

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WELL-BEING IN
MIDDLE AGED NAVAJO WOMEN LIVING
ON THE NAVAJO NATION

By

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*May Beauty surround you.
Beauty before you and behind you.
Beauty above you and about you.
And may your road home be a Trail of Peace.
Happily may you return.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Happiness is a subjective state of mind for which everyone strives. The term happiness has many synonyms including well-being, quality of life and the good life. Well-being is the term being used in this inquiry. Well-being is defined as “optimal psychological functioning and experience” (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142). This concept consists of factors such as life satisfaction, life attitude, purpose in life, optimism, resilience, sense of belonging and happiness.

Well-being is subjective. People judge their well-being on the quality of their own experience, their feeling of being happy and content and their sense of well-being. Campbell (1981) stated that well-being “is entirely subjective, known directly to the individual person and known to others only through that person’s behavior or verbal report” (p. 14).

Well-being is also culturally based. The social and cultural contexts affect how an individual defines and pursues happiness. Studies of cross correlates of life satisfaction across cultures by Diener and Diener (1995) found differences in certain aspects of life satisfaction between individualistic versus collective societies. They have concluded “there are different predictors of happiness for different people and in different societies” (p. 660).

In the Navajo tradition the concept of well-being is associated with harmony. The Navajo word is hozho, which loosely translated means “walk in beauty.” Dr. Alvord, the first female Navajo surgeon, explained that,

Beauty to Navajos means living in balance and harmony with yourself and the world. It means caring for your self, mind, body, and spirit and having the right relationship with your family, community, the animal world, the environment-earth, air and water-our planet and universe. (p. 186)

This is a worldview in which everything in life is connected and influences everything else. Balance is necessary between the individual, family, friends, community and the environment in order to experience well-being. For the majority of Navajo, part of this well-being means living on the Navajo Nation. McPherson (1992) stated, “the land and its associated beliefs water and fertilize the mind, helping the Dine (The People) maintain their identity in their center of the universe. This identity shields the Navajo against the turmoil of daily life and discordant influences” (p. 3).

The present Navajo Nation is located on a portion of the traditional land of the Navajo. The boundaries of the Dine Bikeyah (Land of the People) extend into New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. This part of the United States is designated the Four Corners area because the borders of four states (New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado) meet with four corners. Four sacred mountains, one in each direction, form the boundaries. Partly due to the land, the Navajo have survived as an intact cultural group more so than other Native American tribal groups. They have never been fully removed from their traditional lands unlike other Native American tribes. Therefore the land holds spiritual and cultural relevance to the Navajo person today.

In the Four Corners area life on the land has always been a struggle and required resilience to survive. For the modern Navajo the Navajo Nation is a place of harsh beauty, spiritual places and family lands. It is also a place of unemployment, poverty, alcohol and violence. Even with the problems found on the Navajo Nation, the majority of the Navajo population in the United States lives within the boundaries of the Nation.

In the Navajo culture women play an important role. They are the mothers, the caregivers of the family and the keeper of the legends. In family life the woman runs the household and will do whatever is needed to keep the household going. This may include working outside of the home or working on the family ranch. The challenges of unemployment and poverty are especially felt by the women as they continue to raise their families and care for loved ones on the Navajo Nation as their ancestors did before them. After her swearing in as the first female Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Navajo Nation, Chief Justice Claudeen Bates Arthur was quoted in the *Navajo Times* as saying “ Dispute resolution is what Navajo women have always done in the past because we’ve been in charge of the families” (Long, October 23, 2003).

Navajo women have been involved in tribal and clan governance, religious ceremonies and have an equal standing with men. McCloskey (1998) interviewed three generations of Navajo women about life course issues. The oldest women interviewed were born in 1895 and the youngest were born in 1961. The historical context the three groups grew up in was very different, as were their childhood and educational opportunities. McCloskey discovered there was cultural persistence of certain Navajo values and traditions in the three generations. Among the women she interviewed she

found that “cultural continuity exists in the value women placed on motherhood and children, and in the egalitarian position women assume in Navajo society” (p. 125).

Navajo women, as with many women in middle age, start to experience many changes including health problems, the death of parents and friends, and for the first time, face a sense of personal mortality. The sense of well-being is certainly challenged at midlife; however, the sense of well-being is richer due to the lived experiences of the person. For this study the population being studied is middle age. These people were born between 1939 and 1964. The oldest of this cohort is 65 years old and the youngest turned 40 in 2004. According to the 2000 Census there are 56,453 Navajo/Navajo combination individuals (those who list an additional category with Navajo) who would be considered middle aged. Of that number 30,649 are women (which is about 11% of the Navajo population).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this inquiry was to learn about the strengths and resources associated with well-being middle-aged Navajo women use to face the challenges of being middle-aged, living, and raising families on the Navajo Nation in the 21st century. In this inquiry, resources were defined as “those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right or act as means to obtain centrally valued ends” (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 307). The midlife experiences of these women were examined through the two lenses of culture and gender. This research contributes to the body of knowledge concerning middle-aged women generally, more specifically Native American middle-aged women and most specifically Navajo middle-aged women. The focus was on the distinctiveness of the

Navajo's concept of well-being. By identifying the components of that concept the information obtained can be used to develop mental health and educational programs that will focus on developing a positive approach to aging.

Delimitations and Limitations

The methodology selected for this inquiry was qualitative research, in particular a feminist interpretive inquiry. This methodology "presumes the importance of gender in human relationships and societal processes and orients the study in that direction" (Patton, 2002, p. 129). Using this research method decreases the generalizability of the findings. However, the purpose of this inquiry was not to test a hypothesis but to better understand well-being of a particular group of Navajo women.

This study was limited to middle aged women. The literature is not consistent on what ages are considered middle age. One way to look at this stage in life is according to events that take place and without regard for age. A few of these events are children leaving home to start their own lives, aging parents requiring assistance and being at the peak of a career. However, for this study chronological age was selected as the primary definition because of the facility it offered to define the target sample group and participant selection. The definition of middle age used included the ages of 40-65. Valuable information may be lost due to this elective use of age.

Navajo women were considered in this inquiry. Because different tribes have different cultural traditions, the information discovered as a result of this study may not be applicable to other Native American women. Only Navajo women living on or near

the borders of the Navajo Nation were studied. Therefore, this information may not apply to Navajo women who live off the Navajo Nation in the large urban areas of the Southwest and other parts of the world.

Definitions of Terms

Feminist interpretive inquiry: A research methodology that presumes the importance of gender in the methods used to collect data and analysis of the data (Patton, 2000, p. 129).

Middle age: Middle adulthood is defined as people born between 1939-1964. They will be between 40 and 65 in 2004.

Navajo: A person who identifies themselves as a member of the Navajo tribe.

Navajo Nation: The landmass of over 25,000 square miles located in the Four Corners area of the Southwest United States. The United States Government considers it the Navajo Nation Reservation.

Resources: Resources are those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right (e.g. self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace) or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support, and credit) (Hobfoll, 2002, p. 307).

Well-being: Refers to optimal psychological functioning and experience (Ryan & Deci, 2001p. 141).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Well-Being

One goal of most people at every stage of life is to be happy. Happiness is a very subjective feeling and is not necessarily based on material things. A person in the direst straits can report being happy, and someone with all the wealth in the world may report being unhappy. Happiness has been studied by many people and under many different names one of which is well-being. Well-being has also been defined as quality of life (Kahn & Juster, 2002; Kastle, Wilhem & Reed, 2002), the good life (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999), and being happy and fulfilling a purpose in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Psychological well-being has been the construct most often used when discussing happiness. Some researchers have even stated that happiness and psychological well-being are synonymous (Cheng & Furham, 2003).

Well-being is subjective in nature and therefore depends on every aspect of the individual. Kahneman et al. (1999) believe that the study of the good life needs to start with the overall cultural and social context of the individual. They suggested that the definition of happiness is culturally based; however, the individual's subjective sense of well-being is what determines true happiness. Individuals draw on a wide variety of

information when asked to assess the subjective quality of their lives (Schwarz & Strack, 1999). Subjective well-being involves a judgment made by individuals based on many factors including comparisons with the cultural ideal, individual aspirations, comparison with other people, and with the individual's own past. Other components of this construct are the factors of mood states, temperament, personality, attributional style and self-esteem.

Kahn and Juster (2002) believe subjective well-being may not be the best measure of well-being because what the individual uses to judge well-being is biased due to assimilation, transient moods, social acceptability and silent comparison with others. Some research suggests there should be an objective measurement, that both subjective and objective factors are needed. (Kahn & Juster, 2002 ; Kahneman et al., 1999). The objective measurements would include the environment, neighborhood and the community in which people live, the work they do and the income they earn. For this inquiry there will be no formal study of the objective factors of well-being. However, life on the Navajo Nation presents many challenges to the well-being of women from this objective perspective.

Cowen (1991) contended that what constitutes well-being changes for different age groups and life circumstances. For adults, the key sources of influence that shape well-being become more numerous and complex. Some factors also take on different weights as aging takes place; for value for example placed on health increases as one ages. Besides age, well-being may be different for women, in particular middle aged women. Well-being has been defined by middle aged women as a balance and integration of physical, social, emotional and spiritual elements of life; harmony and stability with

family and close relationships; support, empathy and connection with friends and within communities; equality, power, respect; and living within a society that values people, relationships and diversity (Kasle, et al., 2002).

Keyes and Lopez (2002) identified and defined six personal characteristics associated with well-being. They are:

Autonomy: self-determining, independent, and regulate behavior internally; resist social pressure to think and act in certain ways; evaluate self by personal standards.

Personal Growth: have feeling of continued development and potential and are open to new experiences; feel increasingly knowledgeable and effective.

Environmental Mastery: feel competent and able to manage a complex environment; choose or create personally suitable contexts.

Purpose in Life: have goals and a sense of direction in life; present and past life are meaningful; hold beliefs that give purpose to life.

Positive Relations with Others: have warm satisfying, trusting relationships; are concerned about others' welfare; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understand give-and-take of human relationships.

Self-Acceptance: possess positive attitude toward the self; acknowledge and accept multiple aspects of self; feel positive about past life. (p. 49)

There are also cultural nuances to well-being. In most Eastern cultures well-being is associated with harmony or a balance in people's lives. For Native American cultures, the concept of harmony is also prevalent (Garrett, 1999). The Navajo concept of hozho would be equivalent to the western thought of well-being. Hozho is loosely translated as

"walking in beauty." For a person to walk in beauty, the physical, spiritual, social, and environmental aspects of their lives must be in balance. The basic premise is that all things are interrelated and interdependent, and maintain a balanced relationship within this universe; which is the ultimate requirement for hozho. This is the basis for the Navajo world view. Restoring and keeping harmony is the rationale for many ceremonies, rituals, and health practices.

In summary, well-being is a goal towards which everyone that everyone strives It has been defined by many names and is being defined in this research as “optimal psychological functioning and experience” (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142). This concept is subjective and is influenced by age and culture. Six concepts have been identified that are associated with well-being; they are autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations with others and self- acceptance. Well-being is difficult to measure and these defining qualities indicate well-being. Well-being is linked to the ability to cope with all that life has to offer and resilience is one concept used to explain this ability.

There are two major approaches to resilience. The variable focused approach examines the links among characteristics of the individual, the environment and the event to figure out what is responsible for good adaptation (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 77). The person-focused model explores resilient people and tries to understand what qualities they have that others who are not adjusting well to the same event don't have. Both approaches are supported and used to understand resilience.

The American Psychological Association (2003) defined resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even

significant sources of stress such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors" (p. 1). Ryff, Singer, Love, and Essex (1998) also defined resilience as "the maintenance, recovery, or improvement in mental and physical functioning following a challenge" (p. 74). Their definition includes the chance of improvement and growth after an event that compromised growth. It is through challenges and adaptation of goals and goal seeking strategies that growth takes place. Masten and Reed (2002) stated the same outcome for growth and adaptation to the challenge. They defined resilience as "a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk" (p. 75). The criteria used to determine positive adaptation are that the individual is doing well, using appropriate measures, and that the quality of adaptation is positive overall psychological well-being.

The factors that contribute to resilience can be classified as protective factors, resources and assets. These terms are used somewhat synonymously in the research and are defined as characteristics that predict positive outcomes. The resources can be human, social, or material. Protective factors are those things that enable a person to have a positive outcome in the face of adversity. These protective factors can be within the individual, in the family or in the community.

Masten (2001) related in her article "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Process in Development" that resilience appears to be a common phenomenon and results in most cases from the "operation of basic human adaptation systems" (p. 277). The four global factors associated with resilience in children are: children's connections to competent and

caring adults in the family and community; cognitive and self-regulation skills; positive views of self; and motivation to be effective in the environment.

