lives, and/or be meaningful to them personally, and that would represent something bigger than the job they were currently doing. R said she wanted to make the remainder of her work years “meaningful,” and that at this point in her life “I’m just not gonna be making a change just for the heck of it.”

In essence we do not feel purposeful if we are not passionate about our work. According to Catsouphes’ (1998) research findings, individuals felt a need to define a meaningful contribution at work and at home. Identity became a tool for career

satisfaction. Here identity may have materialized as one's passion or purpose. This finding is not a luxury for unfulfilled employees, either. The findings can be beneficial for employers who desire loyal and long-term employees: Brewster (1999) found that women who occupied work roles that could accommodate midlife developmental tasks were more likely to stay in their jobs. In this sense, a quest for the "right" career, one that allows one to feel a sense of purpose (and therefore, a career that one can identify with, and thereby form one's identity) also can be a form of adult development.

A period of reflection preceded participants' knowing that their current lives seemed or felt unsatisfactory to them. This reflection was especially profound at key age markers for V and R—age forty and age fifty, respectively. V felt grateful for her newfound clarity—something she had lacked in the confusing time during her twenties and thirties. She had said, "thank *God* the twenties are over!" R allows that it may be a natural progression, that of "turning fifty and wanting to find—your true *calling* in life."

All three participants reflected and analyzed their lives as R had done, in an attempt to get closer to living their purpose (both in career and in dating relationships). R said of her transition period, "You just examine different aspects of your life and say, 'is this really what I want?'" Participant V explained her experience of turning forty years old, "that you know, made me kind of just take stock and realize that, "*not* really happy with where life *is*, ' you know, just in ah, all—*all* phases, not just work. And, um. Having an—a sexual abuse background," she knew there were "some core issues" that still remained. She reflected at age forty that, "this isn't where I want to be, thus *need* to go into therapy to, to—make the changes I know I need to." Although this sense of unease may be necessary in prompting participants to eventually focus on their future

vision, the confusion and inaction manifests in doubts and dissatisfactions with current resolutions of self (Baumgartner, 2001).

It is this reflection and subsequent restlessness that makes us form the question, “What do I want?” and leads to critical reflection about one’s situation in life. V said, “It’s sort of like when you’re—getting closer to forty, ah, you start *thinking* about things in a very different way, that [sniffs] um, thirty I was just so glad to be the *hell* out of my twenties,” and “kind of *shut* the door on that decade!” she laughed. V’s choice of words, and her stress on the word, “hell,” was uncharacteristic of her usual speech pattern with me. I could sense the frustration she must have felt in her twenties.

Amundson (1995a.) says the level of one’s self-awareness and sense of agency or self-efficacy are key variables that affect their life career decisions. V’s feelings of being unqualified or not ready for marriage may illuminate a requirement for self-efficacy in matters of personal relationships as well as in career decision-making. We need to feel able to participate in a relationship just as we need to feel able to accomplish tasks in the workplace. We, in effect, need to see ourselves—our identity—in terms of our future roles.

A sense of unease is also related to the passiveness or hopelessness one may feel when one lacks supportive people who understand one’s situation. Participants explained this when they mentioned having no focus; and K mentioned this lack of support in describing how her relationship had felt “stagnant.” K felt she had no support from her family, who was in Japan and who K felt would not understand her “very complicated” situation. They also did not know about K’s dating relationship here in the U.S. or about her friends here. “They haven’t experienced those with me, because they are in Japan.

Therefore I didn't want them to confuse" her decision-making by including them in this process. She wanted to protect her family from worrying about her: "And I felt like if I—um consulted them. I would feel, I thought I would feel like emotionally torn apart" because she had a partner here and her parents there. She also felt her family did not have enough information to help her with her decision, and also thought they would just tell K to come back to Japan. K said, "I guess I was not pretty sure ah, what I wanted to do, therefore it took—long time for me to—make a decision."

K faced unease in several areas, not only career and education. She explained her uncertain situation with her relationship status this way: "The first time I could not make up my mind to *marry* him was about the end of thirty-five to thirty-six I would say." K felt the need for a change, after close to two years of dating her partner. But neither K nor her partner tried to push the relationship forward. "I *think* he wanted to marry me. But at the time I couldn't make a decision. And I *really* did not know what I wanted out of the relationship." She also felt pressured at that time because her time in the United States was "becoming shorter and shorter." She explains, "I couldn't make up my mind by—myself without any external change." Without the ability to focus, K was, "a little fed up with the—all the situations surrounding me."

K had little or no support from her coworkers for her work transition; "I think they were perplexed," but "I felt I *had* to do it." K's manager tried to create a position which would fit her and would try to make it a full-time position. "So I bet, nobody really voiced it, but probably my coworkers, probably was very surprised," or they thought K was "making a very selfish decision." She felt they would not have understood because they were all Americans, and she was an international student.

Therefore, K felt, her coworkers could not “fully understand, um, my decision-making route, or the reason why I had to—I felt like I had to do it.” This unease that is characteristic of transition periods led participants to a desire or need to be in control of one’s life, and to pursuing things or people that would help them achieve a sufficient level of control.

Theme 2: The Quest for Control

Being or feeling in control of one’s life was a motivating factor in the decision-making capabilities of the participants. Being in control gave the participants the ability to create new knowledge for themselves, as well as process which definition of identity they would choose for themselves. It also increased participants’ belief in the likelihood that they would or could attain their purpose. Finding purpose leads to learning (more about) one’s identity. This sense of control can lead to liberation from the past and exploration of new career paths (Walser, 2000). Participants’ feelings of being in control came through various routes: education, support (from peers, and/or a sense of belonging—either in workplace or other groups, such as religious), learning, and focus/decision-making. The formation of a new identity was dependent on gaining decision-making skills that would aid participants in making a transition in their lives.

Participants revealed their desire to be in control of their lives through reiterating the word *focus*. Participants variously spoke about wanting to find focus, getting more focused, having focus in order to point toward their purpose in life. Participants used several means to gain control in their lives. Participants variously used support of peers; religious and spiritual teachings; or education and being financially independent, in order to feel in control of their lives. The quest for control that developed from the interviews

represented a way for these women to pursue and find their purpose or passion.

Finding one's purpose may assist adults in reaching certain developmental tasks. This is how R explained her current situation with her goal towards reaching her passion: She knows, feels, and senses that "I'm close." R, more than the other two participants, is aware of the control she has in her career. She explained, "there's just that peace of mind—to know—that you're kind of in *control*" and her main fear about changing career is that she will lose this control. R is very proactive about the control she exerts in her career search, saying that, "I'm gonna hang in there 'till I can bargain to get exactly what I want *then* some with the benefits," even though she "may be looking for a long time."

R's developmental task is less about maturity than it is finding work that is meaningful to her personally--work which reflects her "passion." For K, this developmental task is maturity, recognized in childbearing, or at least, child-rearing and a life-long partner or marriage. K said that having her own family would allow her to "have a family *space*," and she would, "have a *permanent place*. Or I would know—I think—my permanent, where is my permanent *address* is," she laughed. For V, too, marriage and family would allow her to feel a sense of developmental maturity. Interestingly, maturity is found for all participants in attaining something they now lack. So, maturity could also for them be translated to be contentment, or being a 'healthy' adult.

Feeling mature and having a sense of control improves focus, and therefore decision-making skills both in career as well as in dating. The quest for marriage and family by K and V did not stem from a sense of panic; rather, it was a way of gaining control of one's life situation and goals. As V mentioned being "excited" about turning

forty years old, the influence of time means less of a panic situation than a reason to, and a feeling of, finally clarifying one's life goals. R mentions that now, "it's very *satisfying* to be more in control than when maybe five years, eight years, nine years, ten years ago," when she would have taken any job. Being in control means knowing one's values and being able to make a more conscious and informed choice. On the other hand, a lack of control leads to a fear of the unknown and possibly a hesitation about making any necessary changes in one's life.

The quest for maturity led participants toward ever greater focus on their goal of discovering their life purpose. Although all participants were going through a transition stage, they appeared to be in control of their lives, or appeared to have a feeling of control. This may have been due to their becoming more conscious of their situation through the process of the interview questions, and especially for participant K, through reflections she recorded in her journal. In Vitalis's (1987) study, midlife career change was not a personal instability, but rather a time of becoming free of enmeshed values in order to complete a successful career change.

During the interviews, V was in therapy for healing from her issues of sexual abuse. The age-forty transition or mid-life transition is a time that Jung (1956) termed the second adolescence. It is not unusual that unresolved life issues surface at this life stage. Erikson, who focused on the identity stage of development more than on any other stage of his theory, saw adolescence as a time for healing old wounds and building future strengths. V is realizing her new-found and newly formed strengths chiefly because she is facing these issues, rather than repressing or ignoring them. The resulting improvement of one's strengths can be helpful in re-forming one's identity. This task

becomes especially crucial during a time of career transition.

One of the themes at this stage of life is that of separation (Gilligan, 1982), although this positions women's development against a male standard and ignores the possibility of a different truth. Paradoxically, the women in my study have been in separation up to this point in their lives. That is, they have been working, studying, finding and changing careers—and doing it without any personal support in the form of husband and children, or sometimes even family of origin. As K and V, especially, strive for these connections of husband and children, they through their growth and development are shedding the separation and individuality that characterized their formative careers and adulthood to this stage. Their desire to not be separate is a sign of emotional health, rather than of stunted growth. In this sense, their maturity is dependent on their refuting, or at least redefining, the male-standard of linear development that equates maturity with achieving separateness.

Theme 2a. Learning how to be mature

One of the categories related to being in control was the concept of *maturity*. Participants K and V mentioned throughout their interviews that they want to “feel like an adult.” K thinks this will be achieved if she has a child, like her Japanese same-age peers have done. She explained that because she does not have children that, “I feel like I am missing some very important—chance to—to grow up myself, or to learn from —childrearing?” She added that she sometimes cannot help but compare “myself—to my friends who have—children? And I see more mature *people* who—who—are taking responsibility of *another person* and who *are* producing another *life*. So. I feel very *immature*. When I compare myself to those—friends.”

K also mentions that her peers are college educated, but they do not have Masters Degrees as she has. Perhaps, she reasons, this is the barrier that has kept her from achieving that family status her friends have achieved. When I asked her directly whether her uncertainty about career and entering the Ph.D. program is the reason she is not married, or is delaying the decision, she replied, “Yeah, I think so! Definitely.” And even though she does not always talk about this with her partner, “mostly I *feel* like that.”

I noted that participants K and V felt a lack goal attainment in this area of their lives; otherwise they would not have mentioned it in such detail. They realized that they had not reached the same level of maturity—set by traditional age/stage models of development. They compared themselves unfavorably to their same-age peers. While participants struggle with this facet of maturity, their identity hangs in limbo. Maturity, then, is clearly one of the necessary factors to defining their identity. Their unease during this transition time is due to the incompleteness of their identity at this changing point in their lives.

R’s mentioning of maturity is only indirect. She recounted the mistakes she made in the past when she heeded peer’s advice for her life choices. For example, her friend convinced her that they should both quit the dating club they joined in their twenties. R said, “If I had to do *that* all over again, I would have went back in a—month.” Strangely enough, maturity means different things for these three women. For R, maturity now requires listening to her own preferences. For K and V maturity requires they compare themselves to, and then match, others’ standards.

Identity is bound in learning about, and then attaining, maturity—regardless of the definition of maturity we choose to accept. For K and V, maturity is described as having

a stable marriage relationship and eventually also children. Learning here involves reflection, measuring oneself against standards of one's society, and eventually fitting in or belonging to one's larger (majority) society. Here, that is defined as the patriarchal model. It is only through this maturity and learning process that one can find purpose, and thereby, find one's identity. And once maturity is attained, the individual can have the sense of belonging and the feeling of being a valid member of that society.

Although all three participants experienced learning about self through the vehicle of career or work, they were not learning maturity via dating relationships as their peers seemed to be doing. Instead, career and education were where V, K, and R had and felt control, and thereby experienced learning and growth. They did not explain having as much control in their dating situations. And in the case of K, it was not until she had confidence in her career identity that she was able to approach her boyfriend about marriage.

For V, learning and becoming mature involves understanding, processing, and overcoming her past and forming a new identity from the resulting understandings. V describes her maturity as a time when she can be able to, "move beyond a lot of those issues, and grow in ways that I had always hoped I could." And, "just being content with where you *are* in life." V says she wants to "feel like adult"; that is, have the identity of an adult. V does this as she is "integrating a lot of things, being able to, you know, just literally grow *up* and *feel* like an adult." And even though she was independent, owning a house, having car, "making sixty grand a year, but I still felt like—a little *child*."

V's emphasis on the word, "child" exposed that, "emotionally I knew I hadn't really progressed in a number of years?" Progress here depends on becoming or being

mature. Then one can be ready for marriage, which, in V's mind, makes one become fully or even more mature. For V, being integrated means being whole, mature, and ultimately in control—having self-power. Then she can finally realize her identity. This focus on attaining maturity lends itself to the feeling of being in control of one's life, and therefore, in control of the definition one chooses for one's own identity.

V defined marriage as a “melding of identities.” It follows, then, that V requires herself to construct her own separate identity before even embarking on dating experiences. For V, dating is not a way of finding, discovering, or creating one's identity; it must come after one already has a solid identity. Interestingly, career and education are and were, for V, acceptable means of building her identity. V explained to me how the career change lends itself to the healing of old wounds, which enables one to become a mature adult, and therefore, in control: “For me, the—change in career is also going hand-in-hand—healing from the old wounds and—also very much in the process of kind of becoming an adult.” For all three participants this seems to be so. That is, they learn about themselves through career, but in their interviews, they did not acknowledge a learning that may be accessible to them through dating or marriage and having children.

Learning (gained through support, peers, and belonging) ushers us into adulthood and maturity, and this leads to a feeling of being in control of our lives. Interestingly, V had lost her support group (at therapy), and gained another one through a new church affiliation. But she says those people did not understand her depression. She sets herself apart from the group as a way of being or feeling in control. Also, V told me about her education and childhood through exotic stories of travel as a way to set herself apart as not usual, not the typical person. I thought at first that V seemed to want to belong to the

larger society through achieving its markers of marriage and children. But her explanations of her unusual childhood spent in foreign countries betrayed a need to set herself apart from that same larger society from which she craved a sense of belonging.

If V did not belong to—or was not accepted by—the larger society, then she would not be expected to attain the typical, normal, average age markers of marriage and parenthood. There could be a sense of relief or relaxation in this failure to meet these age markers. The lack of pressure to conform in this arena would allow V a sense of space where she could focus on what goals she personally needed to accomplish in order to later attain those societal age markers. It was a safe space—a self-created or self-generated sense of belonging where V could create her identity before later joining the larger, mainstream society.

This control over where V feels or places her sense of belonging allows V to remain safely outside the range of societal expectations. As long as we self-define as someone set-apart, someone “special” in a very exotic type of way, we gain validity—authenticity. We cannot be compared to normal adults; there is no model to which to compare us. It may not be the achievement of maturity that represents feeling in control; for these participants, simply desiring maturity represents control and at least a direction to follow. They have become aware of what was lacking; and even though they have not attained the goal of maturity, they have a clear direction of what they want. Participants used the term, “I want,” and wondered, “what I would like” when describing their ideal career. This showed that they were in the process of creating that identity—one that would incorporate those values and personality traits that they are learning to value and validate in themselves.

Individuals who have not attained societal markers of maturity feel lack of support or understanding. This dissolving of the ties to the larger (healthy, adult) community is what Hochschild (2003) says is caused by capitalism. When we limit our emotional connection, this strategy adapts us to survive in a destabilizing culture of capitalism. Even acts in such an environment of emotional management, and acts of self control can help shape feeling itself, according to Hochschild (2003). We need to ask ourselves what emotional dilemma we are trying to resolve in order to live the lives we want (Hochschild, 2003). When we have resolved our emotional dilemmas, we will have attained the maturity that enables us to feel in control of our lives, and in control of the identity that we have chosen.

2b. Learning to control time

Becoming in control of one's life demands or requires decision-making skills, including those that expose a definitive time frame. Without control, individuals experience fear and lack of skills for effective decision-making. Participant V's narrative revealed how fear can motivate one's decision-making and wanting to be in control. She talked about the (only) negative of not having kids: wondering "if I'm gonna be alone, when I'm old," because her family has a tendency, V laughs, to either "die by fifty or live till ninety-something." Here she pauses, wondering what that will be like if she lives that long, "especially if I don't get *married*, you know I don't have kids, whatever, it's just sort of, I *wonder*—what that will be like." V's emphasis on the word, "married" told me that that is the key to her being able to feel secure and without fear. Neither K nor R had mentioned this fear of being alone, or of what may happen if they do not attain those specific societal markers of adult development.

This explanation seemed to counteract V's other plans of working on her identity, that is, forming her identity by gaining maturity through dealing with her past abuse issues. Underneath her goals of paying her debts to her parents, getting a career that is worthy of her education and experience, and healing from her issues of abuse, the only way to become complete, acceptable—and safe—is to marry. In this instance, V does not display the self-efficacy that I heard earlier in her interviews. Her tone contrasted with that which she used to express the strength and power she has found from facing her past abuse issues.

V's self-power was seen in her description of how she had controlled time during her adolescence. She said she worked part time while she went to high school, "and basically if I was studying, that my father was like, 'oh, you're busy.' So he would leave me alone." By having every minute of the day planned V said she had an "out". She said that was "how I was going to basically get away from the house and be able to, you know kind of move on from all of this." She realizes that her reactions were those of a fourteen year-old, and "in my thirties it was literally just kind of learning how to grow up," and "learning how to—kind of *be* an adult in a sense."

It was on the second reading that I noticed how often certain topics were mentioned within the category of time. Participants spoke of being in control or of having self-power. For V, this came in the form of becoming integrated in her personality and identity. V had spoken of her thirties as the time she became integrated or whole in the various aspects of her personality. As she resolves her issues, and processes all those past phases of her life, and when she "will have had all these pieces integrated, will be whole," then she can feel in control. She can finally know and claim

her power; she can create her identity. This explanation reminded me again of Hochschild's (1987) phantom identity. This identity is an ideal that we create from chosen aspects of our identity and relationships. It is a vision of ourselves which we feel we can attain when we will have more free time to do so.

Our relationship to time is dependent on our level of maturity. This includes the timing of certain events in life that happen to us, as well as our choice to act at certain times. But this maturity is dependent on our level of learning (and processing experiences) about life. V said, "I wish I had been able to do this *sooner*," as she spoke of getting her resume together and recovering fully from her abuse issues. Her emphasis on the word, "sooner," showed her regret and anger at the passage of time. She said the delay was because she had only recently gained focus. In V's case, focus had to precede the decision-making.

This was interesting, because we educators attempt to force decision-making on learners, in an attempt to make the learners become focused. Participants displayed the need for focus in order to have the skills and insight to make informed and proactive decisions. Similarly, R expressed in her journal entry that she is disappointed that it has taken so long for her to find her passion. In our interviews, she mentioned that she could have found her passion sooner had she had a "*really, really* proactive guidance person," and some "*really dynamic career exploration tools*."

For V, an added benefit of controlling time means that she will have control of her depression as well. She said she will then be able to be on time for work and other appointments. This will give her feelings of self-efficacy and allow her to pursue her goals of finding another career, paying her debts, and dating. V's goals are timed

sequentially, as each reflects her identity at a given or certain time period. She explained, “because it’s just—marriage? Has—been—one of those things of, when I finally deal with all the *crap* that I’ve gotta deal with, *then* I’ll focus on it.” By being in control of time, V can then focus on her identity in each of her sequential life roles: worker, daughter (who pays back debts to her parents), and relationship partner. Surprisingly, being at mid-life did not signal panic as much as it fostered a sense of control. V explained that having the year end, “is I think gonna be pretty good for me, to just sort of make a clean break, it’s like, ‘OK!’” she laughs, “‘Year’s over! Back on the horse,’ and you know, start making some changes.”

By setting these goals sequentially, I wonder if V is bringing her self-professed perfectionism (as she explained when she spoke of meticulously finishing her web-design class project) to all areas of her life. The attainment of each goal will yield another developmental step she will have attained in the quest for maturity and being in control of her life. This sense of control of time allows for the visualization of a better future, one with possibilities that may counteract the family, religious, or cultural messages V has experienced.

Although V appears to be learning how to control time, she also has a passive relationship with time. She said that, she “personally doesn’t feel like she has a choice” and that after years of depending on her parents financially, she knows, “It’s kind of like, OK, this—*has* to change.” Her emphasis on the word, “has,” shows her frustration at herself for not having controlled time better than she has. Her desire to control time as well as her successful control of time motivates her decision-making skills.

Paradoxically, she is in control of time, even as she is out of control, in terms of pressures

to marry and have children. Here, time forced her decision-making, yet not in a negative way; without the time pressure, her decision-making may not have been as clear or as imperative.

K and V speak of time pressures and of feeling behind schedule in terms of certain life and career goals. At first glance, this seems to be a weakness. However, their awareness of time provides them a sense of control and personal power needed to accomplish their goals. It provides focus, as V explained that turning forty years old, “for me has actually been a really cool thing, like I’m—*excited*. Because now I’m kind of working on the things I *know* I need to be working on, that, you know, I’m not in a job that I *hate*.” This sense of control and focus provides hope for V: “I know whatever ‘there’ is like I’m gonna get ‘there’ too, that essentially be in a place where I’m—happy with who I am.”

Theme 2c. The importance of education in gaining life control

One of the key messages that all participants’ families voiced to them was the importance of education. V said that because her first two brothers never graduated from college, V’s father told V and her brother, “You will *go* to school, you will *go* to college, we will pay for college.” V added that her parents, “did not *want* us to have to be working,” during their college years. R, too, explained that, “my parents were *very adamant* about all of us—goin’ on—for—a degree, or some sort of further education.” She remembered her father’s advice, which R says, “it’s stuck with me since I’ve been five. He said, ‘They can take your house, they can take your car. But they can never take your *education* away from you.’ And that just stuck with me—f—forever.” Parental messages gave the impression that education would be a means to earn more money—but

these women did not see money as an end goal. Instead, participants translated education to mean eventual independence, or being in control over one's life. Being in control would allow them freedom to discover their purpose.

R, as the oldest child in her family, was the first to attain a college degree. V and her next-older brother (who had committed suicide) were the only members of their family to have gone to college. Neither R's nor V's parents had graduated college. K's father had a college education from a prestigious university in Japan, and her older brothers were also educated. K's mother had completed a high school education. Whether it was because of the parents' realizing their own lack of education, or (K's father), remembering their own education experiences, families (chiefly fathers) gave the message to their daughters that education was an important factor in the lives of girls.