These factors can be extrapolated to adults. The American Psychological Association (2003) in its publication, *The Road to Resilience*, stated that primary factors in resilience are having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family; a positive view of oneself; skills in communication and problem solving; the capacity to make plans and take steps to carry them out; and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

Hobfoll (2002) has done work with resources in relation to stress and has developed a conservation of resources theory in relation to dealing with adversity. For Hobfoll, resources are defined as “those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends” (p. 307). Resources are divided into four categories that include object resources, personal resources, condition resources and energy resources. Object resources include resources that have a physical presence such as a home or a car. Personal resources include occupational skills, leadership ability, self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy and hope. Condition resources entail health, employment, marriage and seniority. These conditions allow access to other resources. The last category is energy resources, which derive their value from the ability to be exchanged for resources in other categories. These resources include money, knowledge and credit. Hobfoll's conservation of resource theory proposes that people seek to obtain, retain and protect resources. Stress occurs when resources are lost or threatened with loss. Discomfort also happens when there is a failure to gain resources especially after a large resource investment.

In summary resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of challenges. The APA (2003) has delineated factors that contribute to resilience. These include having a caring and supportive relationship, positive self esteem, skills in communication and problem solving and the ability to manage strong feelings. These factors are also known as resources. The conservation of resource theory states that people become stressed when resources are lost or threatened with loss. People entering middle age start to experience many changes and loss of resources in the form of health problems, death of parents and friends and for the first time a sense of personal mortality. Thus the process of managing resources in middle age, the contribution of culture to this process, and the impact of gender form the basis for this study.

Gender and Resources

There appears to be a relationship between gender and resources. In particular there is some evidence women may have different views of resources. Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis and Jackson (2003) studied resource changes and the stress process among 714 inner city women. The women were between 16 and 29 years of age. The women were interviewed and completed measurement tools twice, nine months apart. What the authors discovered was that both loss and gain of personal and social resources were related to change in depressive mood and anger. Resource loss was associated with increased emotional distress and resource gain was related to decrease emotional distress. They also discovered that increased material loss resulted in increased anger and depressive mood.

Glazer and colleagues (2002) focused on predictors, moderators and outcome variables associated with transition to midlife. This was a longitudinal study that followed 160 midlife women for 18 months. The authors described the sample as “a community-based healthy group of midlife women” (p. 616). The major question researched was, “is there a combination of resource deficits that put midlife Caucasian and African American women at high risk for anxiety, depression and lack of participation in health promotion activities?”(p. 615). The authors discovered the best predictor of anxiety and depression at each time period was the loss of resources in the form of personal characteristic resources such as self-esteem and mastery. Other key variables that were consistent predictors of anxiety were "women with lower coping effectiveness, lower educational levels and more resource loss or threats of resource loss" (p. 626). Positive attitudes towards menopause and high level of coping effectiveness led to high levels of health promotion activities.

Moen (1997) also investigated resilience in women. She used a longitudinal design to examine a life-course approach to women's resilience. Moen reviewed the findings of a study that interviewed 427 women who were wives and mothers in a medium sized New York city in 1956. Three hundred and thirteen of these women were later reinterviewed in 1986. There were four cohorts determined by birth year. The ages for the first interviews ranged from 23 to 51 years, for the second interviews the ages ranged from 53 years to 81 years. The researchers found that social and psychological resources constituted protective factors that enhanced resilience of the women as they approached and moved through later years of adulthood. The social resources were in the form of integration into multiple roles and the psychological resources were self-esteem

and life satisfaction. The best predictor of adequate psychological and social resources was previous psychological and social resources in the form of multiple role occupancy. The author called this a "cumulation of advantage" (p. 148). This means that women with social and psychological resources in the 1950s are the most likely to possess the same resources 30 years later. The conclusion the author made was that early experience has long term consequences and that development persists throughout adulthood. This development is shaped both by individual choices and social forces.

Women can clearly articulate challenges and resources. Studies have indicated that resource loss results in increased emotional distress. Moreover there is some evidence that resources are influenced by gender, especially the resources of self-esteem and mastery. This influence continues throughout adulthood. This study will focus on women's perceptions of resources.

Midlife Experience and Well-Being

Research concerning women and middle age has tended to concentrate on menopause symptomology that accompanies midlife. From a biomedical research perspective the only middle aged women seen in a clinical setting were those having major menopausal symptoms and pathology (Nolan, 1986). Due to this limited focus on midlife, menopause has been viewed as the dominant factor of midlife for women. Negative stereotypes have been perpetuated. These stereotypes include emotional lability, grieving over lost youth, empty nest syndrome and the fear of aging. Well populations of middle aged women were not researched until the late 1980s.

Nolan (1986) focused on an integrative approach to the health of midlife women in her research. She reported that there are physical changes and a majority of women do experience vasomotor symptoms but it is not an inevitable time of increased depression or nervous symptomology. Midlife also heralds a variety of transitions including changes in parental and marital roles, care and death of aging parents, and loss of a spouse through death or divorce. Midlife can be a time of life for growth or a time of dissatisfaction. No one factor distinguishes those who age well from those who do not. Therefore, multiple factors need to be taken into consideration when the health and well-being of middle aged women are considered.

Lippert (1997) took a similar stand that multiple factors determine the transition to midlife for women. In her review of the literature, Lippert focused on menopause, the post parental period and role transitions. She offered a caveat that the majority of research on middle aged women has been done on women who are white, married to men and have children; therefore, many of the "generalizations drawn about women at midlife are only generalizable to women who fit a rather narrow profile" (p. 18).

In her review, Lippert (1997) stated there is no one answer for how women react to menopause, post parental role or other role transitions. Individual variables include cultural, social, emotional and hormonal influences, and all come into play for women experiencing midlife. She stated that "as more women at midlife tell their stories and have them listened to and affirmed, appreciation of the complexity of women's midlife transition will surely deepen" (p. 22).

In an effort to better understand women's life experiences, some researchers have used a qualitative approach. Howell (2001) used a naturalistic inquiry to explore this

question with women between the ages of 35-60. The 18 participants in the study were divided into two focus groups. Each group met once a month for three months and then met once in a combined meeting. The researcher was the facilitator and opened each discussion with a general question concerning middle age. Using a grounded theory approach, a model emerged describing these women's perspective on midlife. The study found that for these women, "the goal of midlife is to achieve satisfaction by aligning three aspects of their lives: their behavior, their life circumstances and their unique hierarchies of values" (p. 7). This goal is achieved by a process of each woman clarifying her values (relationships, material circumstances and health) and examining her life circumstances in the context of those values. During midlife women are often simultaneously fine tuning the relationships between their values, circumstances and behaviors relative to many aspects of their lives.

Howell repeated this study with a few changes a few years later. Howell and Beth (2002) brought 11 women between the ages of 40 and 60 from an urban setting into a focus group. This group met four times and discussed the question, "what is it like being middle aged?" Using a grounded theory approach, the model that emerged from this study was a three-stage process that involved changes in many areas of the women's lives. The first stage was rejecting social stereotypes. During this stage the women engaged in awareness of midlife changes and the denial of the label middle-aged. Stage two was titled exploring midlife realities and during this stage, the women mourned midlife losses, clarified personal values and searched for information to help with transitions. The last stage, adjusting attitudes, behaviors and circumstances saw the women engaged in trial and error adjustments and reaching acceptable levels of

satisfaction. The researchers theorize that women go through these stages and associated with each stage are deep emotions and a shift in attitudes until they experience an acceptable level of emotional comfort. The women in the study were concentrating on balancing their priorities. Howell and Beth concluded that middle aged women "ultimately enjoyed being middle-aged" (p. 204). They enjoyed being less influenced by other people's opinions, were more self-assured and had more time to enjoy themselves.

Another study done by Wood and Mitchell (1999) included 131 women between 35 and 55 years of age. They were interviewed over the telephone and responded to a series of open-ended questions about midlife, themselves and their roles. The researchers found that the women's most common image of midlife was the image of getting older. They also associated changes to their physical bodies, emotions, feelings about being older, outlook on life and changes in relationships to midlife. The women expressed the centrality of personal achievement and employment in their lives. The authors commented "the women did not seem to be trying to figure out what to do with the rest of their lives. They were still juggling the demands of integrating work and family responsibilities" (p. 7).

Clearly there are a number of challenges facing women at midlife. Some of these challenges are objective and others are subjective. This study will focus on the use of strengths women possess and the resources they use to meet the challenges.

Culture and Well-Being

Another factor that impacts well-being and resilience is culture. Culture provides the arena where values, attitudes and beliefs about life are transmitted. Culture was mentioned by some authors as a protective factor for resilience (Masten & Reed, 2002). Walters and Simoni (2002) developed a stress-coping model for Native American women that looks at culture as a major buffer or resource that mediates stress and effects health outcomes. The women who cope successfully with the stressors of life on the reservation, being Native American and being a woman are those that have a cultural buffer. These are the women who identify themselves as Native American, who have encultured themselves with their identity, use spiritual methods of coping, and firmly immerse themselves in traditional health practices. The aforementioned factors may have intrinsic benefits that are connected to positive health outcomes.

These outcomes include women's attitudes and beliefs about midlife. Buck and Gottlieb (1991) explored the meaning of midlife within a group of Mohawk women. An exploratory, descriptive design, using a grounded theory approach was used to investigate the meaning of the midlife experience. Eight women who lived on a Mohawk Indian Reservation in Canada were interviewed. The women ranged in age from 45 to 54 years. The women were interviewed three times in their homes over a period of three months. The major theme that emerged was that of time. The four major categories were: it is time to satisfy my needs; being where I should be; personal time for myself; and my time spent meaningfully (pp. 45-47). Seven women described midlife as a time for redirecting or shifting priorities from meeting the needs of others to satisfying their own needs. This

shift was related to the children leaving home or as what was due, given the women's stage of life. Five of the women viewed midlife as a time for reflecting on and summing up past and present accomplishments along the life continuum. They felt they were "where they should be" (p. 46). Three felt that they were not where they should be and saw midlife as a time to begin to get there.

Personal time was a recurring issue for all eight women. This personal time had a quantitative component and a qualitative component and a common theme was quantitative, not enough time. The last category of time was time spent meaningfully. Seven felt their time was spent meaningfully, indicating activities that were interesting and that contributed to achieving important goals.

The women who described shifting priorities to themselves, having enough personal time, being where they should be developmentally, having meaningful experiences were in synchrony. Those who were out of synchrony experienced midlife as either a challenge or a threat. The authors concluded that "the conceptualization of time is important in understanding the development of women at midlife" (Buck & Gottlieb, 1991, p. 49). The time sense of the women involved in this study may be related to their experiences within the Mohawk culture. Culture had an influence on their well-being at mid life.

Well-being is a central concept in health. It is subjective; therefore, measuring this concept is difficult. It is known that well-being changes with age and life circumstances. There is some research suggesting that women experience well-being a little different than men. Well-being is also experienced differently in different cultures. Christoph and Noll (2003) studied well-being in different countries and found there are differences in

subjective well-being that remain unexplained. They concluded, “thus there is good reason to assume that both, objective living conditions as well as factors like value orientation, national characteristics or cultural traits are needed to explain differences in satisfaction” (p. 218). This research focused on middle aged Navajo women living on the Navajo Nation, and will add data to both the gender and cultural issues surrounding well-being. It explored the distinctiveness of the Navajo’s concept of hozho.

CHAPTER 3

Methodological Approach

A qualitative research methodology was selected for this inquiry. The goal of this research was to better understand well-being of Navajo women. Due to the subjective nature of well-being, a qualitative methodology allowed for the interpretation of the rich descriptions obtained during the interview process. Campbell (1981) in his book *The Sense of Well-being in America* stated:

It is self-evident that the only sources of information from which we can learn something directly about the feeling of life is the individual person; the man or woman who is living the life is the only one who can tell us how it feels. The feeling of well-being or ill being is a private experience, and we can only learn about it if the person is willing to tell us about it. (p. 16)

The data collected and interpreted were words that are the staple of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9). The end goal of the inquiry included explaining what was observed. The inductive approach was taken, and from systematic analysis of the data that is grounded in fieldwork, a preliminary theory emerged. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study of well-being in middle aged Navajo women included the resources and strengths that allowed middle-aged Navajo women to meet the challenges of living on the

Navajo Nation. A naturalistic approach using feminist interpretive inquiry was used to examine how middle aged Navajo women make sense of midlife and how they use this experience to make their lives meaningful. A feminist interpretive inquiry allowed for a sense of connectedness and equality between researcher and the participant. The research was executed by a middle aged woman with other middle aged women. The feminist interpretive approach allowed women to interpret their own lived experiences. This form of inquiry allowed the focus on empowerment and strengths because "it assumes [that] respondents are respected informants and almost guarantees that respondent strengths and capacities will be explicitly or implicitly captured" (Rapp, Kisthard, Gowdy, & Hanson, 1994, p. 382).