Education may have been important to K because of the negative messages she received from her grandmother. K's grandmother had wanted to be a teacher but she could not because of some restriction, K explained. "I remember she's saying that, 'females are—females are not good.'" K laughs, "'Females are less *valuable* because they are not good at math.'" K guessed that her grandmother had "frustration she was feeling," although K still felt it was "kind of—unfair that she did not expect me to go to the university." When K was in elementary school or junior high, her grandmother told her, "why don't you just ah—why don't you become a beautician? Because ah, you like to deal with hairs, and—you can have your own shop, and you can have a job!" But K "felt very contradicted" by this advice; the grandmother had given K's brothers the message that they should go to the university.

Education was a means for these women to make a contribution to their world, and to use their education. R, more than the other two participants, expressed her pride and gratitude at having earned an education. She said, “I’m *so thankful* that I’m self-sufficient and I have the *education*” that will allow her to get a twenty dollar an hour job, “as opposed to try and struggle making nine or ten dollars an hour. *That’s* what I’m *most* thankful for—that I went to school. And that I have that education and—half a *brain* that I can *do* that stuff.” She talks about the married women clients who are mothers, and that they are making seven or eight dollars an hour. She whispers, telling me, “I thought, ‘How are they gonna pay [for it]?’ I know what I make, and I’m single.”

By using their education—a phrase R repeated often throughout our interviews--these women could feel useful, and feel they were producing meaningful work, by their own standards. V described it as, “making a difference,” something she did not feel in her previous career. Their usefulness could contribute to a sense of worthiness; if first in career, then later also in relationships (as V’s sequential goals would proscribe). R’s verbalizing what her ideal partner would be could only have been known after she had learned and described her own identity and (career) needs to this point in her life.

Using one’s skills (educational and work experiences) would be akin to living one’s purpose. As an extension, one is using one’s identity—as a learner, student, and an educated woman. It was significant that the women’s family messages included an emphasis on education. Even though of all the parents, only K’s father had a college education, still all the parents of all participants stressed strongly the need for education, and pushed their daughters towards it.

Although not verbalized by the family messages, education was not an end goal, but rather one that could provide independence and safety. This would be accomplished because education would enable the women to have more money to support themselves. Money was seen by participants and their families of origin as a way to have control over one's life and finances. Although I had originally thought of money as a category in and of itself, participants told me that in their homes, there were few of these types of messages. K and V were upper-middle class; there were no money concerns in their household, they told me. R's family was working class, and R more than any participant does mention money. R described some of her clients' financial situation, "I was horrified. Some of them don't even have a savings account. They live pay to pay to pay."

Money was also an indicator that the women wanted or needed a change in career. Such a change would allow them to earn what their education indicated their skills should be worth. In V's case, money was a focal point in being able to repay her debts to her parents. In so doing, she could gain maturity and a sense of control. Then she could pursue her other progressive goals of marriage and family. Money was also an indicator of one's worth, as all three participants described women who do not work outside the home. Each, in their narratives, used the word, "just" when describing those women. It was as though those women's identity is not a solid identity, because they have somehow not done the necessary identity creation or exploration that R suggested represents effective career counseling.

R's contentment with her life is complemented by her healthy financial situation, which lends an element of being in control of her life. She reiterated the stories of some

of her clients at the housing complexes where she works, clients who R knows are not as fortunate as she is. Some of them are “making seven seventy-five an hour, and being a single mother—with one or two kids. How do you do it?” And R talks of hearing so many “horror stories” of people just “scraping by financially. They’re just scraping by financially.” She repeats, and adds, “And it’s just horrible,” she whispers. I laughed to myself as R mentioned this aspect of life; other people may say the same thing about single, mid-life women who are childless. Those women’s lives may seem--to others who already attained those markers of adulthood--equally “horrible.”

Coincidentally, “horrible” is the same word R uses to describe the marriages of some of her friends. Each time R described her clients’ financial status and lack of money, she lowered voice, sometimes whispering confidentially to me, as though it were an awful secret that these clients had not learned: people should get an education so that they will not have financial worries, and then they will be in control of their lives. Then they can find their passion or purpose. Jung (1956) describes vocation as “an irrational factor that fatefully forces a man to emancipate himself from the herd and its trodden paths. True personality always has vocation and believes in it. This vocation acts like a law of God from which there is no escape...as if it were a demon that whisperingly indicated to him new and strange ways. Who has vocation hears the voice of the inner man; he is called (p. 151).”

K also did not talk about money messages she had gotten from her family. This may have been because her father had a high-paying job and her mother was also working. K explained, “they didn’t really ah—let me feel like I have to earn my own money and I have to ah, save it, you know or—m—I have a—really—[whispers] I don’t

know, keep focusing on getting a job which pays better.” Additionally, this unimportance placed on money made K feel that it was pride that made her want to be paid more at her previous job. She laughed when explaining to me how she was unsure about leaving her job, because, “right position or right place to work, or right people to work with may be much, much more difficult to find. So I, when I had those, maybe money could come after! But that time I couldn’t think like that.”

Theme 2d. Belonging and support in gaining life control

Education provided a way for participants to gain control via pointing a direction toward adulthood (maturity). When the individual reaches maturity he or she can then make more informed career and relationship decisions, and thereby form an identity of a healthy adult. This learning required that participants have a sense of belonging, or support. In the case of my participants, this support most often was represented by peer support and advice. Rarely did participants have peers who were their same age, and who were also going through a transition and being single. V said, “I sometimes wonder if—that *does* make a difference.”

Although there was a fine line separating support from passiveness, the quest for support indicated a form of being in control. It showed a consciousness of those items that were needed in order to achieve certain goals. For instance, V said, “I—guess in a sense that I wonder sometimes, if I had more friends, like, my *age*, if that would have kind of helped push me a little bit more.” And even though V currently has a supportive group of friends, she added that the group has, “*no concept of what* it means to be depressed, to—go—through a depressive phase th—especially as deep as I had gotten back into.” V sniffs, almost in an expression of anger, as she adds, “like they don’t—

know—how to help?” Support was a factor that needed to be present in order for the women to feel safe enough to enact a transition in their lives. By choosing to include or exclude peers, participants were able to express control in their lives.

Being in control over one’s life depends to an extent on having a sense of belonging. The resulting feeling of support leads one to a feeling of being in control. For R, this sense of belonging to her religion stems from her belonging to her family of origin. She explained that it was “almost an expectation” by her family that she remain Catholic and not leave the church. R whispered as she talked of her siblings who have “fallen away from the church.” Although not much is said about it, R whispers, it is “frowned upon, if you will.” R told me she had joked to her mother, “‘Oh I might not go to church tomorrow,’ and it’s this big guilt trip kind of thing if you don’t go. We grew up Catholic. And—you went to church every week.” It was this description by R of her relationship to the Catholic Church and her feeling of belonging there that eventually inspired me to add belonging and support as a necessary ingredient in forming one’s identity.

K said she had no support from her family in Japan, because they did not understand her situation. Neither did her American friends support her, because they could not understand her situation as an international student. Her peers added to her decision making confusion, because their reactions were, “very mixed. Probably not very—no one *really* understood why, and no one could rea—no one could *fully*—either support me or ah, oppose me, because it was kind of very, very,” I could hear her smile, even over the phone, “complicated decision-making process.”

All three participants sought this sense of belonging through eliciting support and advice from their peers. However, peers' advice was based on their perception of K, V, and R, and their attitude toward these women. Participants seemed to not have noted this facet of their influential peers and the advice they accepted from them and implemented at the time. The peers' subjective suggestions may not have always been in participants' best interests (see the later sections on passiveness). It was interesting to note that participants did not seek advice or support from their families nearly as much as they did from their peers. Their families' messages and advice may have been the reason the participants chose their primary career. Now the women sought a more realistic, current opinion—one that was based on their more evolved identity.

Although V mentioned that her church group friends do not wholly understand her depression, she knows that her therapy friends did understand her. Their understanding provided V with a sense of validity so that she could begin her identity reconstruction process. For V, her groups provided a rehearsal area for the world of work; she could practice arriving on time at appointments, and interacting with coworkers and peers.

In each of these choices or methods of finding a sense of belonging, the participants engaged a form of learning. They learned about themselves (through the perspective of another person), and they learned how to evaluate and choose which aspects of their identity to keep, and which to discard. V, by consulting her peers, found a substitute for the lack of belonging she had experienced in her adolescence. "I hated moving", V laughs, nervously revealing her loneliness at that point in her life. With no peers to reflect her identity to her, she may have had trouble forming a solid identity.

This absence of support may have been particularly crucial during V's identity development in adolescence.

Peers also represented a way for participants to feel in control of their lives, as they compared their lives to those of their peers. For R, she compared herself favorably, with her clients' financial situations, and her friends' "horrible" marriages. However, R more than the other two participants sought peer support and suggestions in an effort to create a sense of belonging. Peers' opinions on R's work skills and possibilities often propelled R onto a different career path. Their belief in her skills provided R a sense of belonging to that particular career or personality characteristic (such as care-taking). V talked of her friend's teenager who has special needs, "You know, autistic, *retardation*, that kind of, you know, somewhere in that whole mix." V's stress on the word, "retardation," made V seem calmer during her explanations of her own issues surrounding the sexual abuse. By comparing her life and problems with those of her peers, V could feel more able to deal with what seemed by comparison much smaller issues.

R and V used peer support to examine their prior perspectives. When measured by others' opinions, R and V's skills were seen in a different and perhaps more hopeful light. These women could see the possibilities available to them. In some cases, they did make huge transformations: R said that she changed her political affiliation from Republican to Democrat, and V left the Catholic Church and now attends a Protestant non-denominational church. K did not speak about her current religious affiliation; therefore for K, that was not an area of life that she felt she needed to examine and revise.

R and V used the process of seeking belonging and support to complete a perspective transformation. For both R and V, superiors' or coworkers' feedback about their work skills made the work more meaningful. R noted a time when, "the guy that hired you *calls* you and says, 'Wow that was an awesome group of resumes you put together,'" she pauses, then whispers, "and that's –that's nice, that's exciting!" Positive comments about one's work performance would help to locate one's identity in that arena.

It was a lack of support or belonging that prevented K from being able to make clear decisions, gain focus, and feel in control of her life and career. A sense of belonging was an important step in the process toward decision-making; included in this process are focus and freedom from stressors. K felt no one understood her situation; she said her peers' reactions to her decisions were "very mixed." This transition was a "long [laughs] ah, decision-making period, or intense decision making period."

Spirituality as Belonging

Another means of support these women elicited was through religion or spirituality. I first assumed that these women would have no religious experience or preferences. The connection and interdependence that helps us to reconstruct our identity may have been lacking in traditional religions that may require more conformity than these non-traditional women exhibited. That is, traditional religion may not have wholly or enthusiastically embraced these non-traditional women, I had thought. But these women had a religion that they (R and V) defined for themselves. In effect, it was not religion but rather spirituality--something that is integral to an individual's journey toward wholeness and developing a more authentic identity (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

This type of spiritual development is connected to moral and cognitive development, with an emphasis on the importance of connection, while also developing critical thinking processes (see Gilligan's 1982 pioneering work; and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, on how women learn.) Spirituality represents a movement toward greater authenticity, or a more authentic identity. Metanoia is a concept discussed by Vella (2000) (see also Tisdell, 2003). A metanoia is literally a "change of heart," about one's view of themselves and their world (Tisdell, 2003). As learners undergo this metanoia, they change their view about themselves and their world, and move to a less alienated state, and a deeper awareness of themselves and others (Tisdell, 2003).

Religious participation in a different religious tradition than that of her childhood helped V to reenter society after having been in therapy and dealing with her past issues of abuse. V said she was aware of the impact the depression had on her unemployment and work transitioning, as well as on her identity. V described her various support systems (church, psychotherapy group), and regretted that she did not have any peers who were her age. Of those peers she had, she regretted that some did not understand her depression. Hochschild (1983) says that without emotion, we cannot have or form a solid identity. V is striving to overcome her abuse issues and process her emotions. Only then, V said, can she focus on building a relationship and marriage.

Theme 2e. Hope as a means to control of one's life

One of the keys to creating one's identity is being able to visualize and focus on various favorable possibilities for one's life. At the heart of, or prodding this focus on, is hope. Hope engenders a belief that one's life can be different and better than it currently is. Hope leads us to believe that we do indeed have the self-efficacy required to make

necessary and positive changes in our life. This hope enables us to visualize ourselves as attaining all the goals that we and our society deem are important for to being a healthy adult.

Hope was an important factor in allowing participants to visualize a different, better future for themselves, and therefore a different and better identity. It was necessary for developing feelings of self-efficacy in the roles especially of wife and mother—roles that these women had not yet encountered. V expressed lack of hope because she could not visualize this scene for her life: “I—can barely picture myself being m—m—m—married, and kind of you know, with kids, so.” Hope allows us to see other possibilities so that we are better able to problem-solve and make decisions that will move us more toward living our purpose.

Participants expressed hopefulness in their views of their future, especially as concerns having children. In addition, participants expressed hopefulness about their not being alone in their situation of being single and childless at mid-life: participants asked me about the results of my study, and what I learned about women who were experiencing circumstances similar to theirs. K also mentioned in an e-mail to me during the study that she had been to her high school friend’s wedding, and was less upset than she thought she would be. She did not notice the lack in her life, in comparison with her marrying friend; she told me that our interviews had given her a different perspective on her situation and a certain amount of legitimacy. Participants variously used the phrase, “I haven’t given up yet,” when talking about plans for having children. R, too, mentioned hopefulness about marrying as long as her partner reflects her new values.

A feeling of hopefulness helped these women choose what things would influence

their identity, and how they would decide their next steps in the career decision making process. They seemed to have an inward drive toward their purpose, a drive fueled by their hopefulness. Hope had had the effect of protecting them from an early and potentially purpose-hindering marriage. The drive for a life different and better is what compelled participants to find meaning in their career, even as their time runs out to become a legitimate member of their more married patriarchal society. Some women may find their meaning within and because of a marriage relationship; these particular women did not. They chose a different route; or, rather, it chose them.

Although the abuse that V suffered had affected her life, she is more in control now in that she acknowledges she still has a lot of work to do (with her issues of abuse). I could sense V's control when she told me that, "now it's just kind of getting exciting, 'cause—the—light at the end of the tunnel is definitely there, and ah, sort of like the snowball that you know, it's now kind of rolling downhill, and picking up speed."

V's therapy is helping her towards maturity, which will further her feelings of hope. Hope here represents an ability to visualize and believe in the possibility of a better, different future for oneself. Maturity leads us to focus, perhaps because of the pressure of time, and the reevaluation and reflection that occur at the age forty (for V) and fifty (for R). For these women, the biological clock is the best thing that could have happened: it has given the women focus in their decision-making, career, and then, ultimately, their new identity. The time facet ushered in reflection, an ability to visualize, and finally--hope.

The focus V has gained is providing her greater measures of hope. She says she is, "actually looking, really looking forward to—this—coming—decade simply because

I'm—oh, I guess in a way kind of—shedding—all—of—the—things—that—held me back, that I allowed to hel—hold me back, and working through that” and she says she is “sort of becoming—a freer person”, “the person God intended me to be.” Her measured words reflected her focus on the meaning of each word. Her greater focus is pointing her toward her purpose. Although V never stated the words “passion” or “purpose” as the other participants had, this was the way she described her own version of purpose: becoming “the person God intended me to be.”

Theme 2f: Humor's role in becoming in control of one's life

All three participants expressed a sense of humor in various ways during their interviews. Their laughter was variously nervous, accepting, or relieving of tension. For example, the participants described their belief that marriage and children would have just “happened” by now, and they laughed at their surprise that it had not. And V explained that she thought that she would have overcome her issues and be at the enlightened place she is today. She laughed when she added that she thought she would have accomplished this task years ago.

I thought at first that participants' injection of humor was merely nervous laughter. I thought maybe the participants did not want to face or admit to themselves that they are still single at this stage in their lives. I thought they may have felt insecure that they had no male support figure especially during this transition period in their lives and work transitions. But later I recognized their sense of humor as a coping mechanism. It was a way of helping them see a different perspective, and helping them to detach from their situation so they could get a broader perspective. Humor was healing for these women, in that it promoted or enabled an acceptance of their current situation. From

there they could plan for the next stage of their life and become more focused on their goals.

Zirlott (1998) describes the process of humor as disengaging the ego's illusions in our thinking and acting patterns. From that point, we are able to extend our horizon of meaning-making. Participants can then make clearer, more appropriate decisions for the next direction that their lives will take—both in terms of career, and possibly in terms of relationship status. Humor offers us a way of noticing different perspectives, and in so doing it offers us hope and the ability to visualize a better future. Participants used the lightness generated from humor as a way to form and imagine a new vision of themselves and their new identity. Once these women were able to laugh at themselves and their situation, even at this crucial point in their lives, they were more relaxed, more reasonable, more objective and purposeful about their goals and their next steps toward their purpose.

Humor functioned as a type of perspective transformation, an “in-breaking moment in which one's fixed way of perceiving the world is given over to a more creative, imaginative, playful mode of presence, during which one's approach to life is re-gestalted (Zirlott, 1998, P. xi).” This frees us from a rigid seriousness toward life and the world, and opens us to new aspects of reality we may not have seen or considered before. It offers stress relief so that we can think more clearly. The resulting openness that humor offers, as Zirlott (1998) points out, can then be applied to many life situations—including the direction of one's future career decision-making processes. This serves to create a more inclusive and integrative identity and a broader perspective of one's world.

All participants expressed surprise that they were at this age and still not married or with children. They said that they had “just thought it would happen by now.” It seemed that personal relationships goals, to these participants, were supposed to be somewhat automatic and effortless. The women seemed to see relationship goals as requiring something different than the effort required for their successes in career and educational activities. Even though the participants took a passive stance on the issue of their current singleness, their humor at this realization gave them personal power to do something about this realization. Had they only mentioned it with regret, they may have been de-motivated to act in their own better interests.

As participants recognized the irony of their timeline and situation, they gained new realizations and their reflection spurred decision-making about future goals. It now occurred to participants that if they desire the traditional path of marriage and family (“just” a stay-at-home mom) they need to pursue those goals in the same aggressive and purposeful (and non-traditional) manner with which they had pursued their education and career.

K was indecisive and half-hearted when applying to a Ph.D. program, because, she laughed, “the application process was kind [of]—*tedious* and I went back to Japan,” and so, “things are definitely i—up in the air!” She added that, “I do not have a career whatsoever—yet—developed,” she chuckled. Perhaps she was not so intense about resolving this indecisiveness, because she is currently in a relationship. Whereas R and V knew that they may not find or allow themselves to pursue a relationship until they have made definitive career decisions.

K's humor reflects her ability to partially relax about this area of her life. She also laughed when she realized that she had, "put too much energy on 'I don't want to get married' part, and there, too, I'm not." When we realize the irony of our past decisions, and can find the irony and humor in them, we have begun to overcome the power they have over us. With the clarity and focus that humor inspires in us, we no longer have to be content with regret, or be content with less than we want in life. Rather, humor teaches us creative and more effective coping behaviors that will enable us to realize our goals for our lives and our identity.

Theme 3. Passiveness

Throughout the interviews and data analysis process, it was sometimes difficult for me to differentiate participants' humor from hopelessness. What appeared at first glance to be contentment, on further examination I could see it more clearly as passiveness. This was different from hopelessness; it was passiveness, a feeling that was signaled by exhaustion, lack of motivation or energy, and chiefly a lack of belief that there is a more positive or different vision of healthy adulthood. Therefore I had to create separate themes of passiveness and the various forms it took.

For example, R expressed a sense of acceptance at not having children. She even laughed about it, saying, "I've kind of given up doing that at forty-nine." But then adds, on a serious note, "I would have given my right arm to have a child. I would have loved to have children, yes." I sensed that her laughter was not a nervous or insecure laugh, but rather one of contentment and acceptance. "Sure, if I met someone tomorrow, it would be really nice to be—meet a nice guy and be in a committed relationship. But oh, well, if it doesn't happen, I'm—very content with exactly how everything's shaking—down right

now.” Her contentment is mixed with hope for the future: “I haven’t given up on having kids yet, either” with someone who already has children, she said.

In their early or first careers, participants had had little personal input; they took the advice offered by peers, mentors or family members. They had little knowledge of self or of their identity and what careers were possible for them to have. This lack of self-knowledge prevented participants from having focus. Without focus, they had few decisions-making skills to choose a career that met their own preferences. This was in contrast to their narratives and their frequent mentioning of “what I want” when describing their work, education, and relationship statuses.

Participants’ singleness was also a result of passiveness in one form or another. Their responses indicated that this aspect of life was supposed to be, or should be automatic. It was an aberration in their otherwise stellar and successful lives in education and career. In both those, these women had pursued goals, worked very hard, and attained their goals--sometimes even exceeding them.

This passiveness was exemplified in the surprise in K’s voice at my choice of questions to ask during the interviews. She said I asked her a lot of questions, “that’s not *happening* right now, like having a child or rearing a child,” and so she said she wondered what kind of findings I would see in my research. She added, “I guess I don’t question myself that much.” It was as though the women did not think as far into their future in terms of relationship goals, the way they had done with their education and career goals. Their explanations of having just ‘fallen into’ educational majors and careers showed that perhaps they were afraid to just ‘fall into’ a marriage—without first knowing or having attained their purpose. The interview questions for K had made her

conscious that marriage would also require her to pursue marriage goals in the same aggressive, purposeful way that she has in terms of her education, her international travel and educational experiences, and other decisions she had made in her life.

Marriage, to these women, represented passiveness. They had witnessed what they described as the passiveness of the women who were “just” stay-at-home mothers. Participants seemed to have been unwilling—rather than unable—to visualize themselves in this passive role, especially as their view of themselves (defined in terms of career and educational success) did not reflect a similar passiveness. Visualizing a possible future gives us our self-efficacy. This then provides an identity or possible identities we can choose from to create an integrated identity. V, in describing her visualization of marriage at this point in her life says that she figures that, “more than likely I will just end up ah, marrying *into* a family, or just be single, and “*travel!*” she laughs.

V’s dreams have changed because of the timing of her realization of and recovery from abuse issues. Her passiveness in this aspect of her life may have been influenced by her pastor at her new church. V said she told him about her changing goals, and “as he put it, you know, ‘reality therapy,’” and he added that, “‘You’re recognizing O.K., you still want to get *married*, but you know the reality that it won’t be getting married, having a family, ah, that kind of thing, that that’s—*changing*. And you know, that that’s kind of what you *need* to do.’” Her pastor could have encouraged V to pursue a non-traditional lifestyle or to combine all realms of career and family, but he did not. Interestingly, this person who traditionally represents spirituality and hope did not provide much hope to V during her transition situation.