The overall goal of any research is to better understand some phenomenon. This study increased the understanding of the experiences of middle aged Navajo women living on the Navajo Nation. Understanding the resources that women use to meet the challenges added to the body of knowledge concerning well-being and resilience. With this understanding the research findings can be used to reinforce the resources that are used by middle aged Navajo women for well-being. The findings also identified which resources the women use that are not being addressed by the Navajo Nation or the current social or mental health care agencies.

Participants

A purposeful sampling method was used to interview 15 middle aged Navajo women who live on the Navajo Nation or around its borders. The participants were between the ages of 42 and 62. The primary site of the interviews was the Crownpoint Chapter of the Navajo Nation. This chapter is in the western part of New Mexico and on the Eastern edge of the Navajo Nation.

A series of gatekeepers were used to recruit participants. The first gatekeepers were my key informants. The key informants were two women of the religious order of the Sister of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. They have lived and worked in Crownpoint for the past 20 years. The Sisters are the administrators for the Catholic Church in Crownpoint. These key informants recommended several additional gatekeepers. The gatekeepers included a Chapter official, a school psychologist, and several educators who have lived and worked in Crownpoint and had knowledge of the community. These gatekeepers provided a list of potential participants that met the criteria and whom they thought would contribute to the study. I then selected potential participants from the lists. This process assured confidentiality of the participants and maximized the variability of the study group. The use of several sources for lists of potential participants prevented using people whom all knew and recommended each other. The participants were remunerated \$20 for their time and involvement.

Data Collection

The participants were interviewed following a semi-structured process. There were key questions arising from the literature that guided the discussion and from there the conversation was influenced by the life experiences of the participants. Each woman's stories informed the process; therefore, the questions emerged from their responses. As is typical with qualitative methods the questions evolved; however, they remained focused on well-being, resources and strengths.

During every interview the following key questions were asked. In addition, for every question there were a variety of potential prompts (see Appendix B).

Interview Questions

1. Describe what it is like to be a woman living on the Navajo Nation.
2. How would you describe yourself to others? How did you come to be this person?
3. As you think about your life, what is going well for you? Why do you think that is so?
4. What do you like about being the age you are now? What do you dislike?
5. Many women experience a number of challenges throughout their lives. What makes you strong in the face of challenges?
6. What are you looking forward to in the next decades?

Audio Recording

Audio recordings were made of the interview. I generated the transcriptions of the audio recordings as soon after the actual interview as possible. Most interviews were transcribed before the next interview took place. The Sony Memory Stick Voice Editor and WAV Pedal software were used to facilitate the transcriptions. The participants decided if the audio tape recordings were destroyed or archived according to the guidelines from the Navajo Nation Institutional Review Board. None of the women asked that their interview recording be destroyed. All consented to the archiving of the recordings, according to the procedures set out by the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board. The original recordings are in the possession of the Navajo Nation Research Review Board. Field notes were also taken during the interview. After each interview I wrote journal notes to record reflections about the experience.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was guided by “the intent to capture descriptive stories of the participants’ experiences to increase understanding rather than provide explanations” (Jansen & Davis, 1998, p. 303). The analysis of the data began with the first interview and continued throughout the research process. The transcripts were examined and summary sheets were developed for each participant. From this activity, categories and patterns unfolded and were written on cards with the supporting data from the transcripts. As additional interviews revealed the same patterns, those words were added to the cards.

As the analysis continued, themes emerged. The overarching framework of well-being, resources, gender, and culture acted as a guide.

At this point, the peer debriefer, who was my dissertation advisor, was involved in the analysis. The peer debriefer had experience in qualitative research. Transcripts were sent as the data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded. E-mails and phone conversations concerning the data collection and the analysis followed. After all the interviews had taken place, the peer debriefer and I met for a day. During that working visit much was accomplished in assisting me understand the data. The framework that emerged from that data and the discussions on that day were used to guide the completion of the analysis. The peer debriefer also assisted me in understanding my feelings about the research and how it was progressing.

Ethical Considerations

A consent form was used (Appendix A). The consent form language and content was in compliance with the Institutional Review Boards of Oklahoma State University and the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board . The consent form included the purpose of the study, the role of the participant and the information collection process. The disposition of the audio recordings was included in the consent form. The consent form also included any risk factors involved with the study. These included the possibility that the interviews may prompt uncomfortable feelings of anger and sadness.

Confidentiality of the participants was assured. Pseudonyms were used to render the participants anonymous. The audio recordings and the transcripts were kept in the

possession of the researcher and maintained in a secured place. Only the dissertation advisor, the participant, and myself read the transcripts.

I did not anticipate any harm to the participant and every safeguard to protect them was engaged. The questions asked in the interview did not purposefully embarrass or cause discomfort. The consent form explained that the participant could stop the interview at any time without consequence. If the participant felt uncomfortable or became emotional, as evidenced by crying, when a topic was being discussed, the interview would end. This occurred twice. Both women were discussing tragic events surrounding their sons.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data and analysis and credibility was established in more than one way. Prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing were the techniques used in this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). There was a prolonged engagement during the study. During the past seven years I have accompanied students from Newman University in Wichita, Kansas, to the Crownpoint area for service trips. Throughout those trips there has been interaction with the residents during work projects, dinners and conversations over cups of coffee. During the data collection phase, I lived in Crownpoint. Participant observation and informal conversations were done during the day to day contact with the women. These contacts included attending Chapter meetings; participating in the work of the parish, which included preparing and delivering food boxes, assisting at the clothing shop, and providing transportation for those in need. I also

took part in preparing food and participating in community potluck dinners.

Conversations with the women also took place at chance meetings at the grocery store, post office and church. A hallmark of feminist interpretive inquiry is the trusting relationship that develops between the researcher and the participant. This relationship was fostered by my involvement in the community.

Member checking added to the trustworthiness of the analysis. Guba and Lincoln state member checking “is the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 239). Member checking is the process of whereby the participants have an opportunity to give their input into the data and its interpretation. This procedure allows the participants to correct errors of fact or interpretation. The process also can verify that the interpretation has reflected the participant’s perceptions. Member checking also informs the researcher of sections that may be problematic for either personal or political reasons. The end result of the member checking is growth in everyone’s understanding of the phenomena of well-being in middle aged Navajo women.

The process of member checking was ongoing during the data collection and analysis phase of the research. It was formal and informal. At the end of all the interviews and after preliminary analysis had been completed the participants were invited to a focus group. Two focus groups were held one month after the interviews were completed. Half the women were invited to each focus group. Three women participated in the first focus group and four women attended the second meeting. The preliminary analysis was shared with the women and their input was sought. Most of the responses confirmed the analysis and the women were able to add their understanding to the analysis. The conversations at the focus groups became story telling and the women added data about their lives and

growing up on the Navajo Nation. The conversations lasted two hours for each group.

The women were also kept apprised of the progress of the research by four update letters that were sent during the analysis and writing phase of the research.

As noted earlier, peer debriefing was also an important part of the research process and served to establish trustworthiness. The process of peer debriefing is a means for the researcher, who has become immersed in the data, to have an outsider examine the findings. The process is akin to an audit. The peer debriefer, who was my dissertation advisor, read the transcripts and field notes and scrutinized the subsequent analysis and interpretation. The debriefer determined if the analysis and interpretation were supported by the data. The peer debriefer also “poses searching questions in order to help the evaluator understand his or her own posture and values and their role in the inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). This process was an on going process throughout the research project.

CHAPTER 4

Dialectics of Well-Being

The participants in this research inquiry were 15 middle aged Navajo women who live in and around Crownpoint, New Mexico. The youngest woman interviewed was 42 years old and the oldest was 62 years old, but the majority of the women were in their 50's. Their backgrounds varied and their lifestyles were unique; however, they did have some characteristics in common. They were all bilingual and for a majority of the women Navajo was their first language. All the women completed high school or earned a GED, and 11 of them went on for post secondary education. Everyone had been married at some time in her life. All the women were mothers and all but two had grandchildren. The entire group was employed or self-employed. All the participants were content to be living in this area of western New Mexico. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the demographics, educational level and employment of the participants.

The following paragraphs will introduce the women who were interviewed. The participants are arranged by the order of interviews. These sketches will allow the reader to become familiar with the women and their unique life. Pseudonyms are being used to assure the anonymity of the participants. All precautions were taken to protect the identity of the participant.

Mary

Mary is 50 years old. She was born in New Mexico and is the middle child in a family of 12. Mary grew up speaking Navajo at home and helped the family by herding sheep, fixing the wool, making and cooking fry bread. Mary was taught Navajo traditions while growing up which included taking out corn pollen in the morning, standing to the east to pray in the evening, and facing west and praying. She attended many ceremonies as a child. Mary also attended public school. She has been married for over 30 years and has four children. Her youngest son is in elementary school. The other children are grown and out of the home. Mary is expecting her first grandchild this fall.

Mary is an administrative assistant and has been at her current job for many years. Community service is something that Mary and her husband believe is important. Her husband is involved in politics and both are committed to health and environmental causes in the Navajo Nation. Unfortunately, health problems have been plaguing Mary the last few years.

Ann

Ann is 48 years old. She grew up the oldest of six children. Ann's parents had jobs so her paternal grandmother took care of them. She grew up speaking Navajo and listened to her grandmother and learned how to go out into the world. Ann attended public school and had dreams of college and a career. Then she met the love of her life, got married and began having children. Ann says she's now living her dreams through her sons, her nieces and nephews. There are three sons in the family. The youngest is in

college, the middle son works out of town and the eldest lives with Ann and her husband. There is one grandson who is her pride and joy.

Ann is self employed. She and her husband run a business in town. Due to a chronic health condition, Ann is in considerable pain most of the time. Medication and her trust in the Lord are what help her get through the day.

Joan

Joan is 49 years old. She grew up in a rural area of the Nation with eight siblings. As a child she herded sheep and helped with chores around the house. Navajo was the language spoken at home and Navajo traditions were practiced. Joan attended public school and when she was a sophomore in her words she, “got away from home” and attended a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding school about 50 miles away. After high school Joan attended Business College and landed a secretarial job in a large city in the region. After a time her mother asked her to come home and she did. She met her first husband and had a child. The marriage didn’t work so she divorced him and fought for and kept custody of their child. Joan met a loving man and has been living with him for the last 23 years. They had three children together. The youngest is in elementary school and the others are grown. There are also grandchildren in the family who enjoy visiting with Joan at their ranch where they keep horses, cows and sheep. Ranch is the term used to describe the Navajo family home and a small acreage where a family keeps livestock. For the last 23 years Joan has worked for the BIA at one of their community schools.

Susan

Susan, at 42 years old, was the youngest woman interviewed. Susan grew up in a very rural area with 11 siblings and many stepsiblings. Navajo was spoken in the home and her father was a medicine man. Susan remembers the Mormon truck that used to come around and pick up the children around the area and bring them to a Mormon activity center by the trading post. The children would play sports, watch movies and hang out. When Susan was in the third grade her parents signed her up for Mormon placement. This was a program the Mormons had that took Navajo children from the Navajo Nation and bused them to Utah. There the children lived with foster families and attended public school in Utah. The children were also taught the teachings of the Church of the Latter Day Saints and while in Utah practiced that faith. Susan spent her academic career from 4th to 10th grade in Utah. Spending her summer at home on the Navajo Nation was tough for Susan. It was hard reconciling what she had learned in the Anglo world with the world of her parents' especially when it came to the role of a woman. Susan's mother expected her to take care of the home and cook for her brothers, but Susan wanted to play sports. Due to a family tragedy Susan left Utah and finished her high school career in her hometown. Even with the issues that came from living in two worlds, Susan believes her placement was the best thing to happen to her because of the excellent education she received in Utah and the exposure to the western world. After high school Susan earned a degree from the Navajo Community College (now called Dine College) where she played sports. After college, Susan began working for the Navajo Nation. She has been doing that for the last 20 years.

Susan's first marriage ended in divorce after 12 years and she has since remarried. There is a daughter from the first marriage who is in high school and a son who is two from the current marriage. Susan says that the scariest moment of her life was when she found out she was pregnant at 41. She had a lot of mixed feelings about the pregnancy but is very glad about the results.

Cheryl

Cheryl is 56 years old and grew up in a rural area of the Nation. Navajo was her first language and she began learning English when she attended the BIA boarding school. Cheryl's academic career from kindergarten through high school was spent at BIA boarding schools. In high school the children lived at the Indian School but attended public high school in Albuquerque. When she looks back on her boarding school experience Cheryl says there were good and some bad times. She does credit boarding school with instilling in her with a love of reading and writing and showing her that there is a whole open world outside of her little town. Cheryl went on to complete a Bachelor's degree and is a semester away from finishing her Master's degree – both in special education. Cheryl is a special education teacher at the elementary school level at a BIA elementary community school.