V's depression contributed to her feelings of passiveness. She wavered with this vision of hope, as she said she is "not *giving* up on the hope that I could find—someone—and—*get* married." But then she adds, passively, "it's just kind of we'll see what life *brings*." Even so, V expressed hopefulness that the act of opening herself up to dating will have the "net result I will be able to improve my relationships with the friends I currently have." This hope gives her a sense of being back in control of her life; if she cannot have everything in life, at least she can have some things.

V realizes that, "I do things differently than most people, putting up walls and difficult to build a healthy relationship." She said she had no image of herself as being married: "I—can barely picture myself being m—m—m—married, and kind of you know, with kids, so." She currently has no vision of self-efficacy within the identity of a married woman; therefore she has little or no hope in its happening in her life. At church, she said, "I can pick out *any* little kid," she laughs, just as she can notice any dog wherever she goes. She has a vision of what she does want, but not the vision—or identity—of being someone who is able to, or even worthy of, having these things in her life.

V's vision of marriage included her mother's having six children: V said, "she had a handful, you know." When V was born, V's mother stayed at home. V's role model of the wife identity role was that there was too much to handle. This may have been more than V's anxiety would allow her to visualize for herself. She may have even had difficulty visualizing herself even wanting such a life for herself. V said she still hopes to marry, saying that at some point she does hope she is "able" to get married. She figured that this would have happened years earlier, thinking that, "when I *am* forty, I

will *have* worked through all these issues, be married, you know,” she laughs. “So I’m about ten years behind in the kind of the game plan.”

V’s passiveness was clear as she turned forty years old. She described it this way: “It’s like a whole bunch of stuff just sort of hitting at once.” And after getting laid off, she said, “what the hell, might as well just find a career that I sort of enjoy a little bit more” than what she had had at her job at the national bank. “Certainly the--*wish* that things had--*been* different, or that. Y’know that I was maybe at this place at *thirty* instead of *forty*, but. And, everything happens *in* it’s own time, and *for* its own reason, and so at this point, um. I’m just kinda—working *through* things, m--just trying to--.” Gonna “push myself to *change* for the better. You know, like I recognize—this isn’t *where* I want to be, and like, right now I’m still—not—in a great place.” Although V’s depiction may be spiritual (“God’s will”, “in its own time”), it could also be interpreted as an excuse to pacify her feelings of anxiety. However, this new calmness could provide feelings of hope that V otherwise may not be able to manifest.

Although V has achieved clarity on her past abuse issues and is becoming more focused, she is still passive in her relationship with, and her control of, time. She said, laughing, that, “I—just—*did* not anticipate that I would be *forty* by the time *that* happened!” And, “I was *hoping* to be at *this* place—say at the *beginning* of this quarter, not at the end of the quarter. Like, where I am right now. I was hoping I’d had reached—like three months ago, as opposed to—*now*!” So, although she is glad it’s “*coming* together, but I would—have—preferred—if it had been sooner?” I could not help noticing that V mentioned the concept of time much more than either of the other participants had.

The sense of being conscious of time can also contribute to passiveness. We can lose time; we can lose track of time; and time can be out of our control. V mentioned that “I like I feel like I’ve just been—wasting a lot of time? But it’s also—how much of that *was* the depression?” For example, in talking about how she would get ready for work, “like it *surprised* me!” that she “can easily—literally *lose time*.” Controlling this time would allow her—literally--to put life and relationships in order. She seeks a job that will impose this structure on her, so that she has to be somewhere at a certain time. Coincidentally, although in a passive way V wants an outside force to control time for her, this goal represents for V a form of being in control.

V said she has also realized that she can control her depression by not acting on her feelings. If she controls her feelings, she can be mature. This maturity offers feelings of self-efficacy and a new identity. This self-efficacy could extend to marriage, as it is the next logical progression in V’s sequential goal time-line. Being worthy in terms of conquering the depression and showing up on time at work may also make V feel worthy of being married. Once she has conquered her depression, V can feel like—and have the identity of--a mature, normal and non-depressed adult.

To a lesser degree, participants K and R also wrestle with time in a passive way. R said she realizes that her time to have had children has passed. K considers which goals should come first--or at all--and she must factor in the timeline of her partner (who already has had a child). She also foresees the Ph.D. program as taking longer than her partner seems to think it will take to complete. And looming over all K’s decisions is the timeline she must maintain with her visa status.

Theme 3a. Money and passiveness

V's relationship with money was passive because of her current financial debt to her parents, and the need to find work merely to repay these debts. She said she, "*had* to learn the hard way," about finances and getting into debt. And she says that she will probably have to take a computer job right now to have something that will enable her to repay her debts. She—unlike the other participants—does not use the terms "what I want" or "what I would like to do". Instead, she wants to find a job that she enjoys at least a little bit more than the last job, she said. In describing the debt to her parents, she said, "Got to the point now—where—I think I owe my parents probably—God at this point it's got to be closer to twenty thousand dollars." Here, using "God" is out of character for V in her interactions with me. Her choice of words indicated to me strong emotion—anger and frustration at herself and her situation. Since she owes debt to her parents, they in effect are in control of her money.

V has or feels she has no control and therefore has no independence (at least from her parents); therefore she has difficulty feeling self-efficacy. Her current lack of control over money may have stemmed from her family's lack of concern over money problems; there was always enough, so money was not even an issue that was discussed (unlike in R's family). "I guess they kind of felt like, 'ok', I'm not overspending, not doing anything, so 'she's ok'" V laughs. Paradoxically, at that time in her life, she was not "OK", because the abuse was occurring or had already occurred.

The lack of family messages about money contributed to V's lack of self-efficacy with money while V was in college. "And I got to college and had no idea how to write a check," she laughed, "you know, no concept of this stuff." Money, for V, holds a very

strong key for her to overcome and exert her control—that is, if she ever is able to visualize herself “as married”. Self-efficacy with money brings independence (financially) and means maturity and being in control. This contributes to a new identity (of someone who is on control of money; has no money worries; no debts, etc.).

Participants K and R expressed no passiveness about money in their interviews. However, I included money and passiveness as a theme because of its influence in directing how much or whether we can develop the feelings of self-efficacy necessary to create our identity. I am reminded again of how these themes overlap and intersect. Money, even for V, is not an end goal; it represents something much larger and more powerful. V’s control of money may also by extension represent control over her past family issues. That is, in her explanations of her childhood, money played a very large part: V had explained how she worked during high school in order to avoid her father’s abuse; she had gotten into debt by spending money to alleviate stress; and V said that in college she did not know how to balance a checkbook. Money had always represented powerlessness to V. Her fervent desire now to repay the monetary debt to her parents is an attempt to change that part of her identity and create self-efficacy in this area of her life.

Theme 3b. Decision-making and passiveness

Participants expressed their past career decision-making by explaining that their choices had been influenced by others’ perceptions of participants’ skills and abilities. Occasionally participants mentioned that they worked in careers that they enjoyed. This seemed to be somewhat passive, because their descriptors were not couched in anything other than preferences—theirs or peers’. For example, R spoke of changing her current

career, in order to focus on her “passion”. “It’s scary,” she said, “to think of changing career[s] again,” but she realizes or believes that this change would make her happier and would give her more control over her life.

The career decision-making of the women had been passive, as they mentioned just “falling into” their first careers. Now V’s career goal is “trying not to stay stuck.” Although all three participants are very capable and successful in terms of career, they still seemed to accept traditional notions about marriage: women must wait patiently, yet passively, for a man to choose them. Their image of marriage and children was one they figured “would have happened by now.”

Even though their early careers may not have been ideal, or their “purpose”, participants had been proactive and aggressive in attaining those careers and the requirements for them. So, it seemed as though the women may have felt they needed to be passive in at least one area of their lives—dating relationships—in order to maintain the cultural standard of femininity (passiveness), and thereby be worthy of marriage. The drawback to that stance is that it may eventually leak into the women’s career life, too, further promulgating and legitimizing the stereotypes about women’s personal worth as well as their relationship with work.

All participants used the words or phrases, “what I want,” when describing their search for career interests, their evaluation of past careers, and their ultimate decisions. When they explained in their interviews that “I just kind of fell into it,” when describing their first careers, they gained understanding. They realized how much they had been influenced or encouraged by well-meaning peers, family members, or mentors. Now at

this transition stage, they are more aware of what they want, apart from others' influences on them.

I re-evaluated V's "contentment" explanation about her current situation at age forty. This reexamination shed new light on V's phrases about "just see where that goes..." and "I'm not shooting for happiness but contentment" and "I don't expect everything to be *perfect*. Ah, don't expect every day to be honey and roses, but just to be *content* with where I'm *at*." She says she certainly wants a lot of changes and things to be different, but is content with where "I need to be right now," now that she has, "pulled out a lot of the old issues, have—been able to you know, move beyond a lot of those issues, and grow in ways that I had always hoped I could?" She sums it up by saying, "Just being content with where you *are* in life."

I noticed how times V had used the word, "just" throughout her interviews. Her contentment at life may have represented a settling for less, because of little self-efficacy or little feelings of worth. This realization was brought about by looking at the second reading and highlighting of the interview text. I realized how often things I had on first reading indicated a certain topic (for example, contentment and hope) that on second reading showed themselves as passivity. At first glance this decision-making process may seem like openness. On further reading it seemed more like passiveness. For example, R and K used the term "just happened" when describing how they "fell into" their first career "choice."

For all three participants, passiveness was a factor in their various decision-making processes. V's family told her to go to college, and which colleges were allowable. R's friends told her they should all quit the dating group they were attending.

K puts her boyfriend's and family's feelings ahead of her own wants and needs. In this way, K, V, and R, all had experienced being controlled by other people's direction; in this sense they waited for someone else to give them permission to define their needs and, by extension, themselves and their identity.

This waiting occurred in early career choices. V said, "I had absolutely no idea what I thought of when I was a kid," or what kind of work she wanted to do in the future. "I kind of—always figured I would—*get* married and—you know, have a family, which at this point being *forty*, I'm still hoping to get *married*, but not really figuring—on having kids, I might end up *marrying into* kids, and possibly adopting, but that this point, I'm--. Kids' aren't really like—oh, well!" she laughed. Passiveness here prevents a feeling of hope for future changes and possibilities.

Depression contributed to passiveness in V's decision-making. She said the things that, "gave me joy just—weren't—*there*, so I was just stuck with me and the computer." She said, "It used to be, we had *fun*." She sniffs. After her new boss had made more structured time rules, anything enjoyable in V's life, "was just literally getting sucked out." There simply was not time during the day to do these activities. The lack of control of time here intersects with a feeling a passiveness.

V talks about her next steps in her career-decision-making: "definitely willing to give it a try for a couple of years, and sort of see what happens, and see if I *do* like it." Her parents had said she would go to college, but with no definite goals or plans for her after that. Instead, she said, their message was merely, "you know, see where *life* leads you *then*, like you'll have more opportunities from that." V had been led by her peers' direction (or lack thereof), and had been given an identity based on that direction. Up

until this point, V had not had the skills or ability to make decisions based on her own preferences. V describes how depression contributed to this lack of direction: “I think for *anyone* going through major career change, and especially would be, how much—depression—is playing a part.” She seems to feel that she could not have possibly had any control (in terms of wise decision-making) in her life, because of the effect that depression had had on her life.

K also expresses passiveness in her decision to marry and have children. “But, see, you never know.” She feels that even if she makes a decision, she cannot be sure her goal will or can be realized: “I wouldn’t—I feel like I will never be able to really a hun—really make a decision about that a hundred-percent because there will be always *slight chance* of having a child. So I mean--*really never know*.” K said that if she had married earlier; she would have “taken this route a little earlier” and if she had a child, could have gone back to school much later. Or if she’d stayed in Japan, “I might not have gone back to school at all.”

I wondered how much of K’s passiveness was actually a strategy for her to discover or uncover her purpose. After all, such passivity is what had led K’s mother to finding her purpose: K explained that her mother, “was not looking for a job to work, but she just encountered” the employer who had just started a company--a company that had a “philosophy or policy that she really could—go along with.” The job “just happened” to K’s mother; “she wasn’t really looking for anything.” K did not seem to be panicked about making decisions. Her role model had not seemed to her to be panicked, either, and she had found her life purpose. Perhaps that is the reason K does not fight the indecision stage she currently is experiencing. It had been an effective way for her

mother to find her purpose. Passiveness, for K, represented not a hindrance to, but rather a necessary step in, the decision-making process.

Unfortunately this passiveness also operated in a negative way. K explained that she did not want to end her relationship because, “I felt like it would be too harsh. On him and—a—on him and on me. I couldn’t do that, so.” She protected his feelings in the same way she had protected her family’s feelings in Japan. This protection came at the expense of doing or thinking what was best for herself and her goals. She demonstrated passiveness in waiting until aspects of her life felt stagnant, and then she would make a decision and make a move in the direction toward her purpose.

Her decision to enter the relationship also seemed to be passive. She explained that, “I don’t know if there is a reason,” for how they met, “it happened very naturally,” because they live close and he helps her with school, K said. But when they were geographically separated, it was “easier for us to just not to date.” Now closer in geography, they are again together as a couple. She had not even planned on applying to her current educational program. “I wanted to come back to U.S. for studying or working for a long time, but I didn’t know exactly what—fr what, or how.” K continued that, “when I was thirty-three I happened to found that kind of program that I could apply and I *could* afford by myself.” Now that she feels stagnant, she wants to change her environment. That external change, she believes, will give her motivation toward setting new goals, and will allow her to “maybe freshen up [laughs] or um get more energy er, you know, f—ah refocus on my, um, priorities.”

Theme 3c. Support and peers and passiveness

Peers and their influence on us, their belief in us, and their beliefs about us, can shape our identity. V placed a lot of importance on the childhood friend she had had while living in a particular foreign country. Since losing that friend V told me she had not found such a close friend. V did not indicate whether she later sought such a friend; her responses only indicated that merely waiting for a close friend had not produced such a friend. V expressed her sadness at not having had many friends when her family moved often during her childhood.

The lack of peers, V thinks, contributed to her inability up to this point to reflect on her life. “So I—guess in a sense that I wonder sometimes, if I had more friends, like, my *age*, if that would have kind of helped push me a little bit more” She passively waited for someone to make a decision for her. The ideal friends V seeks are those who understand her depression. She spoke of her church friends, who, though they meant well, “they’ve—*never* had to deal with depression.” She may or may not have known of those friends’ past depression or lack of it. But still she seeks a kindred soul, someone who can reflect her (depression) identity back to her. She continued, “It’s *nice* to be *able*—to have someone who *does* understand that.” And “*know* that that other person *knows* exactly what you mean.” V seems to require someone to reflect her current identity so that she can be motivated to progress and create a new and integrated identity.

The problem with such a strategy is that we may live out or experience others’ views of our identity. These views may not be healthy or useful for us. V more than the other participants, was cognizant of stereotypes of women’s identity—especially at certain ages. This awareness contributed to her frequent explanations during her

interviews, for example: “I think that’s still kind of a taboo subject” to ask someone who’s forty, ‘why aren’t you *married?*’” V spoke of her friend from the therapy group who also had sexual abuse issues “and has *no* intention whatsoever, she’s still having some things that she never really dealt with. But um, like she has absolutely *no* intention of *ever* getting married, doesn’t ever want to.” V then explained further, about that woman’s high school reunion where people assumed that since she was still single at age forty that must have meant she was divorced. I saw then that V often used peers’ life examples to form her decisions (about career decision making) and also about her own identity; it was a way to validate her own experience.

V also explained situations where other people had validated her view of marriage. For example, she entered a discussion with someone at the hospital where she had participated in the psychotherapy program. V said that she told this person, a male about forty or fifty years old, “Yeah I just need to—kind of get my own act together first.” His positive response and reflection to her, as well as the positive comments of other peers to this stance (“Nobody told me it was a bad idea,” V said) inspired V to continue on her path toward healing herself first. She used their words to validate her ideas; paradoxically enough, they were ideas that she may have gotten from other peers in the first place.

V’s struggle with depression extends to her controlling how she is viewed by her society. For example, she knows that depression is not to be discussed and should not be noticeable in the work environment. She says she knows that, “the boss doesn’t want to *hear* it, you know” V laughs, “nor do you want to come across as, ‘Hey you’ve got to be very careful,’ that you’re not the—temperamental like, ‘*Oh* you must be on PMS!’ you

know” she laughs. She wants the self-efficacy that depression is currently preventing her from having, so “that you don’t come across as a total idiot!”

Support incorporates a feeling of being understood. K said that because her family and coworkers had never been an international student, they, “cannot fully understand” her actions or her motives. Similarly, V thinks that only depressed people can understand and therefore support her and the creation of her new identity. V also said she wishes she had friends who--though they may not be facing the same issues simultaneously as V—would be “at least at the same—age-wise.” V and others can see her depression as valid, as long as she has the support of understanding peers. Thereby, so too can V be seen as valid—even though she is single and without children while in her forties. She is in effect creating her validation by her own understanding and interpretation of society’s views on depression. She is recreating her identity.

R also displayed passiveness in terms of her peers and their opinions. She talked during our interviews about her “prickly friend” who is critical of R. But R remains friends with this person and continues to ask this friend and other friends what type of career they think R would enjoy. R may have felt no sense of belonging to a particular career in her first career search. She explained that she, “always knew I should be making more money out there, and it was frustrating.” R talked about an interview she had with a national company, and believed she did not get the job because they wanted someone who was “blonde” and “five-foot-three”. Interestingly enough, this was the description R gave of the dating scene; the women who were chosen by men were the “five-foot-five blondes.”

I wondered what R meant by her stereotypical woman, since I am also five-foot-three and am still single and in the midst of changing careers. In addition, I used to be blonde, but that particular hair color had not gotten me any closer to finding my passion or purpose in life. R's words made me recognize how we each choose which grouping, philosophy, or ideal that will give us a sense of belonging. If we lack this belonging, we cannot possibly locate our identity within that group of peers, religion, political group, occupation, etc. It will then be impossible for us to feel self-efficacy in those groups. R did not feel a sense of belonging to the stereotype she had devised. Within that belief, she lacked the support of herself, and thereby did not validate herself as capable in those realms (the national company, and the bar scene, respectively).

Not all passiveness is negative, however. For instance, V said she needed a support group before she could face her abuse issues and become more mature and adult. Without such support, V says she, "Just would not have been able to make it through." V had passively accepted others' views of her personality. She talked about the "fiery personality that always had a temper and was *always* told to *be* that way. But no one ever taught me how to *not* be that way." The negative aspect of passiveness is overshadowed by V's actively seeking support to overcome that past identity that she had acquired and accepted.

This passiveness may have been a factor in V's depression. V said she just "stuffed my feelings to the point where I didn't *feel*." Strangely, she laughs, after describing her life, where "like life is just going along, in a straight line." I thought during the interview, maybe she laughs so that I would not take her words so seriously; or maybe she laughs so that she herself will not see the seriousness of them. In this way,

laughter and humor are helping V to overcome the passiveness that to this point in her life has ruled her decision-making and self-efficacy.

It was interesting to note that V noticed passiveness as it occurred in others' lives. She talked about her brother, who was a "product of his generation of the sex, drugs, rock and roll kind of things." That brother, V said, did not go to college. I could not help wondering whether V thinks of herself and her current singleness as a product of her generation—the one that produced the sexual revolution, feminism, and working mothers. Or, perhaps because her mother did not self-identify as a feminist, V may have felt she was not affected by the changes that were brought by that movement.

K expressed passiveness in terms of her educational choices. She relies on her boyfriend's advice to enter the Ph.D. program as soon as possible, "because it's probably because of my *age*?" K said, uncertainly. K feels "like it may take a little longer than *he* thinks." K may or may not heed this advice in a passive way. She is aware of her time pressures in terms of her status as an international student and as a single woman at mid-life. I wondered how or whether this additional person in K's life would affect her ability to focus and make a decision about her career and relationship goals. K has the strange occupation of both having had a mother who insisted on finding one's purpose in life, and herself having the same characteristics as her mother had--a partner whose inclusion required K's mother to struggle defiantly to achieve her life purpose.

Theme 4: Learning the Stereotypes vs. Learning One's Purpose

Participants gained control of their decision-making by listening to advice offered by peers. Although peer advice can be helpful, it may represent limiting stereotypes of one's society and culture. Nash (2005) says that when we subscribe to the stereotypes,

we can start forming our identity around such stereotypes. Ours then becomes an identity that may or may not be authentic or even beneficial to us. If we seek a sense of belonging to the “five-foot-two” group that is not our authentic identity, we lose our direction toward our purpose. Learning one’s purpose shows us how to achieve authenticity—having a sense that one is operating more from a self that is defined by one’s own self, rather by others’ expectations for us (Tisdell, 2003). This is in contrast to defining oneself by societal stereotypes. Participant V seemed to be the most influenced by the stereotypes dictated by the age-stage developmental models, as well as the accomplishments expected of each stage. V explained that her peers often asked her, “No boyfriend? Come on. You—you should have *plenty!* Beating them off with a stick!” she laughed.

V coped with this invasion of her privacy by reminding herself that their motives may not be malicious. Maybe their comments were meant to be flattering: V explained to me that if they were asking a twenty-year-old, their comments would have been appropriate. So, “It’s not like they’re asking someone who’s forty, like, ‘why aren’t you *married?*’” They felt comfortable asking her, V said, because she seemed younger to them than her actual forty years. Her youthful appearance was something that V proudly reiterated during her narrative. Jarvis (1987) explains identity as something that is not “given”, but is bestowed in acts of social recognition. In this instance, V’s peers identified her age as meaning that she would naturally have the identity of someone in a relationship with a boyfriend. Anything else was outside the bounds of their understanding of the stereotype of a healthy adult woman.

This subject of not being married was one instance in which V skipped onto various unrelated topics. She followed the single-at-forty-equals-already-divorced topic by adding information about a friend of hers who also had sexual abuse issues and “*no intention whatsoever...has absolutely no intention of ever getting married, doesn’t ever want to.*” Then V talked about a reunion that friend had attended, where people assumed that the friend just got divorced because she is forty. V seems to not be offended at these questions, because she in part agrees to the stereotype. She explained that, “it’s just that’s kind of the time most people get married, so they feel comfortable asking.” So, perhaps single women should feel flattered when asked why they are not married; that implies that they look much younger than the taboo age. Yet, the danger in accepting this stereotype is that it makes us ignore that the question itself confers disapproval or at least a questioning of the woman’s identity, femininity, and even status as a healthy adult.

R accepts career stereotypes (five-foot-five, blonde), and both K and V mentioned the stereotypical age for marriage (twenty-seven or twenty-eight). V said she remembered thinking, “*twenty-seven* would be a good year to get *married*,” but not “specifically stating I *have* to be married, but.” That age, she indicated, would ideally mark the end of college and the beginning of a career. It would in V’s mind represent the requisite maturity needed before one should marry. This maturity could help form one’s identity fully, before “melding identities,” as V describes the process of marriage.

These three women were also very aware of how their career choices differed from those that were available to their own mothers. R reflects on her mother’s saying that in her day, women could either be a nurse or a teacher. Participants and their mothers had been aware of the opportunities available for women. They recognized how

various sociocultural elements (race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) had influenced their individual development and career choice (Baumgartner, 2001). This realization may have been the impetus for the strong push for education that all three women received from their family messages. Mortimer, Lorence, and Kumka (1986) found that these social class values of a person's family of origin are transmitted to help to determine children's occupational attainment.

The mothers of these women proved a very strong antidote to stereotypical behavior—both what was expected of them, as well as what their daughters would later expect of themselves. The “flexible wall” that Peck's (1986) model displays may be lax or constricting. The wall is the adult's self-definition that is evolved from the socio-historical setting she finds herself in (or, she identifies with). K and V saw this wall bend --and probably sometimes even buckle--many times as their mothers' role-modeling of courageous and progressive behavior resonated negatively with the rest of their family members (especially the fathers and mothers-in-law). For women who became adults in a time where women had fewer occupational opportunities, the wall would be largely immobile.

This questioning of—and sometimes rejecting of—stereotypes requires of us critical reflection skills. We must question for ourselves the stereotypes created and promulgated by our society, family, church, religion, media, etc., and then choose for ourselves how we shall define ourselves. Healthy adults strive not to achieve the stereotype of the adult, merely in order to fit in with the society. Rather, healthy adults are able to evaluate and choose their identity, and to live, as Daloz (1986) says, up to our own expectations, and be something more than the person others have made of us. Daloz

(1986) continues that this is one of the most compelling struggles of the adult's life. K's mother created her own expectations for her life when she bypassed the traditional Japanese model for women by working outside the home. Not only did she work, but she enjoyed her work. V's mother also surpassed the cultural expectations by working and enjoying her work, and investigating something new--the computer.

Mezirow (1991) names critical reflection as requiring some radical event that will disengage our ego: a disorienting dilemma that allows—or requires—us to question our prior meaning perspectives. The crisis will yield a resulting openness that serves to engage the whole person, and can widen our potential for meaning-making. For V and R the impetus for reflection was an age-related marker: age forty and age fifty, respectively. For K, the dilemma involves the decision of whether to remain in her current dating relationship, or enter a Ph.D. program--or both. It was interesting to note that K was the only participant who indicated that it was nearly impossible to have career and family and yet she was the only participant who was currently moving in that very direction.

These women demonstrated the developmental progress that is valued in Western culture: being self-reliant; exercising increasing control over one's life; and fulfilling personal potential. K's mother may have ingrained the message into her daughter that finding one's purpose in life would allow her to incorporate that new identity into other aspects of life, including one's personal relationships. This attainment of purpose would then lead to a more inclusive sense of identity. So, although C expresses that being a working mother with children is an almost impossible task, she does not seem to be dissuaded from pursuing this very identity. The message she may have retained from

childhood is that attaining one's purpose will allow everything to somehow fall into place.

The choice of what to include and exclude in our definition of our identity gives us the power to both create identity and later alter it as we wish. This identity goal is not merely a selfish or an intensely personal goal; but rather it has economic and practical benefits. This solid sense of self may have a pivotal impact on life career development, as explained in early literature (for example, Super, 1957, 1963, 1981; Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963; Holland, 1973, 1992; Miller-Tiedeman & Teideman, 1990).

R told me that she wants to incorporate something meaningful into her career, as well as in her choice of dating partners. It seemed to me that R would not be satisfied with being "just" someone's partner, any more than she would want to be "just" a housewife. Now her identity includes her values rather than titles or roles bestowed by society. Zirlott (1999) explains meaningful work in this way: when our ideals are congruent with the spiritual ideals, inspirations and functional concerns of the vocation. Participant R knows that for her own life, recycling and environmental issues are of prime concern. In terms of her career, she is not willing to waver on this value. Also, she mentioned that she now knows the type of person she would want to date: he must also value recycling and environmental issues. R has developed a congruence through her life roles that reflects the values that she has considered and claimed as her identifiers, or her identity.

The attainment of purpose for these women applies to career as well as their social and dating life. Both K and V are eager at this stage in their lives to attain or fulfill all three "spheres"—fulfilling career; a relationship (whether a healthy, fulfilling one or

not); and children. V is attempting the goals in subsequent order. She has witnessed peers who had tried to earn an educational degree at the same time they were planning a wedding; V said that, for her, seemed too daunting to do all at once. Perhaps if V had been surrounded by people who could accomplish those goals at once, and with ease, V would believe it is a possible goal or direction for her as well.

Juhaz (1989) names the various life roles or categories as family, work and self. He describes a triple helix of interwoven strands along the horizontal pathway of the life span. Our external contexts affect the health (or possibility) of this helix, and so does our need for self-esteem. We give more attention or energy to different roles at different times during the life-span. V realizes this as she separates her therapy and healing from her career search. Only after those two goals are satisfied—or, under her control—will she have the energy and personal knowledge needed to begin dating. All three participants are giving the career strand more importance at this stage of their lives.

Theme 5. Learning Marriage and Singleness: via Family Messages

One of the interview questions I asked of participants was, “Do you like being single?” R’s responses indicated that she is content. K said, enthusiastically, “Yes! I think I do.” But after a long pause, she added, “I didn’t know that but, I think I do.” She does not use singleness as an identity or identifier, perhaps because she is currently in a relationship. Her vantage point allows her to define singleness in a way differently than V or R could. K described single women who do not have partners this way: “I know that they have to *stay strong*,” because, “they have to support themselves. They have to be very independent and *strong*.” It was strange to hear her say this about single women because she could have easily been describing her married mother as she pursued her

purpose in life. I wondered whether R and V would have described themselves as strong, or whether they would have subscribed to the stereotype that K does. This was another instance where stereotyping influences our behavior; perhaps K does not feel the need to be strong and decisive about her career decision-making and education because she is not without a partner.

V explained to me that, “I definitely don’t want to be single the rest of my life, but also not like, I’m “oh, my God, I’m forty, I’ll *never get married!*”” V laughs, “you know.” Her laughter here could have represented fear or concern about being single. The other two participants did not verbalize that they do not want to be single for the rest of their lives. Their silence about the issue convinced me that they had reached if not a resolution, than at least an absence of panic.

Another instance where V brings up the topic of singleness is in her decision to eventually join a health club. “It’s like, ‘I’ll meet—*guys!*’ and you know,” V laughed, “all of a sudden I—feel like I was starting to tense up a bit.” Also, K and R did not have this expression of apprehension about meeting new people or dating. In addition, they gave no absolute agenda for getting married; it did not seem to them as pressing a need as it was for V. And even though V has an agenda to get married at some point, she does seem to feel in control of this aspect of her life. She said she knows the issues she needs to overcome through therapy. In this way, she can gauge and then control the timing of when she will begin dating again. Gaining focus in this way will enable V to feel in control of her dating life and her subsequent identity as a wife, mother, partner, etc.

Family messages may have inspired a sense of passiveness in V. In describing her mother, V said, “my personality is very much like *hers*, that—you know, I think that

was—um, just more the ‘this is what I *do*,’ and, [sniffs] um, I—doubt my mother would *ever* have told me to just—you know, ‘you get married, have babies, and you know, that is your life,’ ‘cause that—wasn’t her life, and –it was not—ever anything what she intended for me.” V never believed that her mother believed marriage was possible for V. Therefore, V could not visualize herself as married, or as able to take on the identity of a married woman.

We do sometimes accept others’ images of us as well as their definitions about our identity. It then becomes very difficult to visualize ourselves in a different way—to do so is to betray our parents or our peers, and their definition of our identity. K’s father gave her messages about marriage; K said her father, “wanted me to find a good husband who has ah a very good educational background like...my father does?” she laughs. She said her father voiced this message, “maybe like—casually like twice or three times—like my mother did, ah, over the course, but he didn’t really try to persuade me *into* that mindset.”

In terms of my study, K’s parents’ messages would qualify as family messages about marriage. K does not define these as marriage messages, perhaps because, “I didn’t really try to, you know, fulfill that for him.” For K, the message only has validity if we fulfill it or incorporate it into our identity. When we do, that person has a vested part in our identity. If we reject the message, we own our identity in a more powerful way; but we may risk losing our identity we had in our family of origin. Perhaps that was the unconscious plan of R and V, who received no marriage messages. They fulfilled their family’s messages in an effort to retain some sense of identity within their family of

origin. And K has somewhat lived her family's messages about marriage because she is currently in a relationship and considering marrying her partner.

V's history of abuse contributed to her family's indirect messages concerning marriage. V cleared her throat in what seemed to me to be embarrassment, as she explained her belief system at that time (pre-therapy), and how she understands it now: "If my own father doesn't want to take care of me like he *should*, then, she—who else would even—care to, or, you know, like I obviously don't have any worth." That image was her version of the truth; therefore, she could not visualize someone wanting her and therefore had no hope for a future that included marriage. V said those two things "kept going through my mind"; she is therefore not even able to be in control of her thoughts, in terms of that aspect of her life.

V's singleness gives her control over her priorities and makes her conscious of her needs. She has a control and timing of when certain events should occur. For example, finding a career (in order to pay off debts), then find a purposeful career—or at least a career she enjoys "at least a little bit more than what I had at [the national bank]." Once that is accomplished, she will be prepared, or focused enough, to find a dating relationship. For V, purpose means marriage and family. Career is seen as a through-way towards that final, purposeful goal.

Like V, K's focus is first on her career and education. From that focus she had gained the confidence to confront her boyfriend about marriage. Career decision-making led to focus and courage in making other life decisions (including the timing of those decisions, such as marriage). For V, focus meant being in control of time; this would give her a feeling of self-efficacy and of self-confidence. From that, her career decision-

making would improve, leading her to an enjoyable career, a new identity, and eventually marriage. That new role would allow V to feel worthy for having attained the requisite (for marriage) worthiness in the eyes of her partner and her society.

Participant R said that she was glad to have not received any messages from their family about marriage. “I was very lucky. From my family, *none. Absolutely, positively none.*” This lack of traditional expectations gave R the freedom to discover her career goals, and by definition, to discover her purpose. She continued, “Now, I know there are some women in their families, they get the message, ‘you have to marry, you have to’—,” R lowered her voice to a whisper as she added, “I didn’t have *any* of that.” I could almost hear the gratitude in her voice and I could see that she did not locate her identity (or, potentially, her purpose) within marriage.

Instead of marriage messages, her parents instead gave messages about the importance of education and work. R was given the message that security could be found in a career with benefits, money, supporting herself, and not (only) in a marriage. With this security in place, it would be easier to pursue the type of work and lifestyle that one wants, which would include work that one enjoys. This discovery would or could lead to finding one’s purpose in life. R told me she had worked with a career coach during R’s transition from owning her own business. The coach asked her, “Are you looking for somebody to take care of you?” R said that although not in terms of a marriage relationship, that, “yet to a degree, career-wise I *am.*” Her career is her provider and protector, and R more than the other participants knows exactly which benefits and careers are most stable and profitable for her.

R added that, “there were no correlation with—w—wanting to be married and having more money, or somebody supporting me, it as just—the notion of being—in a—being married, having two kids, living in a white house with a white picket fence seemed so appealing.” And, “Sure, if I met someone tomorrow, it would be really nice to be—meet a nice guy and be in a committed relationship. But oh, well, if it doesn’t happen, I’m—very content with exactly how everything’s shaking—down right now.”

Since R more than the other two participants seemed to be close to knowing her purpose, her contentment with being single is noticeable. She explained it this way: “As my percentage with my happiness with being single keeps increasing, increasing, increasing...how lucky I feel, how lucky I am to have what I have. I’d say 80 percent I’m happy being single. There’s a 20 percent that it would be nice to be in a relationship.” She added that if I had asked her two years ago, it would have been 70 percent and 30 percent; three years ago, 60 percent and 40 percent; and at some point it might have been 20 percent liking being single and 80 percent being married. “Now it’s—its’ 80-20. I mean 20 percent it would be nice to be in a relationship—and married, but 80 percent I’m really happy.”

Participant K received marriage messages from her mother, but K had interpreted them as joking. Her mother casually questioned her when K was about twenty-seven years old as to when she would find a partner. K did not seem to have been offended or pressured by that statement. In fact, she included in her interview that her mother, “never expected—she never told me, ‘you’re gonna have *kids* and *home* and *husband*.’ She didn’t give me that picture at all.” At the time of the study, K was thirty-nine. And although she and her boyfriend of two years had discussed marriage, she remained single.

There was a clear difference in these women between their career and educational successes as relates to goal-achievement, and their relationship status in terms of goal-setting. K explained she, “basically thought I would have married by now,” and ideally at age twenty-seven. When I asked why she chose that age (the same age V mentioned in her interviews), K said, “I have no idea. I—it just sounded like a very nice number.”

While the women are and have been very proactive in their career and educational directions, in the area of relationships with potential husbands, their behavior is glaringly passive. K said of marriage that she “thought it would have happened” by age twenty-eight. And although V remembered thinking, “*twenty-seven* would be a good year to get *married*,” she was “not specifically stating I *have* to be married, but you know, you—gone to college, you—had a few years out in a career, kind of decided where you want to *be*, and gotten a little settled, and, so it’d be a nice age to, you know, get married and move on and *do* things.” “Doing things” may mean things that give one a sense of maturity and identity formation. I asked her whether children were a part of that goal; V answered enthusiastically, “Oh, yes!”

None of the participants had mentioned the phrase “I thought it would have happened by now” when explaining their educational or career goals. None of the women said they “just thought I would have earned a certain education degree by now”, or “I just thought I would be a dentist/teacher/lawyer, etc. by now”. They were aware of the effort required and the intention needed to achieve those types of goals. I wondered why marriage was so elusive to these otherwise capable and intelligent women. They did not pursue relationships as assertively as they pursued their career and education. Did the feminist messages they received directly or indirectly from their formative years only

explain how to attain excellence in career and education? Feminism seems to have offered the women no equally progressive and assertive directives for attaining and forming dating relationships.

Participant R and V mentioned the jobs they had left because the money was not equal to their education level. They realized that a promotion would not have “just happened;” they knew they needed to be proactive in order to change a situation at work. Up to this point, they had not used the same type of reflective processes and/or decision-making in terms of their relationships with men. I wondered what had happened between the participants’ definite goals of marriage and children and the reality of that actually happening. They said that they had just fallen into their first careers. I wondered why they had not also been able to (or be willing to) just fall into marriage and children; there must be a missing factor that had eluded them.

In terms of marriage, both K and V seem to have believed that it would have happened, without much effort on their part. This was strange, because their educational and career goals had required a lot of effort and interest. It may have not felt like effort or a struggle, because they had been operating within their identity of the time—that of an educated, career woman. They made assumptions about the future (in terms of marriage, family), without making a clear plan the way they had done with their education and career. True, participants did speak of just falling into their first careers, and of studying a subject because they were good at it, whether or not they thoroughly enjoyed it. But there would not be a mention of these women of just falling into marriage. Clearly relationship and career were two distinct realms for these women.

Waiting until someone or something “happened” to them seemed to be the only

way the women knew to complete the relationship aspect of their lives. That is what they had thought prior to reflecting on it during our interviews. For K and V, marriage would represent achieving the ultimate purpose--fitting into the larger society, being accepted and acceptable. With that purpose achieved, they will have found their identity, this time within the role of a married woman. Participant R, being the oldest participant, was different in this respect of compulsively seeking marriage and family. Yet, she had also been passive about this area of her life when she was at the age that K and V now are.

R spoke almost in stereotypical or generalized terms of the marriages she witnesses in her work and social life. She mentioned the “horrible marriages” of her clients, the “horrible relationships” of her friends. People in such “horrible” situations would have no chance to be in control over their lives. K and V talked about the conflict of their mothers with in-laws, and the conflict in the household as the mother pursued non-traditional work activities. All three women spoke of these examples, almost as though they were the only examples of what a marriage is or can be like. With such a marriage, there seems no chance of being in control over one’s own life. Therefore, there is little time, energy, or focus remaining for a person to find her purpose in life. The women in my study may have inferred that they should ideally be in control of as many facets of life as is possible. This would allow them the freedom and control to discover their purpose, and in so doing, construct their identity.

The stereotype that participants held about relationships was an absolute one. It seemed to them that having a relationship would have detracted them from finding the focus and energy needed to pursue and attain their purpose. R wrote in a journal entry that she is, “sometimes disappointed that it has taken so long to find my passion.” I

wondered if she meant that had she found her passion earlier, she may have been freer to pursue a relationship. The women in my study had no role models of women who had both healthy marriages and who had achieved their purpose in life. K and V did witness their mothers achieving their purpose, but this came at the expense of conflict in the home among the spouses and in-laws. For these women, the two facets were almost completely separate. Participants did not allow for the possibility that a relationship may be useful in discovering (or forming) one's purpose in terms of career and education.

These women's singleness was based on something more than not being proposed to or chosen. Their single status was not due to having been seen as undesirable by all the men they had met in their lives. It was their choice—whether they knew or realized that or not—to remain single, because they knew they had not yet achieved what they considered meaningful, purposeful work. In effect, they had not yet discovered their purpose in life. The search was still on, and they needed to travel the path lightly, without spouse and/or children at this stage in their lives. The women were pulled or drawn like a magnet toward discovering their life purpose or passion. They seemed compelled to find out what their passion or purpose was, even as time was running out for them to get married or have children (according to society's timelines).

Their words betrayed that they know on some level that their peers are becoming mature in a way they themselves are not or cannot become as single women. For example, K uses maturity as a way to describe her peers who have children and husbands. V mentions her therapy peer who had a child who “must be eleven by now.” V also mentioned the possibility of marrying someone who *has* children, marrying into a family with children. I haven't given up.” V remains hopeful, not only about her opportunity

for marriage but also the maturity that it bestows upon us.

K, R, and V all displayed a drive and almost compulsion to find their purpose. It seemed as though finding it would allow them to be at peace. Then they could start making decisions about including someone else in their lives in a dating or marriage relationship. They indicated that they recognize this purpose-pursuing requires a lot of energy and time, and that their focus for this goal would be limited if they were to enter a relationship while in a time of personal and/or career transition. Perhaps V's plan of sequencing her various goals would make sense for any person wanting to know his or her purpose in life. For when a woman has found her (mainly, or only, through meaningful work), then she will have formed her new identity. It would be an identity that reflected her education and work skills and one that included fewer of the societal expectations that limited her in the first career (and identity). The new identity would be one that is self-chosen--fashioned out of one's skills, mistakes, learning events, and choices of the past as well as one's own expectations for the future.

Theme 6. Conflict in the Home

The mothers of participants K and V had worked at jobs for which they had not only interest but also a passion. K and V, as young girls, had witnessed their mothers' fulfillment at their work, and also the implications that goal attainment had in their home lives. The conflict in the home gave these participants an image of what marriage was—or could be—like. Participants saw that their mothers could not be truly in control of their own lives. K explained that she felt, “a little probably anx—-anxious about, O.K., what next?” as her mother tried new work activities outside the home. These progressive mothers' goal attainment instigated conflict in the home, because they had

traversed outside the traditional paths for women in their respective era and cultures.

All three participants were aware of the issues or persons in the home who had the power or control. K said that, “My father did not really like her t—to work outside, and especially my grandmother had a *big* issue [with the mother working].” V’s father was a perfectionist, V said, and directed V and her brother toward college. R mentioned that other people viewed R’s mother, not her father, as being the controlling force in the family.

Despite the power source in the family, the mothers pursued their work interests. K’s mother was almost defiant in her work pursuits, even moving to another city. This was not at all common for women in Japan at that time, especially married women with children. “But over the year—by ah, mother showing them the consistency, and the e—enthusiastic consistency, and probably the success, they ah, they were sup—they became supportive, more supportive toward the end.” K experienced a, “little bit of conflict *every day* in my family, especially when she was going to the group meeting?” K laughed that if her grandmother saw K and her mother going to the political group meetings, she would question them and, “sometimes my mother had to lie to her, or—you know, come up with something else to do first and then stop by at the group meeting or something. So I was always feeling a little bit [of] tension or conflict.”

Participants noted where the power was located, and how that influenced the possibility of attaining one’s purpose. They witnessed the effort required to attain one’s purpose in life. It required tenacity, and going against the traditional path for women of that particular culture, religion, or time period. These young daughters witnessed their mothers achieving and pursuing their life purpose. They also noticed all the barriers the

mothers encountered from husbands and mothers-in-law. They may have interpreted purpose as something that should be (or would more easily be) attained while single.

Hochschild (2003) notes that marriage brings footprints of economic and cultural trends that originate outside marriage. Outside influences in terms of the speed-up and technology occur within marriage and thereby transform it—a trend that has not been met by a cultural understanding of marriage and work (Hochschild, 2003). This “stalled revolution (Hochschild, 2003, p. 12)”, creates a strain between the change in women and the absence of change in society or its members—including the members of one’s own family. Traditionally, men have relied on women to connect them back to a life outside the work world. By ‘staying back’ the woman eased the difficult transition for the men who moved ahead in an agrarian society (Berg, 1978). The home was traditionally the shock absorber of the pressures of the outside world (Hochschild, 2003). When the participants’ mothers worked outside the home, their energy inside the home was limited. Without the shock absorbing power of the women, the conflict in the home could only escalate.

Theme 7: Progressive Mothers and Purpose Messages

The absence of marriage messages from the family of origin plus the progressive role model of the mothers provided participants with a sense of freedom to construct their own personal futures. There was the freedom to search for their purpose outside the traditional path of identity for women—namely marriage and motherhood. But what seemed a good idea at first now hinders them from attaining those very goals, especially given the time pressure related to their biological clocks. This factor made me wonder whether it is necessary to have these family (and/or church and traditional) messages in

order for one to believe it is a goal that is possible for them. When the traditional role is expected for and of a woman (via family and other messages) perhaps she can more easily develop feelings of self-efficacy for this particular role.