Cheryl has been widowed for the last 15 years. She has three children who are grown and out of the house. She is waiting for grandchildren; however, her children are not cooperating. Cheryl acknowledges that they are focused on their careers, but she accuses them of being selfish.

Rose

Rose just turned 55 in June. She grew up in a small town on the Navajo Nation with three sisters and four stepsiblings. Navajo and English were spoken at home. From third grade through high school Rose attended boarding school. It was not a good period of her life. She describes it as agonizing and thanks God she survived. After high school Rose lived in a large city in the region and began working for the federal government. She met her husband there, married and moved to the Nation. Rose was also able to transfer to a government job. In total, she has been employed by the federal government for 35 years.

Rose has been widowed since 1987. She has three sons; the youngest is a teenager and the other two are grown and out of the house. She is the proud grandmother of a granddaughter and a grandson. She was diagnosed with diabetes in 2000 and it took a while for her to accept the disease. She now takes oral medications and tries to remember to check her blood sugar daily.

Luci

Luci, at 62 years of age, is the oldest participant. She grew up in a small rural area of the Navajo Nation with 10 siblings. Navajo as well as English was spoken in the home. Luci's mother was a devout Christian and told her children bible stories. Luci remembers that during her childhood missionaries would visit their Hogan once a week for stories, prayer and song. They were not allowed to attend any of the Navajo ceremonies. Luci's educational career began in the small town but by fourth grade she was sent to a BIA boarding school about 60 miles away from home. Luci reflects back that her experience

was a good one because she enjoyed all her teachers and learned a lot, which included learning to behave and not get into trouble.

In the 1960's Luci married and left the boundaries of the Navajo Nation. She and her husband traveled to the upper Midwest as participants in the Indian Placement Program. The program was nationwide and included all federally recognized Native American tribes. People were sent to urban areas throughout the United States and promised employment and housing with the goal of assimilation. The hope was the participants would not return to their reservations and eventually Native Americans would dissolve into American mainstream society. And like many of the BIA's programs, this one also failed. Luci was so homesick after the birth of her first child she left her husband and returned to the Navajo Nation. Her husband followed and three more children were added to the family. But the marriage was fueled by domestic violence and alcohol and unfortunately ended in divorce. All the children are now grown and out of the house, but there are grandchildren who still live with Luci.

Luci has held a number of jobs during her adulthood. For the past two years she has been working for the Navajo Nation.

Betty

Betty is 52 years old and grew up with five siblings. Navajo was her first language and her parents taught her the Navajo way and those teachings are still with her today. She attended public school in a neighboring town and spent the first months not knowing what the teachers were saying but caught on quick. After graduation from high school Betty went looked for a job and found herself at the elementary school in town as

a teacher's aid. She never left and has been there for 30 years. For the last six years she has worked with preschool children. Betty is now working towards a degree in education. She loves her job and believes the foundation set is critical for her young students. Betty also sees her task as teaching the children values and morals needed to succeed in life.

Betty is married and has two children who are grown and out of the house. She has two grandsons who she enjoys teaching about the Navajo life ways. Betty thinks being a grandmother is wonderful and wishes she had more grandchildren.

Agnes

Agnes is 48 years old and grew up on the Nation but did not grow up knowing Navajo and did not participate in a Navajo lifestyle or in the Navajo community. Agnes attended public schools and after graduation worked various jobs. Agnes came to teaching as a career late in life and has earned a degree in education. Teaching is what Agnes loves and she is currently an elementary school teacher in a public school. As an adult, and with her children, Agnes has been learning about her culture and learning to speak Navajo. She reads the scripture in Navajo at church and gives presentations about Navajo traditions and values to the school children.

Agnes has three children at home. She and her husband are taking a breather from one another. His alcohol problem is the major factor for the separation. Living on her salary alone has made things a little tough for the family at this time.

Alice

Alice is 50 years old. She and her four siblings grew up in a rural area of the Nation, and she lived a very traditional life. There were four other children besides her siblings in the home. Alice did not go to school until she was 10 years old. She attended a BIA boarding school. Alice did not know English when she started school but caught on quickly. She eventually taught her father how to read English. Alice believes the worst thing the boarding school did to her was not let her speak Navajo.

Alice is married and has four children. The oldest is on his own and the others are in college or high school. While her children were in preschool, Alice began working as teacher's assistant at their school. She has continued with this line of work and now enjoys assisting the special education teacher at a small BIA Community School in a neighboring town.

Alice has separated from her husband due to abuse, however, they remain in contact and see each other occasionally. Respiratory health issues have been worrisome for Alice and forced a move from the country into town last year.

Margaret

Margaret is 60 years old. Her family moved to town when she was a little girl. Margaret went to school in Utah as a part of the Mormon placement, but she went home in the summer. It was difficult for Margaret being away from her family. But overall she believes she received a good education and the experience helped her overcome her shyness. After graduation from high school in Utah, Margaret moved to California and

worked in medical insurance. During this time she married. Margaret returned to the Navajo Nation when her first child was born. Her concern was who would take care of her child. Three more children were added to the family. Margaret's youngest son had a stroke and now lives with her. The other children are out of the home. There are six grandchildren and two of those Margaret and her husband have adopted. The marriage has had some rocky moments and for a while Margaret and her husband separated. They are back together and are working on their relationship.

Currently Margaret works for a social service agency on the Navajo Nation. She has been doing this type of work for 36 years and says she is ready for retirement.

Jeanette

Jeanette is 55 years old. She grew up with her two siblings out of state due to her father's employment. She attended a public school, a business school and earned two bachelor's degrees. Her parents always encouraged her to get her education so she could have a better life.

Jeanette was an educator for 25 years in the region and the last two years she worked in administration. Jeanette has been involved in Navajo politics at the Chapter level, Agency level and Nation level.

Jeanette is married and is the mother of three grown children. She has one grandson. Health wise Jeanette has had problem with arthritis and has had both knees replaced and is doing very well.

Marian

Marian is 48 years old and grew up in a very small town with three brothers and a sister. She described it as quiet with hardly anybody around. Marian's father and his uncles were medicine men and she grew up around the ceremonies and rituals of the Navajo. Marian's father and mother were also involved in tribal politics at the Chapter and Nation level. Marian hopes to follow in her parent's footsteps and become involved when she retires. Her educational journey began in a small town and at 14 she left for a three-year placement in Denver sponsored by a Baptist Church. Upon her return to the Nation, Marian finished her high school classes at the Indian School in Albuquerque. She returned to her home town to assist her father with caring for her little brother and the livestock. Marian was the unofficial veterinarian on the ranch.

During her time in high school Marian met her husband. They married right after she graduated. Marian says this is her one regret, that she didn't stay in school and follow her dream to join the armed services. Life goes on and in time they had three girls. The oldest is getting married this summer. The youngest is in college and the middle child is married and has given Marian two granddaughters.

For a while Marian stayed in her hometown and worked in early childhood education. She eventually moved to a larger town for a better paying job in the same field. This job led to her current position with a BIA Community School. Marian has been there for 12 years.

Unfortunately Marian's marriage ended in divorce about eight years ago due to long standing domestic violence. She says she finally realized she did not deserve that as well as living a life that required her to pawn her jewelry to feed her children while her

husband spent his paycheck on alcohol. She filed for divorce. She continued her education and began taking courses towards her degree.

Sharon

Sharon is 50 years old and grew up in a rural part of the Eastern Agency. She has nine siblings and two step brothers. Weaving and selling rugs was her mother's source of income. Sharon, the one in the middle, remembers cooking for all 10 boys and credits that experience to her leaving home and living with her boyfriend whom she eventually married. Sharon attended public school and has gone on for a bachelor's and two master's degrees in education. Sharon credits her graduate career as a time when she became the person she is today. Sharon currently teaches in the elementary grades at the local BIA Community School.

Sharon and her husband have three living children. The two oldest are out of the home and their youngest is in college. Due to family circumstances Sharon has custody of two of her grandchildren plus another grandson lives with them, too.

If Sharon had her choice, she would move out into the country onto family land and the family ranch. Herding sheep, raising chicken and turkeys is the retirement for her.

Claire

Claire is 59 years old and grew up off the Navajo Nation in Arizona. She and her nine siblings attended public school in Arizona. The Navajo traditions and language were not part of her growing up. After high school Claire attended secretarial school in California and lived and worked there for five years. Upon her return to the Southwest

she met and married a man who lived on the Navajo Nation. They moved to the Eastern Agency. They have three children. The oldest son lives at home. The other children are grown and are living out of state. Claire's marriage dissolved about ten years ago. Her husband left her for another woman. Claire took the divorce hard and began drinking. With the help of her children Claire turned her life around and believes she is now a better person.

Claire found a job with a governmental agency when she came to the Nation and has been there for 25 years. Claire didn't know Navajo and interacting with some of the customers was difficult so Claire learned to speak the language from her husband and his relatives. Retirement is on her mind but at this time she would rather work until she cannot work anymore. Claire loves her job.

Table 1 Demographics of the Participants

Name	Age	Marital Status	Children	Grandchildren	Lived Outside of New Mexico	Health
Susan	42	Married	2*	0	Yes	OK
Ann	48	Married	3	1	No	Major Problems
Agnes	48	Married	3*	0	Yes	OK
Marian	48	Divorced	3	2*	Yes	Migraines/Arthritis
Joan	49	Divorced	4*	1	Yes	OK
Mary	50	Married	4*	0	No	Major Problems
Alice	50	Separated	4*	2	No	Asthma
Sharon	50	Married	4	4*	Yes	Diabetes
Betty	52	Married	2	2	No	OK
Rose	55	Widow	3*	2	Yes	Diabetes
Jeanette	55	Married	3	1	Yes	Arthritis
Cheryl	56	Widow	3	0	No	OK
Claire	59	Divorced	3*	Many*	Yes	Diabetes
Margaret	60	Married	4*	6*	Yes	Diabetes
Luci	62	Divorced	4*	0	Yes	Diabetes/Hypertension

* Caring for children or grandchildren at home

Table 2 Education and Employment of Participants

Name	Elementary School	High School	College	Highest Degree	Employment
Susan	Mormon Placement	Public School	Tribal College	Associate Degree	Manager Social Services
Ann	Public School	Public School	No	High School Dip	Self Employed
Agnes	Public School	Public School	State College	Bachelors Degree	Educator
Marian	Bureau of Indian Affairs(BIA)Boarding School	Christian Placement (3 years), BIA Boarding School (2years)	No	High School Dip	Social Services
Joan	Public School	BIA Boarding School	Business College	High School Dip	Administrative Assistant
Mary	Public School	Public School	No	High School Dip	Administrative Assistant
Alice	BIA Boarding School	BIA Boarding School	No	High School Dip	Paraprofessional in Education
Sharon	Public School	Public School	State College	Masters Degree	Educator
Betty	Public School	Pub School	No	High School Dip	Paraprofessional in Education
Rose	BIA Boarding School	BIA Boarding School	No	High School Dip	Administrative Assistant
Jeanette	Public School	Public School	State College	Bachelors Degree	Educator
Cheryl	BIA Boarding School	BIA Boarding School	State College	Bachelors Degree	Educator
Claire	Public School	Public School	Secretarial School	High School Dip	Administrative Assistant
Margaret	Mormon Placement	Mormon Placement	Tribal College	Associate Degree	Administrative Assistant
Luci	BIA Boarding School	BIA Boarding School	No	GED	Social Services

A Dialectic Framework

These 15 women were interviewed and asked questions relating to their well-being. Their answers have been analyzed and themes have emerged. The major themes fall into a framework of a dialectic between challenges and resources. These challenges and resources are in opposition, creating a tension, but through gradual changes over time the challenges transform into resources. This tension reflects a dialectic, which is defined as two opposing forces that through gradual change lead to turning points where one opposite overcomes the other. This continues to happen until something new is created. The change happens because there is tension between the opposing forces. The tension is the catalyst needed to produce efforts to make change happen. The turning points are the opportunities that present themselves the women took advantage of to implement change. The capability of these women to transform the challenges into resources by middle age is key to their well-being. Not all the women have been completely successful at this change for all their challenges, but all have successfully met challenges and have transformed many challenges into resources. As the women age more challenges present themselves and are being met.

Subsequent to challenges/resources lies many other opposing dialectics. The overarching force that has emerged is stability/instability. Achieving stability in various domains of their lives is what drives the women. For example these women grew up in the instability of poverty and as middle-aged adults are now living in financial stability. Changes over the years lead to turning points in their lives, (such as education, employment and determination) that enabled the women to make decisions that resulted

in reaching financial stability in middle age. The dialectics discussed in the following pages, using the words of the women interviewed, are economic status, work, family relationships, education, middle age and health.