Ultimately, though, the mothers' actions and her role-modeling of progressive behavior were the loudest message participants heard in childhood. This ignoring of marriage as an ultimate goal for their daughters may have come from the increasing divorce rates that characterized the period of the 1970's—a time when the daughters were forming their identity of what women are, do, and can become. All three participants described strong mothers, for example R's mother, "would make the arrangements; he [R's father] would kind of go along for the ride, so to speak." Both K and V's mothers were similarly strong, in that they were involved in activities that were not at all common --or even acceptable--for women in those particular cultures, at that particular time or in that generation.

V's mother was unusual, in that she gave birth to V at age forty. V mentioned to me that her mother's background was not typical; V's mother's own parents had divorced. These were two very unusual things for a woman to have or do in that era (V's mother is now in her eighties). Additionally, V's mother had worked before marriage, lived in foreign countries, had traveled alone, and had met her husband at an embassy in a foreign country. K described her mother as someone who, "doesn't really, ah, function accordingly to the common sense of the society or anything. She thinks that—anyone should pursue their own goals, you know, to the full extent. Therefore she doesn't—say, 'Come back [to Japan],' and—or, 'Get married,' or 'Have a child.'" K's mother had met a very "enthusiastic entrepreneur" who was very influential on her and believed in a new

concept of utilizing women in the workforce. “He had a very—unique philosophy of educating or training females. And that was not done during that time in Japan, almost at all.” K’s mother, “was very—um, impressed by that I think.”

K, like V, witnessed the progressive mother role more clearly because it contrasted with their grandmothers who also lived in the family’s home. K said her grandmother, “thought that the—it—it’s the wife’s job to be at the house and keep the house orderly and you know, housework and chores for—the family. But my mother was more active than—my grandmother’s criteria.” Because K’s mother, “was really outgoing, so she couldn’t stay at [the] house for the—rest of her life.” This was similar to V’s description of their house not being big enough for the two of them—her mother and grandmother.

All three participants’ mothers were very familiar with the world of work outside the home. R and V’s mothers had had worked outside the home before marriage, and V and K’s mothers returned to work after their children were older. This familiarity or closeness to another form of finding one’s purpose may have given these mothers incentive to continue working, and to instill the importance of this feeling of fulfillment to their daughters. The progressiveness of the mothers was role-modeled to my participants, and it affected their decision-making about career and marriage (including the timing of each). The women in my study incorporated these messages as a tool with which to construct their identity.

Although there were verbal messages for K about marriage, the participants chose—consciously or not—to follow the behaviors of their courageous and unique mothers. The participants all saw or witnessed that women do not necessarily have to

follow the traditional stay-at-home-mother and wife role of helper. The mothers all had something in their lives besides marriage and family. K's mother had her work and also her affiliation with the spiritual/political group. R's mother, although not working when R and her siblings were born, had had a job and an interesting personal life before getting married. She had an identity as a working woman prior to having an identity as a married woman. Similarly, V's mother had worked both before marriage, and also after V and her brothers were born.

The message these participants received was that women can be strong, non-traditional and yet also valid in their society. The participants as young girls did not seem to note that validity may have been bestowed by the larger society (and that perhaps only half-heartedly), chiefly because their mothers were already married. Those young girls may not have predicted that single women who pursue purposeful lives through work may have a different encounter with their society. The message participants seemed to intuit was that women did not need to be defined by the men in one's sphere of life.

This validity was sometimes hard-won, causing conflict in the home. But even so, the struggle to continue doing something these mothers enjoyed and believed in--their purpose--was promoting a strong message for their daughters. Finding one's strength in this way, by pursuing one's own interests despite no support from husband or family members, meant finding strength as an individual (not as someone's wife or mother). It was this individual strength and power that enabled participants to give themselves permission to define their purpose, as well as define themselves and their identity.

The mother's outside (the home) interests seems to have inspired participants to discover what they enjoy doing. V told me that her mother was very interested in the computer, and this influenced V's decision to explore computers as a career. And even though participant V is currently searching for any kind of work in order to pay her debts, she still speaks often of finding work that she "at least can enjoy a little more than" the last job she had.

Participants, throughout their describing their work history and the changes made there, repeatedly asked themselves, "Is this really what I want?" They did not ignore the restlessness that these questions engendered. Rather, they followed where the questions led them. I wondered whether these questions could have been asked by women whose mothers were not as strong, or as directed toward finding their own purpose and interests in life. Although the absence of husband and children may have freed these participants to ask such questions more readily, still, they felt naturalness to the question; it was not forbidden to ask, since it was also not forbidden for their mothers to have asked it of themselves.

Finding one's purpose and having meaningful work were important goals for the mothers of my participants. Career decision-making to these daughters now would involve more than merely money and practicality. These women told me they want to find a career that they can enjoy doing and one that reflects their changing values and identities. My participants, throughout their transitions, are honoring this goal and are giving themselves permission to find work that is enjoyable to them. They almost insist on it, in this their second (or third) career. The career that emerges from the transition period will not be one that they merely "fall into" as they had described to me their first

careers. Instead, the new career will allow them to “use my education” as V often reiterated to me; and will involve work that provides an income reflecting the women’s educational level. It will be a career that acknowledges and then incorporates the various aspects of their identity they have developed and integrated. Once participants find that specific career, then they can further incorporate their ever-changing and fluid identity, transforming it over and over as needed.

The participants exhibited calmness and an air of being in control over their lives and career futures. They no longer seemed to be swayed by outside messages. I was surprised as I witnessed this. I had assumed that the women would have felt pressured to marry especially at this juncture of their lives. But because of the work (literally and figuratively) of their progressive mothers, the women had partially been spared of this pressure.

Participants acknowledged that their mothers and their behaviors and interests were not typical. V spoke of her mother’s “interesting life” in that her parents got divorced. At that time, divorce was not common; nonetheless, a divorce was an unusual way to describe an “interesting life.” V then explained that her grandmother had built the first log home in Alaska, and had attended school to become a mortician. For V, divorce may have seemed a looming potential event in V’s conflicted household; R on the other hand, knew that divorce in her family’s religious tradition was not an option. It was interesting to note that V included in her narrative that her parents would soon be celebrating their sixtieth wedding anniversary. Neither R nor K had mentioned how many years their parents had been married.

The mothers' progressive role-modeling became a sort of touchstone, a laser-focus toward one's own possibilities in life. Everything else in participants' lives was extraneous—the focus was on attaining one's purpose. Purpose here means not (chiefly) through marriage and family. Purpose was to be attained through career and education; after all, those were the factors important enough to warrant verbal messages of instruction. During the course of our interviews, participants mentioned their friends' marriages and children in an almost detached way. They did not express a lack or a sense of running out of time in light of their friends' accomplishments in the sphere of personal relationships.

The role-modeling behavior of the participants' mothers acted as a magnet, drawing and pulling these participants towards their purpose in life. This occurred, even as time continued on and their chances for children may have decreased. Participants' words hinted that they may know the reality of this time issue, on some level, but the driving force to find their passion or purpose is so powerful that it is compelling above all else. Once found, the purpose will provide a peace of mind. Then the women can begin making decisions that include another person in their lives.

Just as V had planned, success in life requires accomplishing goals in sequence. The first goal to achieve is finding one's purpose. Interestingly enough, for participants this is not accomplished through relationships. Each of the women seemed to be aware of the search for purpose taking a lot of time and energy. Up to now, they simply had not had the time and energy to focus on a relationship. The quest is imperative, because it finding one's purpose translates into answering the question, "What is my identity?" And the search can be found only when one develops focus.

Purpose and relationships intersected too, in the quest for participants' next work situation. All participants mentioned wanting to use their education and wanting to be paid what their education dictates they would be worth. Anything less would give a feeling of not being useful, and perhaps unworthy of the sacrifices the progressive women in the past had made for modern educated women like themselves. By extension, if they feel unworthy in their career identity, they may also feel unworthy to be married. Finding purpose bestows a sense of self-efficacy that could extend to other areas of life, including relationships. Here again is V's plan of attaining sequential goals, each building on the previous goal. Although it appears to be a linear model, it is different than the logical one; in this sequence, attainment of goals is based solely on a feeling of accomplishment and worthiness.

Theme 7a. Working mothers and "just" a housewife

Another defining factor in the role-modeling of the mother was that both V and K (and, indirectly R) mentioned that their mothers loved their work outside of the home. V says, "she definitely—liked the work that she was doing there." And in terms of her work in the planned giving position, "she—absolutely—*loved* doing it." I noticed later that I had not asked whether participants' mothers enjoyed being mothers and wives. Clearly or apparently this was not in my range of visualizing a career and identity topic.

V explained that she was ten years old when her mother went back to work; K told me that she was in the fourth grade. These were significant ages in participants' lives. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1959, 1968, and 1980) posits ages 12 to 18 as when children develop a sense of self and personal identity. However, if participants were unable to make a chosen identity, they may have merely taken on those facets that were available to

them through role models. Work showed these young daughters that the mother was fulfilled and happy with something other than the (conflicted) home-life. Work gave the mothers control in their lives; a control that the daughters did not witness happening at home in the mother's role there.

V talked about the conflict in the home, among the mother and the mother-in-law (V's grandmother): "They each had their own identity kind of thing." V sniffs, "*She* had a place, and my mom, you know, was going out, and working." Work was where the mother felt a sense of purpose and belonging. Because V's mother felt in control at work, she could locate her identity there (Hochschild, 2003). Once identified with the work role her mother could increase her motivation, loyalty, work ethic, and productivity.

V, like K, witnessed her mother having confidence and self-efficacy about her work role that she did not have or receive in the stay-at-home mothering role. These dual-role mothers gave an image to the daughters of what was possible for them as women, too. The mother's working gave the mothers a sense of feeling in control of their lives, and of being independent even within their marriages. This was perhaps the strongest role-modeling theme, because it overrode any verbal messages that had been given to the daughters. V talked of her mother's work, and how it, "opened up a whole new—realm for me," and it caused V to think about "*changing my* ideas of, you know, get married and have *kids*, or go off to *college!*" V also often mentioned her mother's courage especially as she had traveled with her first child—a newborn—to an African country, "by *herself*", V stressed.

All participants described stay-at-home mothers with the word, *just*; their image of that lifestyle is something that is less than the career and education accomplishments

they have to this point acquired. K even said, “I sometimes wonder if they are not get[ting] bored.” I wondered how these participants with their many accomplishments could become wives and mothers; how could they degrade or descend to the image or identity that they have defined as so clearly lesser than that of an educated working woman. I wondered if it is possible even to visualize oneself having that *just* descriptor, and if so, what process one would use. V talked about her mother, and how she would never have told V to “‘just get married, have babies, and that is your life.’ ‘Cause that wasn’t her life, and—it was not—ever anything what she intended for me.” V never believed that her mother believed marriage was possible for V; therefore, V could never visualize it for her own life.

Here, V displays a passiveness: her mother’s opinions and wishes for V are what V uses to fashion her own identity. Or, rather, more exactly, it is V’s belief or perception of what her mother wanted for her. V felt that her mother never believed marriage was possible for V. Perhaps, having a conflicted marriage/home life, V’s mother did not want that vision for her own daughter. As we accept images for us and of us, and their definitions of us (our identity), it is very difficult to visualize ourselves in a different way. Doing so would betray our parents, friends, peers, and their vision of us and for us—whether or not that definition may be healthy or useful for us.

The working mothers provided their daughters a model of what was possible, but they were also required to fulfill the traditional housewife role. V explained about one of her peers who had attempted a similar combination—she was planning to marry while studying for her Masters’ Degree. V said she knew she herself could not do it all at the same time. Similarly, K says that it may not be possible, or would be very difficult to do

both—working and being a mother. And yet, when I asked her, K said that she would not expect her husband to give up his work to raise the children. Here, K and V represent the more traditional notion that is either/or.

K commented on stay-at-home mothers who do not have careers, and wondered if, “they’ll have something to keep themselves busy other than—child-rearing. They could go to school, you know.” And she also described her married peers who are educated, but, “*none* of them have Masters Degrees.” It was as though advanced education meant that it should not be as likely for these women to be a stay-at-home woman, or *just* a housewife.

CHAPTER 5

Findings: Constructing Identity

The act of constructing one's identity hinges on developing as an adult. Development as change over time or with age is fundamental to adult learning theory and practice (Merriam, 2004). Hayes's (2001) framework deals with cultural complexities; however most models of identity development tend to only focus on one aspect of life experience at a time--race, culture, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Tisdell (2003) says that it is important to look at how each of these factors affects development overall, even as we keep in mind the whole person.

The women in my study encountered all the cultural expectations for being a healthy adult. But they also faced cultural expectations for attaining the traditional definition of what it means to be a woman—especially the achievement of certain age/stage markers. Traditional expectations met with progressive expectations, and both were happening at a crucial period in these women's lives. To complicate matters further, it is not possible to sort out and deal with each area of expectation individually; each affects the other and our identity may at times encompass both traditional and progressive notions.

Identity incorporates various understandings, such as the notion of control; passiveness; learning about oneself, one's past, and one's single-hood; and the overarching influence of transformative learning in comprehending the changes and choices one encounters during a work transition. Transformative learning occurred at various times throughout participants' work transitions, and informed their meaning-making, and reinforced their interconnection with their environments

(Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

Because the various themes overlapped, intersected, intertwined, and influenced one another, I chose not to comment separately on each, but to mesh the findings. In the same way that my data analysis required a soft focus in order for me to capture each specific theme, so too must the reporting of the themes.

Control

The control that my participants sought, described, and some eventually achieved, came as the result of transformative learning. The power they felt, I termed as the theme *control*. Sub-themes of control included *learning (via maturity) how to be in control; the importance of college education in gaining life control; belonging and support in gaining life control; and the role of humor and hope in becoming in control of one's life.*

The aspect of *control* encompasses and/or influences both the tension about, and the search for one's passion or purpose in life. This aspect also includes finding or creating meaningful work and relationships, and having hope in one's self-efficacy to accomplish tasks related to attaining personal definitions of maturity. Included in a quest or successful attainment of control of one's life is the processing of family messages about singleness and marriage and then choosing a path of one's own. It also includes learning how to not make the choices that seemed in childhood to be negative, such as being *just* a housewife.

van Manen's (1997, 2003) view of phenomenology is that it shows what ranges of human experience are possible, and the types of worlds that people inhabit. One of the assumptions in phenomenological research is that the perceiving self is an authentic self; on the other hand, the presented self is often distorted and disguised, whether knowingly

or not and the person merely plays a role (Moustakas, 1994). Thus self-evidence may arise from false references and distortions of understanding, for example due to stressors such as depression.

V's self-assessment may not be clear because of her depression. This was not a problem in terms of analyzing my data, because only V's narrative mattered to the uncovering of the phenomenon; she did not need to interpret her experiences. From her narrative, I took the historical issues, the background influences, and the actual events and formed an interpretation of the phenomenon in the form of various themes. Yet, V's quest for maturity and her frequent explanations of wanting to become mature or grown-up were an indication of her desire to channel the fierceness that both Borseynko (1996) and Levinson (1996) mention when describing mid-life women. When a woman is emotionally immature, this fierceness may express itself instead as increased self-hatred, fear of aging (Borseynko, 1996), or in V's case perhaps depression.

Control is an extension or representation of self-efficacy. The way self-efficacy is developed is reasonably well understood (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2003). Gecas (1989) explains it as encompassing a person's sense of control and beliefs about causality, and says that it develops out of the early interaction of the individual with his or her environment. However there is little research on how social roles promote efficacy as a role-specific aspect of identity (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2003). The common thread in most early work in self-efficacy is that it is a general and undifferentiated trait (see for example Pearlin's (1982) concept of masters and mastery scale (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2003)). I would add that the dimension of spirituality, support, feelings of belonging, and

my other themes can combine or stand alone to aid the individual in increasing the innate self-efficacy that the above research focused on.

Being *in control* was a major overriding goal of the participants. Being in control would enable them to better and more clearly pursue their purpose. They would have self-efficacy, energy, and the personal power necessary to achieve their chosen goals—and hence create their chosen identity. The likelihood they would achieve meaningful work would be much greater than it would be without this control. Control was a theme throughout R's interviews, both in terms of career and of marriage. She often mentioned her clients in the senior high-rise where she works: "I was horrified. Some of them don't even have a savings account. They live pay to pay to pay." R spoke about her having enough money, and wanting a better job, so she could renovate her condo. Her clients' having no money also meant they had no security; and therefore they have no control over their lives. And, if there is no (self) control over one's life, there is little chance of finding and fulfilling one's purpose.

Participant V sought control over the timing of her various goals: career and relationship. At first I thought this strategy may prohibit V from gaining support through dating relationships—support that may help her navigate her transition. But Erikson (1950) explains the development of intimacy is attained only after the "closure" of identity. So, V's plan to create her identity first, before the "melding of identities" that she describes is marriage, may be a wise course for her. Moustakas (1956), too, notes that affirming our own value must be primary; only then can we recognize and value others (even though our own self-respect depends on others' responses to us).

In contrast, participant K seeks to remain in her relationship. Surrey's (1985)

self-in-relation theory supports this strategy: in that study, making and maintaining relationships led to women's strengthened sense of self. Relationships can give women a sense of competence that may be transferred to other relationships, including those within the work culture. Learning occurs in moving from our own perspective to recognizing the perspective of the other person. These varied paths and goals of the participants highlight the fact that women cannot and should not be studied as an entire entity; they must be permitted to tell their stories and encouraged to make meaning of their own transition situations.

The younger participants spoke of wanting to become or feel mature. For them, this would be accomplished through marriage and family. V's sequential goals may serve her well in this aspect of her life, as it will give her space to allow the maturity to be created. Cote (2000) notes that without structure and guidance (especially during a transition period) people may lose their place in society and may take longer to become mature. V's participation in her therapy and church groups may provide her a place in society from which she can carefully and successfully craft her mature identity.

V includes various support groups in an effort to gain a sense of belonging. Other participants may have felt this sense of belonging within their new career. Participating in this way, in one's calling, offers feelings of belonging, being accepted, and being welcomed (Fannon, 2007). This sense of belonging fosters hope that the new career, the new identity, will be more fulfilling than the previous one. And it provides the impetus to visualize a positive outcome, even in the midst of a transition situation. The sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) operates when we can see the larger historical

perspective on our problems, and we can understand that we are not alone. We belong to society, in some form (even as an outcast)—even when we are in transition.

Having control meant that participants could construct their identity, for they would have all the components of their identity available to them. For example, V spoke about being in her thirties and being integrated or whole; being, in effect, in control. She would have then had all those phases of her life processed, and “will have had all these pieces integrated, will be whole,” she explained to me. Her narrative on this topic reflected Hochschild’s (1987) phantom identity, a more perfect persona that emerges when we have enough free time to construct it. With such an identity, we are able to attain our potential, both in terms of career as well as family and marriage. V mentioned several references to the themes of *time* and *in control* as she explained her past issues of abuse and her attempts to desperately control time during the abuse period.

Passiveness was a component of participants’ experience, and indicated a lack of control of various aspects of participants’ lives. The theme of passiveness included sub-themes of *money and passiveness*; *decision-making and passiveness*; and *support and peers and passiveness*. Control was a facet in enabling or hindering participants from learning. They variously *learned marriage and singleness*; learned about the experience of being a wife through seeing the *conflict in the home* and their *progressive mothers* who were not *just housewives*. Participants did, however, learn from their passiveness, as they reflected on unsuccessful decisions they had made. In order for learning to occur, the women needed to first be aware of the total environment, and acknowledge that they had had (unused) power in those decisions. Awareness of our passivity gives us a sense of control about our future experiences.

The Role of Learning to Hope

V's depression was a major focal point for her to learn about herself, and to shape her decision-making. She realized that she needs to work harder to control time—to show up on time, to realize when she is late, to coordinate her activities, etc. She also added during the interview that she knows she cannot use depression as an excuse. Her success in finding a new job, and then later in building relationships with men will also be determined by her depression episodes. She said that she knew she could not pursue a relationship until her other issues of therapy, career, and finances, had been put under her control.

Ultimately, participants expressed hope that they did have the power to create their identity in a way that reflected their new values and their work skills and preferences. They wanted to make a contribution (chiefly through meaningful work) with those talents. Whether this message was one they felt innately from the vision given by the second wave of feminism, I am not certain. That is, women who grew up hearing about the groundbreaking feats of the women's movement may have at least gotten the impression that they needed to make some sort of contribution in exchange for these new doors that had been opened for them. Rarely did these messages equate contribution with motherhood and the role of wives. Instead, the messages seemed to negate these very roles. It was interesting to note that none of the participants revealed that this contribution (or their purpose in life) would be as a wife and mother. Instead, all spoke of contributing financially by being independent, or making a contribution through meaningful work. These outrageous few are the ones who improve things for the "good workers" who make no noise (Hochschild, 2003).

Participants were given the opportunity through their narratives to explain their experiences with hope. The dynamics of telling a story might formatively influence one's sense of self, causing one to appraise one's foundational life call and become more open to a new sense of vocation. For instance, V told me that she was motivated by her involvement in my study to send out resumes and get a new job. Where there is awareness, there is the possibility of change and, especially, hope. The research looked at how an event, which begins as a simple telling of a story, becomes a formative event (Hall, 1998).

By explaining their work transitions to me, participants could move from a closed position of vocational frustration and confusion, rooted in a rejection of their life call or purpose. Participants may be able to more fully embrace their career decisions and be more open to incorporate the vocational call into an identity. In addition, the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) offers us hope that our situation is not so unique as to make our outlook bleak. There are other people who are experiencing similar situations to ours, and others who are available as resources to usher us through our transition situations.

We create our life because of, and also despite our outside influences. We receive messages about our external identity (race, gender, religion, class, and so on), but we have the potency to implement or incarnate (affirm and apply) those directives, Zirlott (1999) says. Yes, we may have the innate ability to do this--if we can just overcome our societal influences, our outside messages we receive from family, society, education, etc. The women in my study were able to do that. But, I wondered, what makes them different from women who also were raised during the sexual revolution of the 1960s but

who chose a more traditional path? In two participants' cases, it was the presence or conviction of their purpose, a knowing that they had a passion that they were determined to fulfill and realize. In V's instance, her search for purpose attempted to overcome the sexual abuse in her past. That too is a driving force in her life at this point, just as the passion and purpose that the other two women describe.

Hope and Spirituality

Myers' (1991) concept of identity development looks at spirituality as a way to transcend the forms of oppression we encounter, in order to develop a positive identity. And Hayes' (2001) concept looks at spiritual and religious orientation as one component that affects all aspects of development. For some people, spirituality is a claiming of one's sacredness, and enables one to mediate among all the aspects of one's identity (Tisdell, 2003).

V used her current religious activities as a way to understand—or perhaps transform—her previous childhood religious upbringing. Some people may have been negatively affected by the explicit or implicit message of women's inferiority that exists in some patriarchal religious traditions (Tisdell, 2003). V's new church, she said, was nondenominational and Protestant. Her choice to affiliate with and then choose to belong to this church represented a stepping outside her original, childhood identity. She explained that although these church friends do not understand depression the way her therapy group friends do, they still maintain close friendships with her. V's descriptions showed me that she enjoys having this satellite family around her; she appreciated when they would call or visit her if they did not hear from her in a while.

R's affiliation with her childhood religion continues, although she said she does

question many beliefs of the church, such as sex before marriage and abortion. She said she does not intend to leave her religious tradition: “Maybe if something happens to my mom or my aunt, I might think about leaving.” K did not mention being affiliated with a religion group or teachings. However, her mother had been deeply involved in the Buddhist spiritual/political group when K was a child. K may have witnessed her mother’s sense of belonging in that group.

V was an example of spirituality as it differs from religion. She was raised a Catholic, but now attends a Protestant church. Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) describe transformative learning as a journey toward wholeness—or, as V spoke of “integrating” all the different facets of her life, after which she would be healed enough and feel whole enough to begin a dating relationship. She would, in effect, know her separate, own identity, apart from another. Only then could she feel mature enough to join with another in marriage. V reflects the development of a more authentic identity (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006) that characterizes transformative learning.

However, there is no endpoint, as V may like it, because this process is continual, and we are always in the motion of moving toward authenticity (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). V’s sequential achievement of goals may require her to have a feeling of finishing after each stage, an event that may not occur. I hope that she can see past her perfectionism tendencies and realize this process does not have an end goal, as she would define an end goal such as marriage, children, graduation, etc.

Others have maintained that spirituality often leads to and creates community (hooks, 2003, Palmer, 1998). This is the feeling R had when she described walking into the Saturday afternoon church picnic with her mother and her aunt. It also may explain

K's mother's intense activity and loyalty to her religious group, and her willingness to act in ways that were not typical (or not seen as appropriate) to her husband and mother-in-law of women in Japan at that time.

Spirituality was an avenue toward transformative learning, as V left her Catholic faith. She did not explain it as questioning her faith, as R explained it. V instead focused on a further extension of her faith. Although R questioned her faith, she did not ultimately leave her childhood faith. She did, however, disagree with those aspects of her faith that represented relationships and dating. Gilligan & Richards (2009) note that women can play a crucial role in resisting the Love Laws of patriarchy by challenging the objectification of women—both the idealization and denigration, and especially the prohibitions that keep women from trusting or saying what they know through experience about men and love.

R realized that her religion did not create a space for her opinions on love and dating relationships; yet she wanted to retain the sense of belonging that she gained from membership in her religion. Without an alternate means of belonging to spirituality, R felt she could not leave her childhood faith. However, she was able to finally (by her friends' standards) change her political affiliation. She said that her friends teased her; they had seen for a long time that R's values were incongruent with those of her prior political persuasion. Further study into political party affiliation (especially as one traditionally understands these terms) may show how it may either encourage or inhibit transformative learning.

Although V had chosen a different church affiliation, her background in Catholicism was not without its merits in her transformative learning experience overall.

Standard conceptions of ritual behavior (as in V's Catholic experiences versus her current, more open/non-denominational Protestant church affiliation) do not acknowledge the sacred quality of ritual; yet it is this aspect of ritual that brings spiritual knowing into forms expression that can be experienced and shared in a community context (Teish, 2004).

Some (1998) has stated that transformation and healing cannot occur without ritual. V's catholic upbringing may have given her a basis for understanding and then incorporating her new beliefs within the Protestant church. And in fact, she has sought and continues to create this spiritual community by attending church services, participating in Bible studies, and communicating frequently with her church friends. Whether or not these friends can truly understand V's depression, their support indicates that they do understand her spiritual quest and how it is helping her to heal.

Learning Passiveness

Crittenden (1999) writes that women who were raised on feminism's ideals think that things will somehow simply fall together. This was instanced in all participants' mentioning about their surprise that they had not or were not married by this point in their lives. I was ultimately surprised at how many instances of passiveness were expressed throughout the participants' narratives. Although I understood that women's development reflects a fusion of identity and intimacy, I was not prepared to realize just how fused the women were in various aspects of their lives and decision-making. Women's development represents identity and intimacy as not separate or sequential steps; both must be present for development to progress. I had questioned V's sequencing of her goals (finances, career, then finally dating and marriage); but for her

that may have been the only way to separate her past identity from the goals she wanted to achieve, and for her to attain the identity necessary to achieve those goals.

Passiveness was expressed in K's surprise at the types of questions I was asking in our interviews--specifically, my questions about children and marriage. "This is a study about career change, and about single people," she exclaimed. For her, these other facets of life were incomprehensible to her, a single woman. She was not yet able to envision her future in those particular roles of wife and/or mother. The identification of an individual requires a consistent circulation of certain signs of identity through events that include, refer to, or presuppose that individual (Wortham, 2006). If other people in our environment are not referring to us in terms of being marriageable, or are never mentioning that aspect in terms of our lives, we may have difficulty visualizing ourselves in that role.

Consequently, we may not develop the self-efficacy necessary to achieve those (societally-defined as well as self-defined) roles. Clearly, then our identity is dependent not only on our choices of what we will be, but also on our perceptions of what others see in us, for us, or expect of us. It may not be possible in an interdependent society to completely extract oneself from the influence of one's external contexts. K's surprise enforced my strength in the requirement of visualization and belief (feelings of self-efficacy) in order to adopt a new identity in a new role.

As Barbulescu's (2008) study noted visualization is important in building our commitment to new roles or identities. Taking a passive stance hindered participants from being able to even visualize themselves as a couple or married; after all, they had not been given permission by others to have or feel validity in those areas. The

transition itself may be a motivating factor for us to develop feelings of self-efficacy (Golia, 2000), as long as we first are able to visualize the identity.

K defers to her partner in the same way that she defers to her parents who are still in Japan. She does this mainly to protect their feelings. K mentioned to me that she did not tell them about her relationship status and other problems she encounters here in the U.S. Hochschild (2003) maintains that the general subordination of women leaves every individual woman with a weaker “status shield” against the displaced feelings of others. Likewise, this may be one reason—knowingly or not—that V wants to sequence her goals, so that she can build her strength (her “status shield”). That way, when she does enter a dating relationship, she will not be the weakened child that she was with her former male figure, her father.

Gilligan (1982) adds that girls’ development means relinquishing the freedom of self-expression in order to protect other people and to preserve relationships. Gilligan (1982) explains that these disparate ways of constructing identity create different kinds of developmental problems, such as those relating to human connection and truth; or, as in the case of my participants, a choice between marriage versus achieving one’s purpose or passion.

V also passively accepted the advice of her pastor who encouraged her in changing her goals about having children. He could have told her to not give up hope. Instead he said she should change her needs, change her wants: in effect, she should change herself, her identity. Peers in this instance encouraged or enforced passiveness. Support can be a double-edged sword in our decision-making. Depending on our current mood, strengths, and hopes, others’ words can influence our choices, sometimes toward

choices that we eventually do not want, or are not in our best interests. This was paradoxical, because V sought peers chiefly for their support. Instead, their views and perceptions contributed to creations of her identity and what it is possible for her to do or have (or not do and not have) in her life. This passiveness stood in contrast to the control that these participants seemed to have and display throughout their educational and work paths.

It seemed that although my participants are independent and successful, both financially (V used to be, before her debts) and educationally, they still subscribe to traditional notions about marriage: they have to wait to be chosen by a man. This is in contrast to their career and education behaviors, where they are and were (by their family's messages, especially, but also by their peers' messages) encouraged to build that part of life by and for themselves. In order to be married, their interview words say to me, they seem to need to be or become passive, at least in this area of their lives. This societal marker may be felt as a need to retain a sense of femininity in a patriarchal society.

This traditional mindset is what Hochschild (2003) would term a gender strategy: a plan of action and our emotional preparations for pursuing that action. Hochschild (2003) maintains that marriage is a magnet for the strains of the stalled revolution, and that gender strategies are the basic (although unconscious, and thereby uncontested) dynamic of every marriage. In such a scenario, women must choose between having a stable marriage and an equal one (Hochschild, 2003). My participants may have witnessed this inequality and subsequent struggle for equality as their mothers worked outside the home. Participants seemed to recognize on some subtle level that marriage

would mean struggle and would not allow them to express (or at the least, retain) their strong feminist-approved accomplishments. One of Hochschild's (2003) study participants' minimized her drive for equality to the point where she could feel like a feminist, and still live at peace with a man who was not.

Although my participants gave no descriptions of their ideal marriage, they got a sense of marriage from witnessing their parents' model. Marriage was more than simply finding someone compatible and buying a wedding cake. Because of my participants' accomplishments, their education level, their independence and financial health, they may feel they need to have some cultural constraint, some way to hold themselves back so that they will appear as marriage-worthy (traditional) women.

Hochschild (2003) explains the strategy this way: "A woman sizes up her education, intelligence, age, charm, sexual attractiveness, her dependency needs, her aspirations, and she matches these against her perception of how women like her are doing in the job market and the "marriage market." What jobs could she get? What men?" as well, "what are her chances for an equal marriage, a traditional marriage, a happy marriage, any marriage?" Then she adopts a certain gender ideology, one that makes sense to her, one that suits her perception of her chances (p. 17)."

One of Hochschild's (2003) participants explained a strategy to become the wilting violet ideal—otherwise they would dominate the men they marry, thus confounding their gender strategy of what women "should" be like, or "are" like. It was interesting to note that in that study, these strategies were not affected by status or education level; all women veered toward that strategy. Hochschild (2003) names this "troubling power" as something that subverts partners' ideas of manhood and

womanhood. Our personal gender strategy could limit our outward successes, in both career and personal relationships. Hochschild (2003) further explains that women assess their skills, attractiveness, competition, and then form an ideology (identity) that enables them to further assess their marriageability.

This illustrates the parallel railroad tracks my participants inhabit: being a success in terms of the feminist ideal, yet still living among a patriarchal world whose gender strategy for marriage we still innately cannot undo in our minds. Compounding this inequality or inability towards marriage for my participants is the notion women may have absorbed of a marriage gradient (Bernard, 1972). In this pattern, women marry “up” and men marry “down,” resulting in two pools of unmarried people—highly educated and professionally accomplished women and uneducated, low-status men.

It was difficult to sense from where participants had learned how to be single; and it was difficult to judge whether participants felt the need to, or had the ability to examine this aspect of their life. Passiveness seemed to rule their behaviors to this point, especially when compared to the progressive and self-efficacious actions they had taken in terms of education and career to this point in their lives. To further complicate the prospects of marriage at this transition stage of their lives is the factor of economic trends. Hochschild (2003) says that men lag behind women in adapting to new economic realities. That is, for men, women are the changing environment; and men are not adapting (Hochschild, 2003).

An added burden of learning passiveness is accepting or learning (and then incorporating into our identity) stereotypes. Stereotypes are an imposed identity that affects how others treat us—even if we do not agree with that projected image (Nash,

2005). Simply being aware of the stereotypes seems to give permission for them to enter our minds and our personality. Various stereotypes showed themselves in participants' narratives. R noted the five-foot-five blondes who she felt were being hired where she was not hired. V often noted that people tell her she looks much younger than her actual age. K compares herself to friends her own age who, in K's opinion, are more mature because they are married with children.

The stereotypes I had learned began in progressive programs starting as early as grade school. I learned in Girl Scouts how to be industrious and efficient. That became the stereotype my participants and I followed until mid-life reminded us that we still must co-exist with others within a patriarchal society. I do not recall that boys received a similar program on how to deal with this new breed of girls. Thus marriage intimately unites people who have changed less (men) with people who have changed more (women) (Hochschild, 2003). Men have an incentive to reject progress: they enjoy more power by holding to old-fashioned views: but women hold their power by embracing newer views (Hochschild, 2003). Additionally, Hochschild notes that societal notions of marriage expect us as a couple to aspire to a fulfilling love, yet society also warns against trusting such a love too much: "what the Protestant Reformation did to the hegemony of the Catholic Church, the emotional and sexual revolution has done to romantic love (Hochschild, 2003, p. 123)."

In Hochschild's narrative about marriage, the bride tries to manage her emotions by expecting less, caring less, becoming what Hochschild (2003) terms 'an emotional Spartan.' In the face of the paradox of modern love, more young women may follow this emotional strategy, especially when this culture of love is linked to capitalism,

Hochschild (2003) says. My participants, on the other hand, having had success in education and career, and having developed a strong identity to this point in their lives, do not want this type of empty relationship. As R explained, she knows not only what type of work she would enjoy, but also what her ideal partner would be like. She would not want to just find someone in order to have a relationship, just as she said she would not at this point in her life just want to make a transition just “for the heck of it.” Relationships—as well as career—must be meaningful.

Learning about Oneself

Our sense of self is embedded within configurations of roles and relationships that are also embedded within historical contexts and societies—and all of these may be in flux (Shanahan & Macmillan, 2008). However, this notion is not new; as early as 1934, Mead’s notion was that self is a social product, arising, being formed and maintained through social interactions. This involves role enactment and seeing ourselves as other people see us. The “Me” is the social self that results from this viewing ourselves from the perspective of others—including their socially defined expectations about appropriate behavior (including marriage and family at determined societally determined ages). And this “I” that consists of our individual needs, wants and desires, is constantly monitoring the reactions of other people and changing the “Me” accordingly.

Through our interactions with others, our “I” becomes aware of our deviations from rules and expectations and then revise the “Me” accordingly. The historical study of identity continued with the work of Stryker (1982; 1994) who extended Mead’s work into an “identity theory”, which involves a system linking together a multitude of social roles. This represented a tie between self and action; a more salient identity would

choose a conformist course of action associated with a particular role –for example, religious teachings or traditional Japanese notions of behavior/age frame (as K’s mother was surprised at her decision to study overseas at her age, thirty-two). However, these roles require predictability in the life course, which does not or no longer exists. Instead, says Neugarten (1965), people have roles that are inherently a temporal, socially embedded phenomenon: we have reasonable well-defined expectations about when a particular role should be adopted; V and K both had said that age 27 or 28 would have been a good age to get married.

Our understanding of roles can be traced to the work of Albert Bandura (1986; 1997) whose work on self-competence gives notions of the feelings of self-efficacy that my participants felt or visualized (or could not feel or visualize). This self-efficacy was the root of the ability or inability for participants to visualize themselves in different and new roles. That visualization helped or hindered the women from taking actions necessary to achieve success in those new roles.

I wondered what was the factor that allows some individuals to see themselves (in the I) despite their not being reflected by their society as that role of object (Me). Perhaps it was the progressive mothers’ messages and messages about purpose that allow such women to be internally stronger and to create their feelings of self-efficacy where before none existed. Educators can examine what steps are possible to take to encourage this self-efficacy and achievement of one’s (self-defined) potential.

Participants gradually encountered learning events as they noticed that their lives did not parallel or resemble their same-age peers’. K learned this earlier, as she had first entered her international study program. K had gotten little support for her decisions,

some of which happened instead by chance: “I didn’t exactly plan like this, so but I just [whispers] got chance.” However, K copied her mother in doing something that was out-of-the ordinary, in order to discover what she wanted to do, what she enjoyed—in a word, her purpose. She learned how to discover her own preferences in work and education, because she had (at the time unknowingly) learned from her mother’s progressive model.

Learning encompasses a visualization that represents belief in one’s ability to achieve maturity. I asked K who influenced her to want children, and she said, “I think it was myself. I really wanted to have a child at *some* point,” because “since I was *imagining* having a child would be such a um, wonderful *experience* to you know, learn about life itself, for yourself, or the other person,” K explained. Throughout participants’ interviews, it was interesting to note the vagueness of personal goals in comparison to the career or education goals. None of the participants mentioned that they wanted to get a Masters Degree “at some point” in their lives. Or that they just thought a meaningful work career “would have happened by now.” They knew what self-efficacy was required to make their career and educational goals a reality. But they sensed that they lacked this same self-efficacy (or did not have this quality in a strong enough degree) to make their relationship goals a reality yet.

Until now, my participants may have never been encouraged to critically reflect in these ways, or about these areas of their lives. It is ironic that the shock of transitions allows critical reflection to occur most naturally—but only if we allow ourselves, as R did, to question our prior beliefs, as well as our family’s expectations for us. This is exemplified in R’s grateful and emphatic response when I asked her about marriage

messages she had gotten (or not gotten) from her family. She knew the pressures of conformity in marriage that her Church expected, and maybe now was able to realize her family's lack of these directives has had a positive outcome in her life.

Comparisons to peers usually meant participants did not feel as mature as they perceived their peers to be. My participants have believed and acted upon their innate messages of self-efficacy, and their beliefs about whether or not they could adapt to external markers of healthy adult development. All participants expressed a desire to become mature, and so to fit into their external culture. It was ironic that some participants said they did not feel mature, even though, as V said, "I was making sixty grand a year, and had my own house." They may have thought that only those traditional markers of marriage and family would allow them to achieve maturity; maturity was not represented by career or educational success. (To a lesser extent, money represented maturity, in that having financial stability would ensure or at least move one toward maturity.) Tradition may therefore influence adult development and career development in a way that has not fully been examined in the literature.

Conflict in the Home

Being in control would mean that participants' lives would not reflect those they witnessed their mothers living. Although the mothers had achieved meaningful work in most instances, their achievement was not without a price. Their progressive behavior may have been unusual in the middle-class atmosphere in which they inhabited, and so was not readily accepted by the other members of the family—namely the husbands and mothers-in-law. In contrast, the transitional man or woman, as Hochschild (2003) describes, is supposed to have an identity outside the home, and she can enjoy her paid

work. This traditional woman, though, has no right to be angry at a husband who does not help with housework; he wasn't supposed to have an identity equivalent to hers inside the home (Hochschild, 2003). Industrialization did not affect men and women at the same time or in the same way; women, more often than men, alternated between living in their ambition and standing apart from it (Hochschild, 2003).

The role of conflict in the home served as a barrier to self-efficacy in participants' attaining marriage to this point in their lives. For V, the conflict influenced her inability to visualize herself in a marriage role. Initiation into the demands of patriarchy for girls starts in adolescence rather than early childhood; girls are pressed to incorporate a male voice as the voice of moral authority and to live by the law of the father (Gilligan & Richards, 2009). V had said that if even her own father did not want to protect her, who would want to take care of her? Her interpretation and perception of her adolescence experiences had continued into her adult life, until she reexamined them in psychotherapy. Her perceptions had created for and of her the identity of someone unworthy of marriage.

In individualistic societies it is common to interpret marital problems as clashing personalities; instead of understanding what's going on outside marriage that's affecting what is going on inside the marriage: "Without that understanding, we can simply continue to adjust to strains of a stalled revolution, take them as 'normal,' and wonder why it's so hard these days to make a marriage work (Hochschild, 2003, p. xxii)." Ultimately, the gender lens enables us to see the problem as a whole; it is not a problem of women or men, or of women versus men, but rather a problem with the framework we have been using in thinking about these questions (Gilligan & Richards, 2009).

CHAPTER 6

Recommendations and Conclusions

My study offered new insight and also hope for those adults entering or enduring transition situations. That is the reason I chose phenomenology to inform my research. By acknowledging and using my own experience, I was able to orient myself to the phenomenon and all the other stages of the research, creating a universal, possible human experience (van Manen, 1997). Participants as well as readers may learn that they are not alone in their particular struggle with a work transition; my experiences could be our experiences (van Manen, 1997).

van Manen (1997) paraphrases Heidegger's (1977) question of "can we do something with phenomenology?"; we should instead wonder whether phenomenology – if we concern ourselves deeply with it—can do something with us. My participants expressed interest in my findings. They asked me whether the responses of other participants were similar to their own experiences with the phenomenon. One participant said she had felt more valid as a single person attending a high school classmate's recent wedding. My study provided the women proof that they were no longer alone in their circumstance of being single at midlife and going through a work transition. There were others like them, who had found, created, integrated, or invented a new identity for themselves.

Transitions offer us a learning event; through the transition, individuals are changed--whether or not there is a formal educational intervention. This transition involves more than simply adding or changing one's work skills; it involves a change in relationships, which in turn will require a change in how we see ourselves and define our

identity. Learning identity is one way that a person reflects on the meanings of his or her experiences, and constructs a new identity. The new identity is one that has integrated an individual's new experiences and perceptions.

The particular group of single women that I studied had not been previously married. Their experiences, societal expectations, and goals at mid-life may affect how and whether they enact certain career decision making processes. Individuals make meaning from experiences more thoroughly when they understand the connections between the patterns of their lives and the course of world history (Mills, 1959). This information can then be used to achieve an understanding of what is going on--both in the world and what may be happening within ourselves. Mills (1959) considered this to be the most fruitful form of self-consciousness.

Theoretical lenses used in my study included critical reflection, adult development theories, and feminist theories in adult education. Critical reflection enables one to question the societal influences that led to the primary career choice, and to affirm one's legitimacy in a society that defines a "healthy adult" in a very specific manner. Adult development theories offered a variety of perspectives on how society views those members who are outside the mainstream culture, and how—or whether—those members will eventually gain legitimacy as an adult. Finally, feminist theories in adult education enlightened the reader as to how the culture of patriarchy influences women's career choices, career success, and ultimately, how she is able or allowed to view her own identity. By understanding the experiences of this specific group of adult learners, adult educators can become more thoroughly involved in meeting the needs of single mid-life women learners.

Work transitions force us to ask ourselves who we are if we are not doing the job we previously did. The attainment of adulthood requires the ability of the individual to make successful connections to a changing world (Merser, 1987). Identity represents continuity among the past, the present and the future. In this light, a highly changeable future can make one's identity incomplete. Individuals can adapt to these changes by creating work roles, or career identities (Hicks and London, 1991). Yet these roles threaten to further distance us from our true selves. For instance, in order to survive in service jobs, we must emotionally detach ourselves from our own feelings in order to deal with the falseness we must portray (Hochschild, 1983).

Yet our emotions are our interpreter of meaning in our experiences. Emotion locates our position in the world. Without emotion, it is not possible to form a stable identity. We are merely humans playing a role in a particular workplace. Such deep acting causes us to alter ourselves, and to push our real self further inside, making it safe from commercial elements, but also hidden from ourselves (Hochschild, 1983). We gradually lose the ability to answer the questions, "Am I acting now? How do I know?"

Though we may resent this acting in our own lives, the act seems to be a rewarded requirement of today's work environment. Our role becomes a resource that we sell for wages. Without realizing these factors, we ask ourselves during a career change, "Who am I?", and search for a solid, predictable core self even though the conditions for the existence of that self have long since vanished (Hochschild, 1983).