The Six Dialectics of Middle Age

Economic Status

The dialectic discussed in this section is economic instability/financial stability. All the women interviewed grew up in poverty or near poverty. During their lives they have made decisions that led to financial success during middle age. Money problems are still challenges that face these women but they are in better shape now to handle these situations.

During the times these women were growing up the economic situation on the Nation was difficult. Due to circumstances ranging from Federal governmental policies toward the Nation to environmental conditions, many Navajo families were scratching out a living on subsistence farming and ranching. For a few women the only source of income in the family was the selling of rugs woven by their mothers or grandmothers. Therefore, growing up in poverty was a common theme that emerged from the interviews and an impetus in later life to gain financial stability. The circumstances ranged from abject poverty to families trying to make ends meet with both parents working at low-end low wage jobs. A few women grew up comfortably by Navajo Nation standards of the times but none would ever say their families were well off according to Anglo standards.

Many of the women grew up without running water or electricity, which was not unusual for the times, and where they lived in very rural areas of the Nation.

Claire remembers her childhood and how her family tried to make ends meet. “*We were short on our food sometimes and my Dad would try his best to keep up with the fields, buy clothes for us. Ten kids in the family.*” She recalled how they all slept in a two bedroom trailer,

We had only one bunk bed. My brothers used to sleep two on top and two on the bottom. And then the roll away bed we had three of the girls sleep on there. And then the baby and then the next baby they used to sleep with my Mom and Dad in their room and the rest would sleep in the living room on the fold out couch.

[Claire]

As Claire reminisced about growing up in a poor family she said, “*It was just the way it was. You know what was given to you and you take it.*”

Poverty, while a challenge in and of itself, also gave rise to several associated challenges for the women in this study. Lack of stability in housing was a way of life for some of the women. For many men living on the Nation at the time, wage-earning work was hard to find and usually required moving around the region. Some families stayed on the Nation as the husband went from job to job. Other families, like Jeanette’s, followed the husband and had very unstable living conditions. Jeanette remembers financial hardships growing up as the family followed her uranium miner father to different jobs. She said “*we were just living in any makeshift place to work in but my Dad was making barely enough to support, there were three kids.*” Thus being poor also resulted in

unstable and challenging living conditions that ultimately impacted these women's sense of well-being.

Not all the women in this study had unstable living conditions while growing up as their families lived on family ranches that were situated on the frontier, (as defined by the population density), in isolated areas of the Nation. However, the isolation associated with living on the frontier presented other challenges. For example, getting from one place to another took effort and money. Rose's parents were so poor she had to stay at boarding school during holidays and breaks because there was no money to pay for transportation to bring her home and then back again. She said "*I guess we were so down right like poverty kind of living wise.*"

Another consequence of poverty was looking poor and this was a concern for a few women. They felt marginalized. Acquiring clothing from missionaries or from the Nation was commonplace. Luci recalled getting clothes from the missionaries and the clothes did not fit in with the kind of attire worn on the Nation. Her clothes were too good so it was obvious she had received them from the missionaries. Luci said:

That's how come we had sort of good clothes. Nobody bought, nobody wore wool skirts or woolen caps but we got those from the church so we were pretty well dressed. But of course I was embarrassed. I used to think why can't we dress like those other girls because we were dressed differently pleated skirts, pleated wool skirts and nice shoes. [Luci]

Mary remembers getting clothes from the Nation once a year. A whole wardrobe including underwear was given to each student. It was painfully obvious who was wearing the tribal supplied clothes, even back then, because appearances mattered. Mary

recalls that the tribal supplied bras were the worst due to color and fit. Claire, who grew up in a family of 10 siblings recollected,

One of us or maybe two or three of us would get a pair of shoes, you know, like every other year and then the next group would get another one and then clothing. [Claire]

Claire vowed then she wasn't going to raise her children the way she was raised, in poverty but was going to get a job that paid good money

The experiences these women had growing up in poverty set in motion a resolve to not live that way as an adult or raise their children in poverty. Like Claire, Jeanette set her resolve in high school when she realized, *"I want to live better than this."* Joan's response to poverty was similar. *"We grew up kind of poor in the family. So that made me, I can't be poor forever. I'll have a job."*

Through education, employment and hard work most of these women took advantage of turning points in their lives and have reached some sort of financial stability in middle age. All the women interviewed work outside of the home and all are acutely aware of the importance of their employment to the economic well being of their families. When they were all asked why they were happy, all of them in their answer said, "I have a job." Many of the women are single parents and the sole provider for their children. A majority of the women interviewed work in education. Others work for the Federal Government or for the Nation and one is self-employed. Many of the women are eligible for retirement (due to the number of years not particularly because of age). A few women will retire within five years and some of them with a governmental pension. Others are thankful for a job in a very tight job market and a job market where who you

know may be more important than what you know. Having employment also results in having a home and a vehicle, which is a necessity for living on the Nation. A few of the married women have husbands who are working and a few of the married women have husbands who are not working in full time employment for various reasons (disability, seasonal work).

Margaret sums up what many of the women felt when she said,

I always was the breadwinner in the family and I knew I had the responsibility of taking care of my family. You know who's gonna help me and it's like I've been here for 36 years (at present job). I knew I had to work. I had to take care of my family. The things that we have in our home are things that I have gotten because I have earned those things. [Margaret]

Rose, a single parent, who works for the federal government says, *"I'm more or less really dependent on that career so it gives me, you know the benefits that I need and security."*

Many of the women interviewed grew up in very poor circumstances. Their parents did all they could to give them food, clothing, shelter and an education. Wearing donated clothing, living in crowded conditions and following their fathers from job to job are some of the memories that have been recalled. The women used their experiences living in poverty to motivate them to find a way out of that situation and assure that their children would not share their childhood experiences. Now as adults all the women are employed and have reached some degree of financial stability. This stability was reached by these women finishing their education and finding stable employment. This stable employment has led to financial stability which is a major factor in the women's well

being. These women have changed the dialectic from economic instability to financial stability.

Work

In the context of work, the dialectic of stability/instability was expressed through feelings of control and autonomy over the work experience. The tension between the opposing forces of control or lack of control over work started in childhood. All the women talked about the chores they did around the house or ranch when they were young. They had the responsibility but not the control. That responsibility encouraged a work ethic that is visible today in their employment status. The autonomy that came with being in control of the work environment is seen in their longevity of employment at one job and the satisfaction experienced by their work. This is more evidence of the successful change in the dialectic to employment autonomy and stability.

Living at home involved helping the family to survive and taking on the role of the woman in a Navajo household. This included caring for younger brothers and sisters, cooking, caring for the livestock and herding sheep. Working at home was an issue for Sharon. She recalled, *"It was hard to be at home. You can't even play you had to be working all the time."* Marian echoed that remembrance. She recalled that she was responsible for so many chores at home, especially after her Mother died, that *"when I was in school it was the only time I played but at home I was a mom."* She admitted that getting married at a young age was mostly to get away from home. Sharon also admitted that caring for her brothers and stepbrothers influenced her getting married rather young. She said, *"I needed to leave from there. Especially cooking for 10 brothers."*

Almost all the women told tales of herding sheep at a young age, some as young as five years old. For most it was an adventure and a time to be out of the house and play. Mary recounted that it was a fun time but also says. “*A lot of times it wasn’t so fun when it was cold or raining or really hot.*” Losing sheep was not looked upon kindly and Mary’s comment to that was, “*You get chewed out at the end of the day.*” Marian left boarding school to return home and help her Dad with running the ranch after her mother died. She said,

My Dad wanted me to come home. I did a lot of kind of kept the house and took care of the livestock. We had cattle and sheep, horses so I was kind of like a veterinarian at home. [Marian]

Working hard is a way of life on the ranch. Many of the women had heavy responsibilities in the family from an early age. The chores when they were younger dealt with herding sheep and caring for livestock. As they got older, the responsibilities moved into the areas of keeping house, cooking and caring for siblings. Not having time or feeling like they could not take the time for fun things was common.

The hard work these women experienced when they were children laid a foundation for the work ethic they have today. All of the women are employed and many have been at their jobs for over 20 years. Claire could retire from the federal government at any time but says,

I rather work. I’m used to working all the time and I can’t stay home. I love working. I said I’ll work until I can’t work anymore. [Claire]

Ann is working two jobs to help her family’s financial situation and many of the women who are teachers have some type of contract to teach during the summer months.

Besides getting a paycheck employment also plays another role - the role of satisfying work. Many of the women stated that they love their job or they love to work. Betty, a teacher's aide in a preschool class, really enjoys teaching and sharing her values with the children. Part of the reason she enjoys her work is the response she receives from the children. She says,

They are so wonderful. They give me a lot of love, you know, after school they'll just go like this to my arm (demonstrating petting her arm) and they'll run off to their parents. Little did they know that they're blessing my arm! It's so precious to me. I'm sitting there thank you children for blessing my arm. [Betty]

Other teachers feel the same way about their students and the satisfaction they get from their positions as educators. Agnes, who teaches first grade believes in her work because she believes at this level, *"you set the foundation and I feel like I'm contributing by setting the foundation as they get up there."* She also enjoys her work because, *"I like what I do. I like working. I like learning more things, you know."* Cheryl is also a teacher and teaches special education elementary students. She says her job is a challenge but *"I like what I do I really do. You can see the sparkle in their eyes when they catch on."* Ann who manages a clothing shop and a lunch stand also enjoys her work because, *"Makes me feel good because I'm a person that likes to meet people. I like to talk to people."*

Employment outside of the home is important for these women. For some the paycheck is a necessity, for others it is the work itself that brings satisfaction. The work ethic that was instilled in these women as youngsters worked to their advantage as adults. They were able to find employment in a very tight job market. Most of the women had more than one job during their lives. However, the majority have been in their present

positions for over 10 years, some over 20 years, and a few over 30 years. They have reached the stability of employment.

Family Relationships

Relationships with family was a major theme found in the interviews. The Navajo are a relationship bound culture. When Navajo meet, the first questions deals with “where are you from?” meaning what are your clan and family ties. These ties begin with the maternal line. The individual inherits his or her clan from his or her mother.

The dialectic discussed in this section is the tension between family as resource and family as a source of stress. The women discussed family relationships between the women and their parents, spouses, children and grandchildren. The time frame being used is the women’s childhood through them becoming grandmothers. During their lives there have been troubled relationships with members of their families. However, by wanting things to be different and having the courage to make changes, these women have resolved, in some fashion, many of the challenges brought on by troubled family relationships. In most cases they have been able to turn family challenges into family strengths. Interestingly, this is one of the dialectics that still challenges the women. However, when asked at middle age why they were happy, all the women mentioned family as the number one reason they are happy.

In the course of growing up disconcerted relationships with parents ran the gamut from physical abuse to differences of opinion on parenting. One woman stated that her mother physically abused her when she was a child. Many women stated that they

witnessed domestic violence. Luci related, “*She (mother) was there for us no matter what my Dad did to her and beat her up and went drinking, went out with other women, she was there.*” Luci realized that watching this happen to her mother influenced how she reacted when domestic violence became part of her marriage, “*It never occurred to me when that was happening to me that I should walk. I just stayed.*” Margaret speculates that the reason why her Mother sent her to boarding school was to keep her safe from her alcoholic father. She said,

She (mother) was always having problems with my Dad because he used to be an alcoholic and I tell you he was a womanizer and it was like that was her way of keeping us safe. Being up there [Utah] instead of being home. [Margaret]

The types of abuse these women experienced were not limited to physical abuse. Alice still can hear her mother calling her dumb and stupid. “*That was it. Those simple words. I always heard, I always heard it.*” At another part of the interview, Alice again reflected, “*You know when your Mom tells you, you won’t make it (referring to school) I mean that hurts.*”

Being separated from their parents because of being sent away to boarding school was reported by some women as being a traumatic time. Sending young children to boarding school through Mormon placement or within the Bureau of Indian Affairs system was common. The parents were faced with difficult decisions about sending their children, as young as kindergarten, to boarding schools or away from the family for extended periods of time. The parents believed that their children would be better off at those places where there was reliable food and an education. However, at the time, the benefit of leaving home to attend school was lost on many of the children. Leaving for

boarding school or Mormon placement holds some bitter memories for some of the woman. Margaret stated

I used to cry a lot when I would go back and every year when I went back. I mean she [mother] just made us go back every year whether we wanted to or not. And I used to really cry because I missed being with my Mom and my Dad and when I started getting older it was like I got used to it and so but I always wanted to come back so bad because I wanted to be here with my Mom and Dad.