Adult Education in the Work Transition Situation

During times of transition in an individual's life, there is a need for some semblance of security. Adults may seek educational programs because of their organized, formal

character—something that is lacking in the upheaval of a life in transition (Lange, 2001). If we acknowledge that one of the goals of adult education is to help learners develop the ability to think and make choices in an autonomous way (Mezirow & Associates, 2000), we need to be willing to re-think our usual way of planning, operating, and promoting programs. To us, the educational process operates quite normally; we sometimes forget to question why we do certain behaviors, and what the results of our actions may be. We need to focus on who benefits from those results, with an emphasis on envisioning creative ways to offer our services and expertise to adults who are in transition situations.

One of adult education's most useful qualities is its ability to dispel feelings of isolation in learners. Learners realize that there are other adults who are in similar situations to theirs. Together learners can make progressive and useful changes in their lives. During a transition situation, this isolation is felt more deeply, especially as the individual lacks clarity and solutions. In a work transition situation, there is an interactive influence of identity, support and stress (Stoner, 2007). The traditional solution to the transition is usually to understand one's situation as an individual failing. Each person in an isolated way then tries to deal with the emotions involved in making a work transition. The individual then carries those tumultuous emotions forward into the new workplace, and may never fully resolve underlying issues. This could negatively affect an individual's job performance and personal life.

Adult education has the ability to encourage examination of our external environment. From this investigation, learners can choose a direction within their current environment, or else create something different. Learners can recognize that their seemingly isolated, individual problem stems from a larger, societal and possibly

systemic issue. With this knowledge, more options and solutions become available to the adult in transition (Mills, 1959). Equipped with a broader knowledge of their work transition situation, individuals can acknowledge their unease, uncertainty, fear or guilt. But more than that, they can discover the deeper origins of these emotions within societal inequities. The resolution to their work transition situation may serve a greater purpose in relieving others who are in similar circumstances. Although this may not lead us to an answer to the question, “Who am I?” it may at least give insight into the next step to make in our developmental progress, both personal and career.

The work transition situation is one in which there is a deadline. An individual may need to find a job to pay living expenses, and may therefore decide to accept unequal treatment or personal dissatisfaction in the workplace. There is little time given to reflection on the larger societal issues that led to the work dissatisfaction and later transition. In other categories of life-changes, the time frame and emotional component is acknowledged, accepted and normal. For example, “empty nest syndrome” acknowledges possible negative feelings, and there are support groups for people in that particular transition. That may be because empty-nest syndrome is personal and private.

However, careers occur in the world of work. They are public, serious, and seen as more important than one’s personal life. The world of business and career may see little reward in condoning feelings--even if this strategy may make employees under-perform and make company profits suffer. We are not supposed to think about, much less discuss, how uncomfortable, abnormal, or wrong we are feeling about our identity in our new career. But this disjuncture in the way we see or define ourselves--our identity--affects the other roles we play in our lives, and ultimately affects our productivity on the

job. That is, if I never really see or consider myself as a salesperson—having been and seen myself as, or defined myself as a steelworker for the past twenty-five years—how does that affect how I think of myself as a complete, total, whole person? If I have to pretend in my job role, am I also pretending at home--pretending to be a parent, a spouse, a neighbor, a citizen, a friend? We may never be sure that our act has ended, just because we have left the workplace (Hochschild, 1983).

Outlook for Women's Identity Formation

The fragmentation that my participants felt stems from the conflicting messages received and absorbed from their external environment. As young women they had received the feminist-directed message to pursue education, so that they could achieve autonomy, independence, and success. However, that message did not include an equal directive for their personal lives. Society seems unable to incorporate a vision of the “legitimate” single educated woman. It seems that traditional definitions and conceptions of marital status define how a woman allows herself to see herself—as a learner, as a worker, as a potential mate, potential mother, and potential citizen. In effect, our external environment to some extent dictates how we are allowed to view our identity, and thereby partially controls how we define the reality of our experience.

Our environment teaches us what parts of ourselves are appropriate, and which we must keep hidden. As we internalize society's construction of self, we are coerced to play a role and to act out constrained ways of knowing, learning and being (Alcoff, 2000). When the messages received are unrealistic, or are not applicable to one's lifestyle, work situation, or marital status, an internal conflict can arise. The presence of other people, institutions and ideologies alters one's awareness of oneself and

consequently one's behavior (Mead, 1934). This awareness extends to include one's career decision-making processes. Our self ceases to be in charge of our consciousness; instead, the self develops out of our various social experiences (Mead, 1934).

The dichotomy that women are faced to confront stems from society's general image of marriage as an institution that does not progress or evolve alongside the advancement of technology, and women's rights and advancements. In such a scenario of outdated definitions and expectations of and in marriage, both men and women lose-- but women lose to a greater extent. The pervasive traditional view of marriage as women becoming the housekeeper and care-giver may lead to a woman's losing her individual identity. She may gain educational degrees, but she may also feel the pull to abandon that aspect of herself in order to retain society's view of femininity for her life.

Single women must reorganize their developmental identity, and change their own perspective about themselves--even if they cannot change others' perspectives. This reorganization of identity allows women to self-validate and live authentically. Although they may remain an outsider in a society that is defined by who is and is not worthy of marriage, these women can live authentically within an identity that is self-created. It seems ironic that even as lasting marriages are decreasing in numbers, the mindset and expectations for and of marriage and its participants remain ever-present.

Adult development theories that take for granted marriage and motherhood as a characteristic of the "normal" adult serve to dis-empower all women. Single women who opt out of this characteristic, either by choice or by circumstance, are seen as less valid by their society. And women who subscribe to the characteristic may in the process lose their authenticity in an effort to conform to societal standards. Women are coerced to

give up (or at least to ameliorate) their hard-won power in order to become legitimate, mature members of society via the only legitimizing vehicle, marriage. This effectively keeps women in a second class position, because even as they try to compete and excel in other arenas (especially the workforce), women are ultimately shackled by a burden of illegitimacy based on their personal (single) lives which do not match the definition of legitimacy offered by a patriarchal society.

Society has largely been more flexible about men's expectations in marriage. For example, the man may no longer be pressured by society to be the sole breadwinner as dual income couples are becoming the norm in middle-class society. However, society still retains the traditional expectations for women to perform the bulk of housework and childcare activities. Society has largely not accommodated for women's changing roles that incorporate increasing amounts of time and energy at work in order to create the two income couple (Hochschild, 1987, 2003).

The role that work plays in the lives of women and their creation of identity has not been adequately researched. Work for men's identity seems to be an expected facet. But Brown's (1998) study shows that work is an integral and not a tangential area of women's identity development. Until research appropriates women's experiences of and with work, women will continue to be required to measure themselves by an irrelevant standard. The women in my study had role models of having it all—marriage, family, and an important career and purpose. Some of K's peers were married, and with Masters Degrees, and V's friend was marrying and attaining a Masters Degree simultaneously. Participants did not mention many other examples of such women. Without such role models, it is much more difficult to visualize a future that includes all these aspects of

life. Many of the feminist role models of the sexual revolution had already been married before they passed their message of revolution to us. The feminists' revolution may have been in response to their unhappiness in marriage, but it lacked a caveat as to what their young followers would encounter as they joined such a successful revolution.

A work transition is a promise of a new beginning, a fresh start, and in some cases, a pursuit of happiness. But the reality is sometimes completely otherwise, because it requires us to reflect more deeply to find what other life issues may have been masked by the unfulfilling career. Society encourages us to change careers, rather than to critically reflect on the systems or circumstances that contributed to our unhappiness. My participants are at a juncture where the prongs of their age, career status, and relationship status all demand a response. In such a situation, these women cannot achieve society's definition of a healthy adult who is married, and who has children and a fulfilling career. The pressure to conform to one's society may compel women to compromise and conform, rather than ask questions such as these: "Why is it that I am not now in those societally proscribed roles?" And "Why is it that I am not involved in a career that I enjoy?" Reflection does not occur naturally or automatically in most people, unless there is some catalyst: for example, V's abuse issues, K's time constraints with her visa status, and R and V's reaching a milestone age.

Thinking Differently About Learning

Educators must remain open to alternative forms that learning takes. For example, the women in my study may have not encountered a discussion on spirituality in meetings with career counselors, job interviews, or academic counselors. But it was the spiritual dimension that informed many of their decisions, and helped to clarify their identity.

Ignoring their spirituality is what may have even led participants to their disorienting dilemma that prompted the transition period. Acknowledging and fostering this side of learning feels risky because it feels so powerful; it also seems as though we cannot control it (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). Paradoxically, it is this uncontrollable power that enabled participants to feel more in control of their lives and their decisions about career, dating, children, and educational programs.

Spirituality involves a search for and achieving of authenticity, as well as acceptance and honoring of the various dimensions of how people learn and construct knowledge (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). When we bring activities right from the beginning that include affective, somatic, imaginative, symbolic, cultural, and communal in addition to the rational, learners often experience both spiritual and transformative results (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). We must be willing to transgress our mainstream cultural taboos that would have us silence the issues of soul and spirit in learning (hooks, 2003). And we must assume the risk involved in engaging authentically as people, not only as instructors and students (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

As learners increase and actualize their authenticity they may be drawn to work that serves the larger society. In this way, spirituality may help clarify a work transition and career decision-making process. In Harwood's (2007) study on those who changed careers at mid-life, many participants had chosen to continue their education with the goal of entering socially responsible careers, and of improving the life of their community. Higher education has the potential to attract adult learners such as these (Harwood, 2007).

Even while acknowledging a spiritual component to learning, educators should

ensure that our motives support the wholeness of learners, rather than proselytize learners (Fenwick, 2001). We can create such a learning environment without even using the term spirituality in our activity: we can be aware of the power differentials within the classroom between learner and teacher; and we can ourselves be authentic, and without expectation that students share our perspectives and passions (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

In addition to being open to learning itself, it is important that educators allow for varied experiences and definitions of a transition situation. When we abide by strictly defined terms of what a transition is, we decrease the other tools available to us--for example, the use of visualization as an important skill in moving through a transition event. My participants needed to be able to visualize themselves in a different role in order for them to perceive and enact the self-efficacy required to make that new role a reality.

For example, K talked about working and being married and a mother, saying, “the reality or in the society, it’s *almost impossible*.” She then added, “it’s very *hard* to do *both*, it’s not impossible, but, could be *hard*.” She concedes that she may currently be unmarried because she is still looking for her purpose. And though it may not be the main reason, she thinks, “It’s at least a *part* of the reason.” Perhaps she also is not yet able to visualize what her new career would look like. Until she can realize that those multiple roles are doable, simultaneously, she will not attain them or may not even attempt them. Similarly, V currently cannot picture herself “*as married*,” she explained, emphasizing both words. She often explained how she would attempt, unsuccessfully, to picture herself and visualize possible roles for herself.

A better way for educators to address learners in transition situations is to

communicate through images, which would enable us to see beyond the learner's literal concerns and understand their underlying and deeply emotional issues (Dirkx, 2006). We must continue to give ourselves and our field permission to step outside the norm or traditional standards of what we understand as learning, knowledge, and education.

Thinking Differently About Transitions and Transformative Learning

When we as educators are able to think differently about what constitutes a disorienting dilemma, we offer new avenues for learners to construct their identity. The disorienting dilemma has taken on a somewhat negative connotation. However, in Berger's (2004) study, some participants, when they were on the edge of their knowing, said the experience felt exciting and energizing. Participant V's disorienting dilemma was drastic, leading to therapy. However, through that event, and afterwards, she has become energized. For example, she explained enthusiastically that now she is "excited" about being forty.

When we only focus on the dilemma event itself, rather than its beneficial outcomes and the learning that occurs through and because of the disorienting dilemma, we may overlook potential learning events. In Berger's (2004) study, many people had difficulty articulating how they felt. My study may have made participants' experiences more conscious because they had to explain their experiences to me. In that way, the disorienting dilemma was given no more power over the women than it needed to have. Instead, it could be viewed as a necessary part of an overall transformative learning experience.

Most transformative learning happens because we have been largely unconscious in life for a period of time. With this view of transformative learning, it is important to

reframe our conception of the disorienting dilemma. The disorienting dilemma may be neither pleasant nor unpleasant. We would do a service to learners by not labeling it with a value; it is the learner who must ultimately attach a value to the event. The disorienting dilemma should be viewed merely as the switch that turns off one realm (unconsciousness) and turns on another (consciousness). It is like the pause between an inhale and an exhale. When we can examine a disorienting dilemma in this way, we can allow learners to create their own meaning of and reaction to the event, as well as their own plan of action.

Similar to labeling mid-life as a time of ‘crisis’, we set expectations of a negative outcome for a disorienting dilemma. We encourage learners to bypass the positive outcomes that may be inherent in such a disorienting dilemma occurring at this mid-life age frame. V and R mentioned that they had gained a new perspective and power only after having reached their milestone ages of 40 and 50, respectively. And participant K realized her power to confront her partner about marriage—something she was unable to do when there was no disorienting dilemma and no pressures concerning her visa status.

Sometimes it is not one specific event that leads an individual to question his or her perspectives; sometimes it is the building of events, one upon the other (Cranton, 2006). Asynchronous time tables and non-events can also create stress (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) and lead an individual toward a disorienting dilemma. The fact that the participants mentioned that they thought marriage would have happened to them by this time in their lives could have begun this building up of events. Then, once confronted with societal norms and timetables based on age-stage tasks, their absence of marriage could have led to their disorienting dilemma.

Participants had the added burden of several possibly disorienting dilemmas occurring simultaneously: choosing or adapting to a new career; healing from abuse issues; and contemplating leaving or remaining in a relationship. These are the prongs which I described as those aspects of life these women must somehow combine, consolidate or integrate into their new identity. But first, they must complete their perspective transformation in order to know which habits of mind are useful and which are not.

If the goal of learning were absolute right answers, then learning would not have to include this reflecting on our perspectives of the world (Cranton, 2006). In the situations of my participants, there were no clear right answers and no absolutes. It was only through reflection that they were able to examine their perspectives and make changes and integrate experiences where necessary. Mezirow (1991) originally defined the most significant learning as that which incorporates this ability to critically reflect on our premises about ourselves.

A series of small life changes, none dramatic in and of themselves, can accumulate to a revision in a habit of mind over time (Cranton, 2006). During the course of our interviews, K realized that she had never considered whether she liked being single. And my questions had led her to think about how she will juggle family and career and/or a Ph.D. program. The fact that participants expressed a desire to be part of my study indicated to me that they were seeking some sort of disorienting dilemma. They wanted something that would take them out of their confusion, and lead them in the direction of their purpose.

From these illustrations, it seems there is a need to revise our perspective about

the disorienting dilemma. It may not always be an event that merely happens to us, and over which we have little or no control. We do not always have to be passive participants in the experience of transformative learning. Even before participating in my study, the women had been reflecting on their lives and their next careers. None mentioned that they had taken a class on reflection or read about how to do this task. The disorienting dilemma may be something that we can control and use toward attaining our learning goals, especially as concerns constructing our new identity.

Another aspect of transformative learning theory that was brought into question during my study was that of the discourse group. We construct personal meaning from our experience and validate it through interaction and communication with others (Cranton, 2006). For example, V's boss and co-workers praised her work skills, and R mentioned being praised by a certain boss. K was not able to receive this degree of interaction because she believed that the people in her life did not adequately understand her situation.

Educators should realize that power can exist not only in the discourse group or in the larger society, but also may have a more narrow focus for learners in transition. Mezirow has been criticized for not placing enough emphasis on power structures. Still, his theory is adequate to begin an examination of learning one's identity after a work transition. We must acknowledge power in some way, even at the local level. For example, peer influences had an enormous effect on participants' early career and relationship choices. Cranton (2006) states that learning occurs when we encounter an alternative perspective and call into question our prior habits of mind. These new messages gave participants information they could use to construct their new identity.

Although the peers appeared in participants' lives sometimes individually, their contributions can look like that of the discourse group as Mezirow explains it. If we alter our concept of the discourse group, we will see that it may not be housed in an academic setting, or even in an educational event. Educators must remember that our learners have been involved in possibly unhealthy and unproductive discourse groups throughout their lives. Therefore, learners may lack even the ability to recognize healthy and productive discourse groups. Or, because of prior negative experiences with peer advice, learners may choose to not heed the discourse group's advice, or may not recognize how beneficial or useful that advice may be.

Mezirow also does not allow for the possibility of learners in transition not having the discernment to choose healthy discourse groups. For Mezirow, adults in transition should be able to talk their way out of their dilemma. Many learners cannot do this, and depending on the severity of their transition situation, it would be unwise to expect this of learners. In addition, in a transition period, even our ability to identify the 'safe environment' that should characterize discourse group may be impaired.

Some learners, such as V, may require a much more narrow focus during the education event. Because of the energy required for her therapy issues to be resolved, power may not be a factor in her learning events. Nonetheless, she still may be able to achieve perspective transformation. The way that larger social forces shape an individual may not be relevant to V during her particular transition event. But other learners, such as K, may require this broader view in order to complete the transition. A more inclusive view of power and discourse group descriptors would be useful for creating a safe environment for all learners.

One of the facets of transformative learning that Mezirow eventually did acknowledge was intuition. My participants mentioned visualizing themselves in different roles. They also all said that they “just knew” it was time to leave their previous career. This innate knowledge must be nourished and validated by educators. We question our prior beliefs when that knowledge was acquired from an authority figure (Cranton, 2006). We must also acknowledge that the prior beliefs may have been self-created from our consolidation of various inputs from others. In a culture such as ours that devalues matters of soul (Dirkx, 1997) it is difficult for learners to trust their own voice, or their healthy visualizations for the future. Educational events should accommodate a spiritual dimension or direction in which learners can create their identity through innate knowledge, and without the input of the instructor.

Recommendations for Further Research

Even though I had thought that I chose a very specific group of women, I realized through the course of analyzing the interviews that this—like any group of women—is not a group of women that can be generalized or studied as a whole. I could easily have done three dissertations, using my participant criteria plus the following three distinct categories: women who are sexual abuse survivors (V); women who were born with or acquired a handicap (R); and women whose mothers worked for the first time outside the home, after the participant was born (K).

Work transitions represent a time of uncertainty but also a time of experimentation. V had chosen to return to graduate classes to help her decide a new career direction; K contemplates entering a Ph.D. program; and R realizes that she would only continue her education if it would advance her current work skills. Educators must

consider this facet of their students in terms of student retention. That is, if the adult student is only in the classroom or in the program to struggle with recreating his or her identity at this juncture of life, how does that affect program planning, perceived importance of the program, and even the evaluation of the instructor? If the class is not a vital component of the learner's overall life strategy—or if the student does not understand where the class fits into the purpose of his or her life—the student's evaluation of the teacher and class may reflect that.

There are undergraduate advising programs for the undecided student, yet we tend to assume that adults already have a clear career path and know their purpose in life. Educators tend to not perceive an adult student in the same way we do a traditional age student; we therefore do not define the needs of the adult student adequately. Again, this may be due to the delineating of learners based on arbitrary limits, rather than the entire lifespan outlook. Similarly, educators should take seriously, and should create a space for, learners who are in a search of not only a new career, but also their life purpose. Such learners have an agenda that may not have been addressed by adult education. As the prongs of the learner's life intersect at a particular time, they may search not only for learning and an eventual career. Their search may include more meaning and importance than we have been used to encountering in our education events.

The importance of the learner was brought into stark relief during V's interviews. She told me that the abuse began when she was fourteen years old. This made me wonder at the relationship of identity formation in adolescence. If, as Jung (1956) claims, the mid-life age range is a sort of second adolescence, V's identity formation may be only beginning—now that she has a clearer perspective. Many students may share this

unclear identity. But if we divide education neatly between age groupings such as K-12, undergraduate, graduate, etc., we do not recognize the nuances that are inherent in a whole lifespan viewpoint. With such a constricted view of development, we are in danger of assigning certain developmental outcomes at particular times—and unconsciously punishing or discriminating against those learners whose lives do not conform to the standard.

V spoke of how she was motivated to enter graduate level classes at a private Catholic university, after “a period of a few months that I just kind of decompressed.” She cleared her throat and continued explaining that she “had actually signed up for two ah, graduate level classes,” her plan being to mesh the creative and the computer background. Returning adult students often create their own curriculum, program plan, and timeline. They know their needs, whether or not they are able to or choose to communicate them to the instructor. This strategy places the adult educator in the unwitting role of career counselor. We must acknowledge this learning need and adapt to it even if that may mean digressing from our own model of a correct or profitable program.

Women—and all adult learners--must be made to realize their marital status is not an indication of failure (or success). By placing the task of authentic living on the individual, we will not be tempted for find or create our identity through involvement with another person. Instead, an individual must examine the gradual process—called incremental transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000)--that indicated they were searching for a purpose through meaningful work.

Most transformative learning is more often incremental than epochal or sudden and dramatic (Cranton, 2006). However, research usually examines transformations during a certain period of time, rather than the changes in perspective that happen over time. Further research that follows learners throughout their transition situation would provide new information for educators to better adapt to learners' needs. When learners can feel that their needs are heard and acknowledged, they will approach the higher dimension of development that K. Taylor (2000) described as a connection with others and experiencing oneself as a part of something larger. No learner need feel alone in their transition situation. As researchers continue to study more diverse segments of the learner population, more voices can be heard and more programs can be developed to meet these needs.

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITING SCRIPT FOR POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS

I am a doctoral candidate at Penn State University studying Adult Education and Workforce Education. I am seeking volunteers for a research project. The research project is: How do single, mid-life women re-create their identity after undergoing a work transition. Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age; parental consent must be obtained if participants will be minors. I am looking for participants who have had a work transition, either from part-time to full-time (or vice versa), have changed industries, or have had another type of work transition.

For more information, or to volunteer for this project, please contact Trina Hess at (814)797-2711, or trh177@psu.edu. If you have questions about the research process, contact my advisor, Dr. Fred Schied, at (814)863-3499.

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Common Setting

- Interviewer: Trina Hess
- Interviewee: Single women participants who have made a work transition
- Interview time planned: One hour
- Interview place: As interviewee chooses
- Recording: With digital voice recorder

Opening comments at first interview

As my e-mail/telephone call/letter indicated, I am conducting a research study with single women participants who have made a career change. I will use data from these interviews in my doctoral dissertation. Your name will not be used and your comments will remain confidential, recognizable only via code. I will refer to this interview and your comments with an anonymous pseudonym. By signing the Consent Form, you agree to allow me to record your comments. Do you have any concerns or questions before we begin?