[Margaret]

Susan's experience with leaving home for school started at third grade. She recounted,

At first I didn't know what I was going into. I just got on the bus and one of my family says, 'Here's your suitcase and you're going to Salt Lake City.' And I was like, you know it was scary. It was really scary. [Susan]

As the women look back on their boarding school experiences they all believe there was good that came out of their separation from their families in spite of the pain and separation. Rose was in BIA boarding schools and separated from her parents from sixth grade through high school. She says, "Thank God I survived." Rose continues, "When I look back I mean it's agonizing." But she also says that the experience made her strong and taught her that she could survive anywhere. The silver lining to this dark cloud for Rose was that the boarding school offered three meals a day, clean sheets and a shower, things that were not readily available at home. Separation from parents, family and familiar surroundings was difficult for some women. But they were somehow able to find an inner strength that enabled them to survive and succeed at school.

For some during their younger day's relationships with parents was sometimes strained. Mary recollects that her Dad was an alcoholic, "*we grew up having an alcoholic Dad. He eventually died from it.*" In Mary's mind, her mother was strict and wasn't being reasonable with she and her siblings while they were growing up. She says,

My Mom was real strict. I tell you my Mom was strict. She wouldn't let us go to dances. She wouldn't let us go to the basketball games. You know I would say she wasn't a real good Mom because she never went to teacher's conferences with us. Never got involved in school activities with us. [Mary]

Because of her own childhood, Mary decided she was not going to be like her mother when she had her children. Mary was very involved in her children's school activities. Cheryl also bemoans that her parents were strict. She says, "*You were only told once. Second time, shoot! You didn't dare talk back. Yeah, we were disciplined very, very well.*"

Rose was 10 years old when her parents separated. As the oldest child Rose took on many responsibilities of the household. Her Dad went his separate way and according to Rose, "*Our Dad completely just ignored us and never came back to give us anything. So you know we were just kind of forgotten on his part.*" Even as an adult, Rose had no contact with her father, who has since passed away. As for Rose's mother, their relationship was troublesome. Rose has never forgiven her mother for sending her to boarding school. She says,

I think we (she and her siblings) didn't like her for putting us in boarding school....I've always figured that she , she kind of, you know, shove us to

somebody else while she had her, her um freedom to do whatever else she wanted, she had to do.[Rose]

As an adult Rose admits she and her mother were not very close. Her mother has also passed on.

Margaret's mother also sent her away to get her education. She went on placement to Utah. The goal, according to her mother, was to marry an Anglo man and live in Utah. However, as often is the case with mothers and daughters, this was not the goal for Margaret. Even today when she looks back, Margaret understands her mother's motives but says, *"I kind of resented her for sending us (she and her siblings) off to school up there."* Margaret's mother is still alive but due to her diabetes is having vision difficulties. She lives with Margaret's sister mainly because Margaret, at the age of 60, admits she's still scared of her mother and is still fretful about what her mother would say about her behavior (i.e. drinking, gambling).

Alice recounts that her mother, who is still alive, was always busy with another baby and didn't take the time to teach her things. She says, *"it seems like even though I had a Mom, I grew up without a mom."*

As with most children relationships with parents for these women were sometimes conflictual. They clashed with their parents over discipline, decisions made about education and division of affection. As the women have grown older and have families of their own and as their parents have aged, their relationships have mellowed over the years. They have reached some peace with their parents and realize that their parents were, and in some cases still are, a tremendous influence on their life. The women

have realized that what their parents taught them when they were growing up makes more sense as they have reached middle age.

As is the case for most middle-aged women, the caretaker role has reversed. Most women have lost at least one parent. A few have their parents living with them and a surprising number have parents who are still living on the family lands and still caring for livestock with the help of children and grandchildren.

Ann's parents still live outside of town and continue to be very active in caring for grandchildren and keeping up their property. Ann says,

My mom and dad take care of us (meaning she and her brothers). Believe it or not it's that way because they have my brothers all live near by the Becenti area and they leave their kids with them. Then she calls us every single morning to see how we're doing. She takes care of us. [Ann]

Jeanette credits her parents' pestering her to continue her education. She says,

They were always saying, you know, go to school, you need to go to school because you know we want you to go to college, we want you to, you know, and we want you to do better then we're doing and da, da, da,. And I thought that that kind of went into my head and so that's what I thought, I thought one of these days, you know, I want to live better than this. [Jeanette]

Besides nagging at her Jeanette recalls that her parents gave her a lot of encouragement, support and inspiration to do the best she could and were always there for her.

Claire credits her mother with helping her adjust to life on the Nation after she returned from California. She says about her mother, "*She taught me a lot. She's the one*

that encouraged me to stay on the reservation and get used to it.” Claire says it was her mother who taught her what she needed to know to live in the Nation.

Joan, whose mother has passed on, sees her mother’s life as a role model. She says,

My mom was a very strong lady and she was a Christian lady. And I looked, you know, I observed, you know. I want to be like my mom. I’m not let things slide by or I want to stand and make my foundation just like her. [Joan]

According to Joan, her mother was a strong person and even though she was uneducated, she challenged things and people looked up to her. Joan calls her a good person and that is the type of person Joan wants to be like. Susan also emulates her mother who is living on her own at 82. Susan says, “*I just hope to be like her when I’m older.*” Susan also calls her mom her best friend.

Betty credits her traditional parents for her success as an adult. It is obvious she is still amazed by her parents’ breath of knowledge when she said, “*They knew everything, they knew everything and they used to tell us these things.*” Betty recalled as a youngster sitting at the table and listening to her mom. Betty related,

She would have us sit to the table and tell us, you know, respect yourself, respect other people and treat, you know, all people are different. Some may not walk, some may need help, crutches. You need to help, you need to be there for them as well as you. You don’t laugh at them, you don’t make fun of them, you know, you go and assist them with whatever their needs are. [Betty]

Mary's mother is alive and at 77 years old still has a full time job. This amazes Mary, who has been having some health problems. Mary said, "*I always envy her because she's so strong.*" When she thinks about this, Mary muses,

Well my mom was taught to work. She was taught how to deal with snow in the winter time and the heat in the summertime, you know, I think it just comes in generations. She was born to be or was raised to be a strong women and she kind of rubbed off on us. Although like I said, we're not as strong as my mom and grandparents. [Mary]

Alice saw her father as the major parental influence. Her mother was always busy, usually with a new baby, and "*so my dad was the one that always taught me.*" She also said, "*My dad was there to support me. He was there for all us all the time,*" Mary remembers her father as also being a support. She relates, "*Whenever he was there for us he taught us a lot. He taught us to be strong. And I think a lot of it (being strong) comes from him as well.*"

Besides parents other relatives played an important part in the lives of these women. These include grandparents, aunts and uncles. Grandparents consistently play a major role in Navajo family life. They are the keepers of the wisdom and traditions and are indispensable in raising their grandchildren. All of the women have lost their grandparents but still remember their strength and contributions they made to their lives. They were steady influences that helped ensure family stability when there was a threat to the stability.

Ann's paternal grandmother helped raise her and her siblings because both parents worked. She recalls the rules her grandmother taught them,

She always told us when you go out into the world you have to be nice, smile, meet people, shake hands with them even if you don't know them. She said that's what a person needs to do and learn to do it. She taught us like that and helping, she said if they need help, help them. [Ann]

Mary remembers her grandparents and the influence they were on her. She recalls,

They were just loving people, both of them, my grandparents. They were loving people, they teased us, they laughed, we laughed with them and we played, you know, tried to pay tricks on one another, but you know they always have that serious time, you know, we sit to the table and they would tell us you need to do this, you need to sit up like this, you need to eat this, this is good for you, you know, all kinds of wisdom that they gave us, you know, they were both like that. [Mary]

Encouragement from her grandmother helped Rose leave home and take a job with the federal government that required a one-year internship in Washington, D. C. Her mother did not want her to leave, but her grandmother Rose says, “*She was all for it.*”

Ann recalls her Aunt Nellie and says,

She had no kids. And she brought us up like her kids. I mean she wasn't in our lives everyday but she was there when we needed her. [Ann]

Nellie's sister was Evelyn with whom Ann stayed during the summer when school was out. One of Ann's fondest memories is driving around in her Aunt's wagon with two horses. They would haul water and just ride around.

Keeping in touch with family is very important to Luci. When she found out an aunt was living in a nursing facility in Gallup, she was able to track her down

and bring her to live with Luci and her family in Crownpoint. Luci says, “*my family means a lot to me and that’s what makes me happy.*”

Agnes credits her family with helping her make it through the hard times of unemployment, no money and no prospects. She says,

My mother and my grandmother. I have a good role model now, my Aunt Rose and my Aunt Berta. You know these are people that I see as people of strength and people of faith, you know, they’re the ones that I think about when I come across a hardship, you know, that it has carried them. Their strength has carried them through so much and that makes me feel that I can get through a lot too.

[Agnes]

Family is not limited to blood relations. For the women who were placed out of state their foster parents and families become a big part of their lives and helped to shape the women they are today. Susan still sees her foster family every year at a family reunion. She says, “*my foster family they played a big role in my life.*”

Grandparents, parents, aunts and foster families all played a role in molding who these women are today. The women recognize these family members as a major resource in the stability of the family as they face challenges of living on the Nation in the 21st century.

Caring for aging parents is a task that many women in this age group face. It seems like a reversal of the parent role. These women, in some cases, are the caregivers for their parent. Cheryl’s mother is 83 and recently lost a sister and a son. Cheryl’s youngest brother has declined physically and mentally. She has gone from using a cane to a wheelchair to get around. Cheryl is sure her mother is depressed and wants her to see

the doctor and get some medication. As a matter of fact on the day of the interview, Cheryl's sister took her mother to a doctor's appointment. However, Cheryl had a feeling her mother would say no to medication, that she would want to go traditional first before she sought out that solution. So Cheryl is in the middle. She knows medication may work wonders concerning her mother's depression, but needs to respect her mother's need to see the medicine man first. The medicine man does not have office hours and is not readily available as the doctor. Cheryl is grateful that her daughter, home from college, will help take care of her grandmother this summer.

Susan's mother is 82 and lives alone on her ranch outside of town. A few months ago Susan received a phone call from her Mom (who seldom complains).

One day she called me and said I don't feel well. And you know something got to be wrong really wrong for her to say that. I took her to the hospital and we found out she had bacteria growing in her blood. So she ended up at the Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque. And here we found out she had gallstones. I don't know how that happened but we're still in the process right now. [Susan]

Her mother is back at the ranch but she has a cell phone that gives Susan some comfort.

Claire had her 93-year-old father move in with her after her mother died about a year ago. Her father was so lonely and felt lost without his wife. Her father is not sure about his age because when the census people came around many years ago to count the Navajo many did not know a birth date. It was not important. So the census takers would guess an age and that was given to the individual. He believes he may be approaching 100 years old. He's in good health except for occasional falls. Claire says he falls a lot. She says, *"All of a sudden he falls down he says his leg gets weak and everything. So he*

fell on me about like four times at the house.” Claire cannot lift her father and is concerned about his safety.

Relationships with parents change over time. Some of the women considered their parents too strict when they were growing up and promised themselves they would treat their children differently. Some of the women had rocky relationships with their mothers that continue today. Many of the women are dealing with ailing parents while caring for their own families.

Marital relationships for these women run the continuum of domestic violence to long and happy marriages. All the women who mentioned domestic violence are either divorced or separated from the offending spouse. The women who are happily married have worked at their marriages and exhibit strength and a desire to preserve the relationship over the years. It seems that marital relationships are a challenge and a resource.

Several of the women were in abusive relationships with their spouses. All have gotten out of those relationships by divorce or separation. This was not easy and took time but all those women found the courage to leave those relationships. Marian and Luci divorced their husbands after years of abuse. Marian says,

I left my husband in '96 because of domestic violence throughout the years and the last one was too much. I ended up in the hospital. So I loved him but I didn't deserve that. So right now I'm on my own. [Marian]

Half of the women are currently married and experience spousal support. Sharon, who has been married for 32 years, attributes their success to communication. She says,

I would say communication between myself and my husband because I don't do things alone and he doesn't do things alone so we talk a lot. I think that's um, we've been married 32 years now. So that's number one, communication.

[Sharon]

Ann has been married since she graduated high school. She brags about her husband when she says,

He's the only one that provides for us. He's been doing that since we got married.

Still doing it. [Ann]

Mary reiterates that sentiment about her husband's support when she says,

You can't do it by yourself. You can't. Mother (herself) can't run to everything by themselves all the time. Your spouse has to be there helping you out and my husband's been pretty good about that. He's always supported the kids as well.

[Mary]

The only other family members that were seen as an even greater resource for the women are their children and grandchildren. All of these women have or had children and the vast majority has grandchildren. A few still have children living at home who are in elementary school, high school or college. Some have grown children who have become successful and are raising their own families without help from their parents. Some of the women have grown children that are not so successful and need their parents' support in the form of housing or caring for their children. It is not unusual for the grandparents to provide care for their grandchildren.

Margaret is caring for her 29 year old son who suffered a stroke brought on by a drug overdose. He is paralyzed on one side, is aphasic and attempted suicide a few

months ago. He is also facing cardiac surgery to repair damage to his heart. This has been hard on Margaret. She says, "*Sometimes I cry because it hurts to see him suffering.*"

Margaret got teary eyed during the interview. Claire also cares for a son. He is 32 years old and having heart problems. He is on oxygen and cannot work due to his heart condition. She continues to encourage him to follow doctor's orders, takes him to doctor appointments and therapy sessions. Claire believes he is on the long road to recovery.

At times some of the women have their grown children living with them. Ann's oldest son and his girlfriend live with her in their two-bedroom house. Other women comment that when times are tough for their children, they come home for a while to get their bearings.

Experts say that losing a child is the most stressful event that can happen to a parent. I believe Sharon would agree. Sharon is the only woman of the group who has lost a child. Her youngest son was killed during a fight a little more than two years ago. Sharon calls it murder. The legal proceedings stemming from the incident were due to take place this summer. Sharon says, "*I really miss my son.*" Her crying ended our interview.

Luci has two grandchildren living with her. Marian has her granddaughter living with her. Margaret and Sharon adopted some of their grandchildren with the permission of their sons, the fathers of the children. In Margaret's case, she rescued one grandson from an environment of drinking and drugging. When her son's common law wife became pregnant again, she asked Margaret if she would take the unborn child when it was born so the brothers would be together. Margaret and her husband took the second grandson home from the hospital and adopted both of the boys. Sharon's daughter in law

was killed in a car crash and with the son's permission they adopted his two children because their son was not able to provide a stable environment for his children. Sharon and her husband have legal custody of another grandson, their daughter's boy. She has been unable to care for him due to drug and alcohol problems.

All of the women have children and these children range from being grown and out of the house to having a two-year old. The older children run the gamut on accepting assistance from Mom and Dad (or just Mom) to being independent. A few are living with Mom due to health problems; a few are living with Mom due to financial problems; and a few come and go at Mom's as money or other issues arise. It is obvious from the interviews that children are one of the biggest challenges these women face. It doesn't matter how old they are, Mom is still worried about the welfare of her children.

Grandchildren are also a challenge. Some of the women have adopted their grandchildren or have custody of their grandchildren due to parental neglect or indifference. Others have grandchildren living with them as their children try to solve their problems. None of the women complained about this situation. They were helping the family.

Every woman mentioned that their children and grandchildren were why they are happy. For some it was that their children and grandchildren are around; for others their children and grandchildren were healthy and happy; for others it was that their children are successful; and others that the children are out on their own.

Claire declares that, *"Everything is just going great with me now. My kids are always with me. That's what I'm really grateful, having my kids by me all the time."*

Betty says, “ *I enjoy my family, enjoy my kids, enjoy my grandkids, my husband and my life and the things around here at the moment. That’s what I’m enjoying.*”

Agnes credits her children with helping her self-awareness. Speaking about her children, Agnes says,

I think they’ve made me more, more aware of who I am. They bring up a lot of things that they say I say. And it’s like did I really say that? [Agnes]

Agnes also believes it was her children that helped her look into her traditional values. Without them Agnes doesn’t think she would have gone back to learn about being Navajo. She and her daughter learned how to weave; her youngest daughter had a kinaalda (female puberty ceremony) and she was an intricate part of organizing a Blessingway ceremony for her brother within the last few years. Agnes thanks her children.

They’ve helped me in rediscovering my traditional part. I think that if I didn’t have my children they would have just slid by and I would have just gone on in this world just, you know, not knowing who I was. So they’ve made me more aware of that. [Agnes]

Alice thanks her children for their support when she started drinking. She states, “*It took a lot of support to get out of that (drinking) and my kids gave me that support.*”

Ann’s oldest son lives with her and offers her support. At this point in time he is unemployed. Ann says,

At times I wish he has a job somewhere else but I’m glad he’s home with me because he helps me. He helps me, little things, this and that, he’s here. [Ann]

Talking about grandchildren brought out smiles on all the grandmothers interviewed. Words such as precious, wonderful and beautiful were often used. Ann's grandson lives close to her and visits everyday. She says, "*He is really special because he's my first grandson. He brings a lot of joy.*" One of the women will become a grandmother sometime this year and already has plans to spoil her first grandbaby. As discussed in previous section many of the grandmothers care for their grandchildren, and expressed concern about the welfare of the grandchildren. More than one grandmother stated she needed to remain healthy for the grandkids.

Family is paramount and family stability is the goal for all the women. Their lives revolve around their aging parents, their children and their grandchildren. When I was trying to schedule the interviews, many times a date was difficult to find due to a family centered activity. Some interviews were rescheduled due to family matters. The tension between instability and stability still exists, but the scale is tipped towards stability in family relationships. The women work hard to keep things that way.

Education

The dialectic related to education represents the role of education in developing a cultural identity and in facilitating independence. One way this dialectic is expressed relates to the tension between maintaining a Navajo identity and blending the best of the Anglo ways into that Navajo identity. This tension occurred between a perceived loss of culture versus the development of a strong cultural identity. For many of the women, the experience of going to school was their first contact with the Anglo world, but many

times tension arose between the Navajo traditions and the Anglo world. Fortunately, all of the women have been able to walk the path that blends the two traditions.

Obtaining an education is divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with elementary school and high school. Like most children the women did not have much control over decisions of where to go to school or even to go to school. At this level the underlying theme of culture identity is tempered with the need for independence. The second part of obtaining an education concentrates on higher education, and the women did have control over those decisions.

Elementary and High School. Boarding school was commonplace on the Nation. Eight of the women spent all or some of their elementary and or secondary school years at a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding school. A very practical reason was that not every little town was able to support a public school. Other reasons existed for children living in the rural parts of the Nation because commuting everyday was impossible due to distance, lack of transportation and nonexistent roads. Economically, not all families could afford to feed and care for the children in the family so boarding schools helped. The BIA realized the problems and established boarding schools in strategic locations around the Nation. Also, the aim of the BIA educational policy at the time was assimilation. The boarding high schools where these women attended were located in Fort Wingate and Albuquerque. In Albuquerque the students boarded at the BIA Indian School and were farmed out to public high schools throughout the city. These BIA schools are still in existence and are now called community schools because an enlightened BIA policy towards control of the education of the Nation's children affords more community involvement. The control has been given to the parents and the

community. Not many still board students mainly because the number of schools has increased, roads have improved and buses are now used for transportation.

Placement for education off the Nation was brought about mostly by the Mormons and other Christian denominations. Three of the women spent some or all of their elementary and secondary education in placement off the Nation. The thought was to have the children live with Mormon or Christian families off the Nation and subsequently these children would receive a good education. And in addition by living with the Christian families and living a Christian life their souls would be saved. It was also an economic necessity for some large families similar to boarding schools. The parents could not monetarily support all their children so going on placement where all the child's needs were taken care of was a viable strategy.

Due to the difference in the age of the women boarding school and placement experiences vary. For some women regimentation in the boarding schools was par for the course, but for the younger women that was not their experience. What all the women agree on is the fact that they unfortunately lost their language and they lost their culture. Those who did not attend boarding school or go on placement usually lived in Crownpoint or in close proximity, and they were able to attend public elementary and high school in town.

Regardless of where the women went to school it was there where many of them learned to speak English. Almost all of the women interviewed grew up speaking Navajo with some being bilingual. At an early age these women learned how to live in both worlds; the Navajo world at home and the Anglo world at home. Mary recalls, "*When we*

got to school, we had to talk English and as soon as you get home then it's Navajo."

Betty recalls,

I spoke Navajo and I didn't have no idea what the teacher was saying when I first came to school. It was just so hard for me, [Betty]

Losing their language is still a hot button for many of the women. Alice says, "*I think that's the worst thing they (boarding school) ever did to us.*" Joan is concerned about the young people not speaking Navajo. She stated:

But who's doing it these days (teaching Navajo). Nobody. So we kept our language from that time when we were growing up. But now, you know, our kids don't understand they're kind of like confused. [Joan]

Cheryl also reflects that, "*it's sad. It's sad we're losing our language.*" Cheryl believes the language helps defines the Navajos.

Alice remembers when she went to BIA boarding school at the age of 10, she and none of the other children in her class spoke English. She says first things that happened was, "*They gave us a bath, gave us our haircut.*" The first English Alice learned was "Come here." Alice's mother also went to a BIA boarding school as a youth and told Alice stories of when they used to wash your mouth out with soap or make you stay on your knees if you were caught speaking Navajo. Things were not as harsh when Alice went to school.

Seven women attended public school either on the Nation or in cities of Arizona or Colorado. Jeanette's family lived out of state so she attended an all-Anglo high school. She was the only Native American at the school, she relates, "*I had to go in there and I had to just compete with the other kids just like I was one of them.*"

Returning home for holidays and summer vacation from boarding school or out of state placement sparked conflictual relationships between the women and their mothers and brought into sharp focus the changing Navajo society. Adapting to the role of women in a Navajo society was increasingly difficult for some women. They learned that women had options other than that of wife and mother; women had opinions that were valued; women should speak up and have a say in their world. When Susan was a teenager and back from a placement in Utah she and her mother had differing opinions on how Susan should behave. Susan wanted to attend college and play sports. Susan's mother wanted her to stay home to help care for the household. Susan asked her, "*What do you want me to be? I don't know what you want me to be anymore.*" She continued,

You know you chose for me to go off the reservation, you chose for me to learn what the world is about out there so you're going to have to adapt to it. This is what I've been taught so the question was are you telling me it's wrong? But that's the choice you made for me. [Susan]

Rose had the same issue with her family as Susan. When she would come home from boarding school for breaks she adopted the role expected of her because she was the dutiful oldest child and did what was expected; the cooking, the washing and other home chores without question. She recalled having no time for recreation at home. Even when she was away at school Rose found it difficult to leave her home behind. She never felt like she needed recreation (movies, school dances, the prom). She said, "*I was so, I think, embarrassed to even take part in things like that.*" Eventually Rose was able to enjoy the extracurricular activities of high school. She said, "*But being at home was not being who I would be at school.*" It was difficult living in two worlds.

The events surrounding obtaining a basic education were life changing and the women became adept at living in two worlds; the Anglo world of school and the Navajo world at home. It was not easy. Susan, who was on Mormon placement, remembers,

We came home in June and we went back in August. But you know it was hard to grow up in western society and live by their rules, live by their, you know, by what they wanted us to be for nine months. Then we came home and we were expected to live the way my mother wanted us to be and it was hard, it was hard. And you know you have to adapt to different lifestyles but I learned. I learned. [Susan]

For most of the women their education at the high school or at college earned them academic credentials needed for advancement in the work world. Education also was a transforming experience. Many of the women had never been off the Nation until they were sent to boarding school or placement (so a new world; an Anglo world was open to them). For some it was the indirect education that transformed their lives. Learning how to be outgoing, to ask questions, to stand up for themselves, be independent are life lessons the women still use today.

When Cheryl was asked about her boarding school experience and how it affected her life her initial reply was learning time management but then she said,

Learning, academic learning and that is the way to go is to learn how to read and write because everything involves reading and writing and learning. That helped me to become and realize, you know, what's out there not just this little place that I called Little Water. There's a whole open world out there that you need to discover. [Cheryl]

Cheryl says her parents encouraged all of their children to stay in school. She says,

They used to tell us to stay in school that's for yourself. You're doing it for yourself; you're not doing it for anybody else. That's to help you learn about the white man's world, learn about their world because it's going to come to that where all the traditional, what we believed in and what we grew up it's not gonna be around no more. So learn their ways. [Cheryl]

Margaret, who went on placement to Utah, says,

I think I got a good education and I'm not bragging or anything but to me I'm glad that I went to school up there like I did because it made me talk out and not to be shy. [Margaret]

Susan has some of those same sentiments about her Mormon placement. She believes it was the best thing that ever happened to her. Susan states, I got a very good education. When Susan returned to the Nation as a high school sophomore and entered Crownpoint High School to finish her education she found,

I had all my requirements and I could have graduated I guess right away but I wanted to play basketball and do all sorts of stuff so I stayed in school but I was actually ahead of the rest of the class. [Susan]

Rose believes her boarding school education and experience affected her at many levels. She says, *"I think it made me strong and I could survive anywhere and, you know, I had my own responsibilities as to I could make it that I didn't need my parents right there."*

Not all the women took the same path to finishing high school requirements. Because she was the oldest Alice left school to take care of her little brothers. She said,

I always dreamed I want to always have a diploma. I always dream at night I'm about to get my diploma and I wake up. So I said darn I need to get that thing.