Opening Questions

Length of time since enacting work transition:

Age at time of work transition:

Type of experiences/responses that you encountered during and after the transition:

Any other relevant information or reflections of the work transition experience:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FIRST INTERVIEW

Part one: life history and details of the career change

- Please give me your name and tell me something about your educational and professional background.
- How long have you been at your current job/position?
- Tell me about your life after the work transition (how is it different from your life before the work transition?)
- Describe making the choice to change to a new career—what were the influencers or the impetus to make this work transition?
- What were some of the reactions of people close to you after you made the work transition?
- Please describe a typical day at your new job, including the interactions with co-workers.
- In your opinion, what was the most difficult aspect of making the work transition?
- Please describe something you consider unique or problematic about working in your new career (compared with previous career).
- What would you say is the biggest difference between your experiences at your previous career and your new career?
- How would your life be different if you had not made the work transition?

- Please give me your name, age, and tell me something about your educational and professional background.

FAMILY BELIEFS/MESSAGES:

Money

Marriage/Singleness

Religion

SINGLENESS:

Do you like being single?

Is getting in or out of a relationship a factor in career change for you/did the two coincide for you?

Do you agree or disagree with these messages:

It's better to be single than marry the wrong person

The goal is to have children...

How did you get in this point of relationship with this person?

WORK:

Do you enjoy that type of work you do?

What is the social interaction in your workplace (male/female ratios), and are you satisfied with that ratio?

RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION:

Describe your religious activities in your childhood home:

Describe your current religious activities.

JOURNAL TOPICS

Some of the journal topics you may want to record include the following:

- What were the experiences that led you to consider making a work transition initially?
- What were the first responses you received from loved ones or acquaintances when you announced your desire to make a work transition? (Or, if you did not announce your decision, why did you not?)
- What were your first steps toward enacting your work transition?
- What were your feelings after you took the first steps toward your work transition?
- What were the reactions of other people to your actions?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SECOND INTERVIEW

Parents

- Education
- Marriage
- Did they like their work?

Mother

- Age when you were born
- Did she work? How did you feel about that?

Goals

- Career/early goals (what think you'd be doing by now?)
- Desire for children?
- Want a higher degree? Will this conflict with having children, do you think if you had it to do again, would you take the same path (that is, career?)
- Do you feel things are going your way?
- Are you pleased with what you are doing/things going the way you want them to?

Marriage

- Main reasons for not seeing someone right now
- Do you think the reason you are not now married is because of career indecision?
- Mental outlook if you were now married?
- How important would your spouse's education be to you?
- If you don't eventually marry, would that affect your feelings about yourself?

Children

- What do you dislike about not having children?
By what age must you make a final decision about having children?
- Are those plans for children definite?
- Will it affect your feelings about yourself if you cannot work while you have children?
- Can/will you work at the same time you would raise children?
- Would you have to give up something?
- Other people in your sphere: how they affect your children decision?
- See women with children/not work, how do you feel?
- See women who work/no children, how do you feel?
- *Reflection on the meaning*
- Given what you said about your life history and about your current career, how do you feel about the work transition that occurred?
- Are you happy with your situation in life—career, relationship status, financial, other?
- How would you define happiness?
- How would you describe the most successful workday in your new career?

Closing comments at final interview

- Do you want to add anything? Do you have any comments?

I appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. As I have said, your responses will remain confidential. Thank you.

APPENDIX C
EXCERPTS FROM RESEARCHER JOURNAL

...Jan/Feb 08, Need to BELIEVE it's possible, in order to visualize it. Have to believe FIRST. But if depression, you CAN'T believe or visualize it (or vice versa), marriage, for example, or dating, etc. especially after so many bad experiences, you give up hope, become and thereby visualization-less, too!:(?)

...from watching the play *The Female Odd Couple*: One character says, "Men play poker, people don't think they're gay. America is very suspicious of people who are not married."

.....I fell into the stereotype patriarchy trap too: At the restaurant, my friend talked of her having 8 aunts on each side of family. My other friend John asks how many uncles she has. I say, "Um---EIGHT? Duh!", then though, John says, "But do they all have to be MARRIED?" I catch myself!!! I just assumed that they were all married aunts! Why did I of all people so suddenly/spontaneously unthinkingly and unconsciously think that??? Or did I say it because I DIDN'T think??... not ALL aunts have to have or will have a corresponding uncle!!!

... Nov 13th. Black and white movie, "Don't you have any family, any friends?" the cops ask the female character who is dying/suicide?, after being the "loser" in the movie. She's alone BECAUSE she was ambitious. Her protégé vacillates between marriage to a man and her illustrious career on the stage. In the end, she leaves her mentor woman and meets with the man in the street, he tells her, "Next time you fall [she'd fallen onstage] I'll be there to catch you." She says, "I hope so!" The ambitious female character walks sullenly the other way on the street—all alone...Career woman extraordinaire. 1940's movie, but how much of it is true in the minds of people today—that is, the NEED to have to CHOOSE between the two??!! Ironic.

...Thinking about V's saying that her brother was a product of his generation, whole sex, drugs and rock and roll. But then I thought, what about all the other women who ALSO grew up in the 70's, but who did get married and have children. What is uncommon about us that made us adhere to our cultural influences (of feminism)—are we just more easily persuaded or easily influenced, or are we just more anti-establishment and progressive, the way the drug users in the 70's were anti establishment and willing to adopt something that was more nontraditional?

..... And at the mid-life age range, that's where all the prongs sort of come together...if you're looking for different work, and if you weren't married before/yet, that prong comes in, and if you don't have kids yet, that prong comes in then. So everything comes in as sort of a type of PRISM, everything comes together at this one time. And for anyone even in a healthy mental situation, that would be overwhelming. But if that...leads someone into depression, or...because the person had been living in depression that wasn't recognized...I kind of see now a lot more clearly, how—depression really does play a role in career change and this self-examination process.

APPENDIX D
EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS OF PARTICIPANT V

V: And—really--just, um. Integrating a lot of things, being **able to**, you know, just **literally grow up and feel like an adult**. You know, even though I *owned* a house, I *had* my own car, you know, at one point I was making like--sixty grand a *year* kind of thing, **but I still felt like--a little *child***. You know like a fourteen, or you know, like, um, I guess it was sort of I felt like **there was my chronological age and the emotional age**. And I **always--felt like I was--ten years behind emotionally**. [pauses] Which would make sense, since I was like fourteen, and it was like twenty-something that I've started going back

T: Mm-hm.

V: into **therapy again**, and--you know, **thankfully I don't look forty!** So [laughs] ah, you know, I have to

T: [laughs]

V: thank

T: [laughs]

V: **thank my grandmother's** good German *skin* for that one,

T: [laughs]

V: but ah, you know, so in that sense, ah, turning forty for me has actually been a really **cool** thing, like I'm--**excited**. Because **now I'm kind of working on the things I know I need to be working on**, that, you know, I'm not in a job that I *hate*. **Not necessarily in you know, the right place that I wanna be, but I know that**, you know, had enough experience of going through therapy and ah know that I've got--more **determination** than ah, you know [laughs] **most people I know**, that um. You know like, **I know whatever "there" is like I'm gonna get "there" too, that essentially be in a place where I'm--happy with who I am**, that I have the confidence that, you know just sort of um, loving yourself kind of thing?

T: Um-hm.

V: And ah. And you know **some people have like said**, "Well, you know, you're almost forty, but" you know, "you've got a great personality, **you look good**," you know, **"why aren't you married!?"** [laughs] and you know. And I say the answer is, just quite frankly, **I'm not happy with myself and nobody else is gonna give that to me, so I know I need to--get that fixed**, you know kind of--**really learn how to love myself, take care of myself, be my own person before I can**, you know, kind of--**meld identities and become a couple** with someone else, so. **And I have not yet had one person say**, "Oh, that--" you know, "don't worry about that," [laughs] you know. **Everyone's like**, "Good thinking!

APPENDIX E

SECOND HIGHLIGHTED COPY OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

V: And—really—just um. Integrating a lot of things, being able to, you know, just literally grow up and feel like an adult. You know, even though I owned a house, I had my own car, you know, at one point I was making like—sixty grand a year kind of thing, but I still felt like—a little child. You know like a fourteen, or you know, like, um, I guess it was sort of I felt like there was my chronological age and the emotional age. And I always—felt like I was—ten years behind emotionally. [pauses] Which would make sense, since I was like fourteen, and it was like twenty, something that I've started going back

T: Mm-hm

V: into therapy again, and—you know, thankfully I don't look forty! So [laughs] ah, you know, I have to

T: [laughs]

V: thank

T: [laughs]

V: thank my grandmother's good German skin for that one

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V: And ah. And you know some people have like said, "Well, you know, you're almost forty, but" you know, "you've got a great personality, you look good," you know, "why aren't you married?!" [laughs] and you know. And I say the answer is, just quite frankly, I'm not happy with myself and nobody else is gonna give that to me, so I know I need to—get that fixed, you know kind of—really learn how to love myself, take care of myself, be my own person before I can, you know, kind of—meld identities and become a couple with someone else, so. And I have not yet had one person say, "Oh, that—" you know, "don't worry about that," [laughs] you know. Everyone's like, "Good thinking!"

Comment [01] independence

Comment [02] over/over

Comment [03] support

Comment [04] age

Comment [05] over/over laugh

Comment [06] Time
(40) [unclear] focus knowing what she wants

Comment [07] people

Comment [08] Contentment/ROPE

Comment [09] AGE/peer marriage
marriage/c

Comment [010] Marriage=melding identities,
must first have an identity to offer someone!

Comment [011] Also as is career change, peer support in financial hard decision-making

APPENDIX F
PRELIMINARY CATEGORIES FROM INTERVIEW DATA

FAMILY:

1. Messages from Family: Education messages/ no Marriage messages
2. Mother: returned to work “Her work opened up a whole new world” for V;
progressive; activist; unusual; against societal culture/strong-dominating
3. Father; proud of him; but emulated mother’s behaviors/courage
4. Father’s verbal messages
5. Conflict in the home (parents’ marriage; K’s mother no control, arranged marriage;
V’s house not big enough for mother and grandmother’; R’s domineering mother)

WORK:

- 1.. Indecision/Couldn’t decide/couldn’t make up my mind (career)
2. enjoy work/want to do something I enjoy]
3. Purpose (what I really want)/K: in job: “I felt I was not learning enough about life”;
(K: children would help her learn about life, and purpose/control even in
relationship with boyfriend; wanting to USE their education
4. New job brings focus V R; for K it is PhD focus on what she wants to
study/motivation, energized
5. Work=learning about things, about self (identity) K
6. Got positive comments on her work V, R

PERSONAL:

1. Time/age (40, 50) Examine life--Is this what I really want?
Sense of time with depression--distracted/losing time
2. Sense of belonging (fit in); K “wanted to be ‘recognized’ more both from the job and
from my boyfriend”=be seen/identity?
3. Hope: Haven’t given up yet (on children, marriage); spirituality

DECISION MAKING:

1. Women mentors/friends advice
2. Lack of peers/(emotional) support: “No one understood”
3. Passivity: “it just happened”/“I just fell into it” (of earlier career) and “I just figured”
I would be married by now”
[they could picture/visualize themselves as married, but had or made no definite
plans/indecisive, as in early career?]

MONEY:

1. Money/felt underpaid (leading to career change) R: “I knew I needed to leave”
Messages from family, save R
2. independent/independence-- Wants to be in control (V) wants to have choice (R);
K takes control in relationship, asks where it’s going, notices it’s stagnant; Proud
of her own courage (in changing things)

APPENDIX G
WORD DOCUMENT OF CATEGORIES FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

CONFLICT IN THE HOME:

But in terms of the home, “The house just wasn’t quite big enough for the two of them. So that’s when SHE went back to work.” V brags, too, about her mothers’ work, “eventually was—all—but running their—ah, department of planned giving. So she definitely—ah, did a HUGE CHANGE in terms of responsibilities and that kind of things, WORKING there.”

Mother: work as escape of the conflict: V: work as escape of still being single??
 --and, “They each had their own identity kind of thing” V sniffs, “SHE had a place, and my mom, you know, was going out, and working.” BELONGING=IDENTITY.
 WORK=IN CONTROL (~third shift book; volunteering for more shifts, etc.), so can keep that sense of BELONGing/appreciation/WORTH! SELF-efficacy that they didn’t receive or feel in mothering/stay-at-home solely mothering?

EDUCATION:

Family messages, “It was just more, you know, ‘Get your education,’ and—I guess in essence, you can do better than WE. You know, that sort of—every parent” says. This is similar to what R said, too, of her parents’ message, because neither of them went to college.

SINGLE:/AGE “Living (in) between the extremes” Title!!

“I definitely don’t want to be single the rest of my life, but also not like, I’m “oh, my God, I’m forty, I’ll NEVER get MARRIED!” laughs. “you know.” The laughter here seemed like fear. The other two participants did not verbalize (or have to?), or feel the need to?) that they don’t want to be single the rest of their lives; they seem to have come to terms with it. And, V sniffs at the end of that.

The other instance V brings up singleness is in her eventually thinking of joining a health club, “it’s like, ‘I’ll meet—GUYS!’” and you know, (she laughs), all of a sudden I—feel like I was starting to tense up a bit.” Also, K and R don’t have this apprehension on meeting new people/dating (mainly because they have no absolute agenda TO get married; it’s not as pressing a need for them as it is for V?)

--in CONTROL because she knows what she needs to do in terms of getting over her abuse issues. And so, she also controls the timing of when she will begin dating again. And knows that others can’t validate you or make you happy. Fix myself first and then dating./SEQUENTIAL! Goals. “Because it’s just—marriage? Has—been—one of those things of, when I finally deal with all the CRAP that I’ve gotta deal with, THEN I’ll focus on it.” IN CONTROL→ VISUALIZE.

One at a time career first, then relationship. Can it be other way around? For some, K also career first, THEN she had more focus and more confidence to confront boyfriend about marriage (Career--> focus→courage→decision making→Timing (of marriage, etc. goals?).

V: focus → control (of time)→self confidence/self efficacy/→career decision making→ identity→marriage (=worthy person—ie in V’s own eyes).

APPENDIX H EMERGING PATTERNS DRAWN FROM CATEGORIES

INDECISION/DECIDE indecision interferes with visioning process

K's grandmother gave her the verbal message in elementary school or junior high that, "Why don't you just--ah, why don't you become a beautician? Because ah, you like to deal with hairs, and—you can have your own shop, and you can have a job!", but K "felt very contradicted" by this advice, because the grandmother gave K's brothers the message that they should go to the university.

Her second subject in her studies/University helped her to "focus my—I think focus myself"—she was indecisive and half-hearted when applying to the school, because "the application process was kind of [chuckles] –TEDIOUS and I went back to Japan, so."

Because she had no FOCUS because she had no VISION? ???

Now, too, "Things are definitely i—up in the air!" because of the school and career. I do not have a career whatsoever—yet—developed," she chuckles.

[she probably would not have gone back to PhD program, or would not have THOUGHT about it, why??]

PASSIVITY: No clear vision: "I think it was MYSELF" who influenced her to want children, "I really wanted to have a child at SOME point." **INDECISIVE/no**

planning/PASSIVITY. "And, since I was IMAGINING having a child would be such a um, wonderful EXPERIENCE to, you know, learn about life itself, or yourself, or the other person." CHILDREN=LEARNING

"But, see, you never know" things just happen, no control, can't decide. "I wouldn't—I feel like I will never be able to really a hun—really make a decision about that a hundred-percent because there will be always SLIGHT CHANCE of having a child." There is a chance to not to be able to have a child, "so I mean—REALLY NEVER KNOW."

Passivity/NO CONTROL [use this in the IN CONTROL section/negative side of it!!]

She thinks that if she was married earlier, she would have "taken this route a little earlier" and if she had a child, could have gone back to school much later. Or if she'd stayed in Japan, "I might not have gone back to school at all." Traditional Japanese lifestyle.

CONTROL: "He said yes when I—when I mentioned about that." She brought up marriage to boyfriend, the second time, that is, when she wanted to get married; first time was him wanting marriage. "I asked him, 'O.K. what are we gonna do?' you know, in October sometime" she asked it of him. When she was a teenager, she did not want to get married until 27. **CONTROL the outcome of relationship status.** : "I put too much energy on 'I don't want to get married' part, and there too, I'm not [laughs], I'm still not-married but."Peers/coworkers she acted on her interpretation of their thoughts. "I felt I HAD to do it" control/decisive: "I THINK they were perplexed." The manager tried to create a position which would fit K, make it a full time position FOR her. "So I bet, nobody really voiced it, but probably my coworkers" were "probably was very surprised" or thought K was "making a very selfish decision." She felt they were all Americans, and she an international student, so they wouldn't "fully understand, um, my decision-making route, or the reason why I had t—I felt like I had to do it." **No self-efficacy in career, because of the indecisions/lack of focus**

APPENDIX I CULLING THEMES FROM THE EMERGENT PATTERNS

For V, focus → control (of time)→self confidence/self efficacy→career decision making→ identity→marriage (V's feelings of becoming a person who is worthy of marriage)

For V, it was career first, then relationship. For K, it can be the other way around: career first, and then she had more focus and more confidence to confront boyfriend about marriage career → focus→courage→decision making→timing (of marriage, and other goals) →purpose →new identity

In Control → TIME: Timing=depends on our level of MATURITY.

TIME=CONTROL/ FOCUS→DECISION-making→IN CONTROL of timing/time

For V, focusing on her progress in therapy=mature=marriage=mature? And her feeling of being finally integrated=whole=mature=IN CONTROL=IDENTITY (finally!).

INDECISION=NO CONTROL: =UNCERTAINTY=NO FOCUS, during her career search, “It was just sort of all over the map, that there wasn't one—thing—that—at the time that I was like “OK this is what I'm gonna do, this is what I'm gonna go after.”

V said she wants to find work that is meaningful, PURPOSE/useful.

For V, IN CONTROL=sense of accomplishment, self-efficacy/usefulness/worthy/MEANINGFUL.

Money-->independence→ CONTROL>self efficacy/self confidence. (getting the salary, the benefits, “to just financially BE on my own feet, again” and “not have to depend on my PARENTS so much.”

(Quest for) maturity→ IN CONTROL → FOCUS. [Time pressures →reflection→ focus] →PURPOSE (=IDENTITY, V describes as ‘the person God intended me to be’)

Mature→CONTROL time=>control depression→decision-making→Career/purpose?)→feedback from Peers → IDENTITY

PEER→IDENTITY

PEERS→decision making

PEER→career IDENTITY→her career id. Decision making.

Decision making→maturity/career→maturity IDENTITY

as V fits into the workplace culture/identity of retail store, →her career IDENTITY! =IN CONTROL Or vice versa, in control→ IDENTITY in career.

In job, others' opinion of V formed her self efficacy IDENTITY/ in the new work situation. Positive feedback→ sense of BELONGING→ we agree to this IDENTITY (vs. our previous/possibly passive/passively accepted identity).

APPENDIX J FINDING SUBTHEMES

HOPE

(passive/IN CONTROL piles)

At first, V's saying that "I'm not shooting for happiness but contentment" and "I don't expect everything to be PERFECT. Ah, don't expect every day to be honey and roses, but just to be CONTENT with where I'm AT." And that is "Almost where I'm at right now." She says she certainly wants a lot of changes and things to be different, but is content with where "I need to be right now," now that she has "Pulled out a lot of the old issues, have—been able to you know, move beyond a lot of those issues, and grow in ways that I had always hoped I could?" She sums it up by saying, "Just being content with where you ARE in life."

On first reading of the interview, this seemed that she is happy, this contentment. But is it a settling for less? A reflection of little or low self-efficacy/worth? PASSIVE, not IN CONTROL.

MONEY/CONTROL--"make sure I earn more than you know, eighteen, twenty thousand dollars a year." Debt=NO CONTROL. \$ drives V's career decision making right now (to practical, not want/purpose, as R and K are, at their stages of life).

This quest to rid the debt brings a PASSIVE nature to V, as "Well, I don't like having all the debt, so therefore consider the computer career—again." That is, taking something she doesn't love, in order to reduce her debt, so she can get on with her other (ultimate) life goals, including marriage/family.

--\$\$her job at the bank?, Insurance, and "It was difficult to just kind of look back and feel like you'd –DONE anything, you know." Or, "to feel like I've made a difference in people's lives?" but "It wasn't enough people, it wasn't big enough, um."

And V didn't want to feel, "Like a gerbil in a wheel." Wants PURPOSE/useful. This was the first mention of "purpose" in terms of V's interviews, whereas in K and R's interviews it was clearly stated, and often.

IN CONTROL=sense of accomplishment/self-efficacy/usefulness/worthy/MEANINGFUL.

And she \$-->independence? CONTROL>self efficacy/self confidence. (getting the salary, the benefits, "to just financially BE on my own feet, again" and "not have to depend on my PARENTS so much.")

CURRICULUM VITAE

TRINA R. HESS
85 Hi-Level LN
Cranberry, PA 16319
814-319-2184
trh177@psu.edu

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University **2009**
Doctoral Candidate, College of Education
Major: Adult Education Minor: Workforce Education
Dissertation: *Living Between the Extremes: A Phenomenological Study of How Mid-Life Women Recreate Their Identity After a Work Transition*
Dissertation defense: September 30, 2009

Indiana University of Pennsylvania **1995**
M.A. College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Major: English Concentration: Teaching English to
Speakers of Other Languages

Clarion University of Pennsylvania **1991**
B.A. College of Arts and Sciences
Major: German Minor: International Business

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Hess, T., Zabitgil, O. (2007, May). *Learning Through Trauma*. Educational session presented at Hendrick Best Practices for Adult Learners conference, University Park, PA.

Hess, T. (2007, March). *How Do Mid-Life Women Recreate Their Identity After a Work Transition*. Round table presentation given at Harvard Graduate School of Education Student Research conference, Harvard, MA.

Hess, T., Zabitgil, O. (2006, March). *The English Comedy: Humor in the TESOL Situation*. Educational session presented at WE LEARN (Women Expanding Literacy Education Action Resource) annual conference, New Haven, CT.

Hess, T. (1995, May). *Using Humor in the Classroom*. Educational session presented at Three Rivers TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) conference, Indiana, PA.

HONORS AND DISTINCTIONS

Frederick Douglass Fellowship, Teaching Scholar 2007
Lavanda P. Muller Graduate Fellowship in Education 2003-2004
Graduated with University Honors, Indiana University of Pennsylvania 1995
Graduated with University Honors, Clarion University of Pennsylvania 1991
Alpha Mu Gamma National Collegiate Foreign Language Honor Society 1991
Scholar Athlete Award – Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference 1990-1991