[Alice]

While pregnant with her second child Alice took the courses that led to the writing of the exams for a GED (General Equivalency Diploma). She remembers,

I thought it was going to be hard because I've been out of school for so long and I didn't have much confidence in myself, you know. But I couldn't believe how smart I was. That's when I noticed how smart I was. I said, "Did I do this?" I kept asking my teachers and they said, "Yea". And then it was only two weeks then she said "You're ready for to go over there and take the whole battery. I said, "Are you serious?" and she said, "Yes". Two weeks. [Alice]

Alice took the tests and passed. Her comment after that was, "*Then I knew there was more.*" Alice has continued her education and is taking college courses.

Sharon, after being out of high school for 16 years decided, "*I'm going to go back to school. I'm going to do something different.*" So she enrolled at the University of New Mexico and completed her bachelor's and master's degrees. Her graduate work was done at the main campus and she credits that experience for the person she is now. Sharon remembers,

I was a quiet person that never asked for anything. I think that really changed me because when I got to the main campus in Albuquerque I was in the graduate level. I really came out. I mean I was the only Native American in that group, graduating group and I can't just sit there anymore. I just can't be away from the

group I have to be part of if I want to be something, if I want to go somewhere.

[Sharon]

Getting an education was very important to the women. Many were sent to BIA Boarding schools or sent on placement with the Mormons. Others gained their education from the public school systems in New Mexico, Arizona or Colorado. Entering school was the time when the use of the Navajo language decreased. The women began to learn early on how to live in two worlds, the Navajo world at home and the Anglo world at school. The tension between the opposing cultures started when these women began attending school. By the time they were in high school and college they had been able to make changes that eased the tension and were able to blend the two cultures and walked the fine line very well. Many of them began interpreting the Anglo world for their parents. Some of them taught their parents to read and speak English. Today these women have mastered the blending of the two cultures.

College. The art of living in both the Navajo world and the Anglo world was mastered in college. Obtaining a college degree allowed the women independence in choices about employment and where to live. All the women chose to live on the Nation. Many of the women interviewed are educators. Six of them have bachelor's degrees and several have or are working on their Master's degrees in education. Several continue to work towards a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. Only one took the traditional route and went on to college after high school. The majority returned to college as adult students with families and jobs. The most often mentioned university where the women attended and received a Bachelor's or Master's degrees is the University of New Mexico (UNM) in Albuquerque. UNM has satellites in Gallup and Grants; each about 50 miles from

Crownpoint. Western New Mexico State was also mentioned and they also have a satellite in Gallup.

Jeanette went to college after she married and had three children. She recalls,
It just took me a little longer than most people to get my bachelor's. It took me 10 years working part time and working full time that kind of thing all that kind of thing, you know, all the going to school at night, getting away from my job whenever possible to take classes. Took me ten years but I was also raising three little kids. [Jeanette]

Jeanette struggled with financial troubles during those times and had to quit school to take jobs to make money to continue going to school. When it came time for her student teaching for one semester, Jeanette worked as a secretary with the BIA and the thought of having to struggle financially for four months was sobering. With advice from her supervisor and a great deal of soul searching, Jeannette quit her secure government job and completed her student teaching. She struggled but finished her degree.

Agnes dealt with family issues while she worked on her degree. She recollected:
I just kept thinking if I just gave up because it was hard getting my second degree, there were a lot of times that, you know, driving and working and having to deal with my husband and my Dad was also drinking and my brother was also drinking and my kids were small and I kept thinking that I kept wanting to give up and just forget about it. [Agnes]

Besides dealing with family and financial issues one of the women commuted to school without a vehicle. They could not afford one at the time. Marian used to hitchhike

to and from class more than 70 miles one way. It was not unusual for Marian to arrive home after midnight. She recalls

I used to walk from the main graded road to my house, which was like maybe a mile and a half or two miles. Carrying my books. This was late at night too. And I was scared, you know, skinwalkers (Navajo witches) and all that stuff. But I thought if I'm gonna get ahead I need to do this. I don't care what happens.

[Marian]

Sharon contended with finding a place to stay while in summer school at UNM in Albuquerque. Her husband stayed home with two of the children and the youngest stayed with her at school. Sharon remembered with a laugh:

We used to stay at the RV place (in the truck) and Wal-Mart; you name it we used to be everywhere. See you couldn't get an apartment for two months or even a month. [Sharon]

During the day they would stay on campus and stay at the library until closing. She remembered that her son who was nine at the time knew every part of the University- especially the computer labs. She remembered he would end up helping everybody.

Formal education was the turning point that changed the lives of the women forever. For the women, the dialectic between the two cultural traditions of the Navajo world and the Anglo world gradually transformed into an ability to live in both worlds. The women saw this as a resource.

The circumstances behind getting their education may have been a challenge (boarding school, financial strain for college); however, all the women believe the education they received was their ticket out of poverty and a pass to a better life than the

one they had growing up. They had a choice of what to do with their lives because of education. Education also opened their eyes to a world beyond the Nation and for some an introduction to the Anglo world. Self-determination and choice were just a few of the values the women learned. All the women learned the Anglo ways but they were also able to hold on to their traditional ways. No one wanted to go back to the way life was on the Nation without electricity and running water, but now all the women lived in the Nation and keep the traditions viable.

Middle Age

Growing old is a reality for all these women. They are all middle aged, whatever way that term is defined. This is a time of a time of change and a time of loss. For some the changes and loss are related to health, for others the changes and loss are due to family responsibilities. For many women change is due to the challenges that accompany coming to terms with aging.

Alice summed up how most of them feel about middle age. She said:

Oh my it's like a bad dream (laughter). I remember when I couldn't wait to be 21 years old. I just couldn't wait to be 21. Yep. When I got to 21 couldn't wait to be 30. And when I hit 30 I said WHOA! Slow down. Slow down. And the ball started rolling. I was 30, 40, oh my goodness I was the big 5-0 and I was depressed.

[Alice]

Mary was also caught off guard when she hit middle age. She said:

I always heard talk about it since I was younger being middle aged and people turning 50 and I never thought it would happen to me. Once it happens to you, I

don't know, you start letting your imagination run with you and you start to imagine all kinds of things. Like for myself, I had some health problems here recently and my imagination went wild. [Mary]

Rose also wondered about the unknowns of middle age. She said:

When I do think about my age, you know, it's kind of scary to me and to think that I know it's probably dealing with the age itself and then what you think you might expect, you know, unpredictability maybe health wise and stuff that's what I think. [Rose]

After Margaret was diagnosed with shingles, she remarked about the unpredictability of middle age,

It's like finding out when your middle aged you're beginning to get these elderly things (shingles) that are happening and it's like kind of getting used to going places and they say, oh you get an elderly discount, you know. I don't feel like it. [Margaret]

Cheryl believes that middle age is making her act stupid. She recounted a story when she left a gas station with the gas nozzle still attached to the truck. She said:

I stopped it (the gas) and I went in to pay and I just got back in the truck and started driving.....further down the road (interstate) this 18 wheeler was driving by and the lady, a passenger, she rolled down the window and she kept doing this (demonstrating pointing), and I rolled down the window and they slowed down and she kept (demonstrating pointing) "You're , you're something" she could hear me and pointing to my truck. I thought what in the world is she saying to me? I was driving and I looked back in the mirror and my side mirror and here I saw

(laughter) that what you call it thingy, the gas nozzle thingy. I guess I pulled, I drove off with it and it pulled it off. I slammed on my brakes. Is this for real? Is this for real? I stopped my truck and got out and sure enough it was hanging there. I just stood there like this (demonstrating hands over her face). [Cheryl]

Cheryl always bought her gas at the same place so she knew where to go. She says she contemplated not returning to the gas station because she was so embarrassed but reminded herself the nozzle thingy was probably expensive. So she screwed up her courage and returned it. She was met with laughter from the gas station attendants and they were glad to have the nozzle back. This type of thing could happen to anybody at any age but Cheryl believes it is happening more often to her in her middle age.

Physically many of the women commented about slowing down. Joan bemoaned this fact when she related:

I used to keep my house clean, come back and do everything like at 11 o'clock I'll be home. But now I can't do that. It's slowed me down. That's what I tell my kids. I'm not young any more. I have to rest and forget about, you know, house chores. Leave it. [Joan]

However, one woman found herself pregnant at 41. Susan says she was scared and had very mixed emotions about her situation. She was especially concerned about her age as the baby would get older. Susan states,

Some of the things that scared me was the age and I'm going to be in my 60's when my son is 18 and you know that really scared me and I think it scared my husband too because of his age (he is older than Susan). He said , "I'm afraid

that I'm not gonna see my son grow up." Because he's diabetic and I think that's what really scared him and I had a lot of mixed feelings. [Susan]

Middle age is a fact of life for these women. For most women they were caught off guard when they hit middle age. They had heard other women talking about changes that happen but none thought it would happen to them. However, they realized being middle aged is a resource. Having lived for 40 or 50 or 60 years is a resource in meeting the challenges of living in the Nation. Well-being is also a factor of being middle aged. The women have come to a time in their lives where they all say they are happy. Some are no longer struggling with the financial issues of early adulthood; others have their children and grandchildren around them; many are looking forward to retirement.

Cheryl stated that middle age is,

When you come to realize what you've been taught. Like my mother used to tell us a lot of things when we were growing up and I used to think, 'Why are you telling me that? I'll never, no don't tell me that.' But the things that she used to preach to us about I've come upon it and I would think back, 'Oh this is what she meant.

[Cheryl]

Betty spoke along those same lines when she said, *"As you grow when you come to a certain age like maybe 45 years old, things start to come together as a puzzle."*

When asked what she liked about being middle aged, Luci replied, *"I like the wisdom that comes with age. Just knowing that I've done that, I've seen that, I've read that, I know all about that."* With that wisdom comes the ability to preserve and meet head on any challenges with the knowledge that you have the ability to face those challenges.

Many of the women spoke of the notion that having lived a hard life, going through tough times made them a stronger person. Susan remembered after her first marriage ended she became a single parent and was left with the finances to figure out. It was hard but she did it and years later she laughs about it and said, *“I can’t believe I was crying every night and I can’t believe I did all these things. That’s strengthened me.”* Marian reiterates that thought when she says, *“I think from going through all that (domestic violence, financial struggles during marriage) I think I can pretty much face anything.”*

Another hallmark of successful middle age is accepting and liking the person you have become. I believe all the women are at that stage. Ann summed it up when she said, *“What do I like about middle age? I guess doing what I’m doing now. Just being, being this person that loves to do things and I’m trying to do it.”*

Middle age has many facets. For some women it meant their lives were coming together like a puzzle. Others enjoyed the feeling that they knew things and the wisdom that comes with age. Others attributed their current inner strength to the lessons learned along the way to becoming middle aged. And the final lesson learned by these women was to accept the person they have become. These women have been able to create stability in middle age.

Health

Health is a concern for many of the women. With growing older comes the reality of declining physical ability and in some cases declining health. Chronic health problems

begin to be diagnosed in the middle aged population. Out of this group of 15 women, three have osteoarthritis, one has rheumatoid arthritis, three are diabetic, one is borderline diabetic and three more have serious health problems. Two of the women had recently (within the year) broken bones due to falls. The challenge here is to wrestle with the dialectic of loss of control due to health changes and transform to being in control and coping with the health problems.

Luci summed the type of health problems she experiences at middle age. She is not alone in her lament. Luci said:

The pain of growing old. My knees, I can't go up the steps as fast as I used to. And the foods I used to love to eat now I have to take a pill every night. Having to go to the bathroom, leaking when I laugh. Then when we go to Gallup (about 50 miles away) my daughter has to stop for me at Thoreau (about half way) and then when we get to Gallup, "Find a bathroom"! That's what bothers me. [Luci]

Jeanette has rheumatoid arthritis and deformities in her hands from the disease.

About six years ago she had to do something about her knees. She remembered:

My posture got so bad that I was walking, it was kind of walking around like this (demonstrates walking awkwardly). On my God because my knees was just horrible, it was terrible. So I couldn't stand it any more. I think to this day if I did not do anything about that time I would have been in a wheelchair now.

[Jeanette]

Jeanette had a double knee replacement.

Alice struggles with respiratory problems including allergies, sleep apnea and asthma. She often uses oxygen at night. Due to her health problems Alice moved to town

where she uses propane for cooking and heating the house. Where she lived before Alice used a wood and coal burning stove and the indoor air quality was not conducive to respiratory health.

The women who are diabetics are using oral medication and diet to control the disease. However, some are not being as careful as they should. Margaret admitted she tries to keep her blood sugar levels within the normal range but her levels have been, "*kind of really high and it's like, I don't know.*" When Rose was asked about her blood sugar checks, she stated she checks her blood sugar close to the time of her doctor's appointment, and she adds, "*I don't let it get to too high out of range. But you know how they monitor you and you can't really lie either. So that's what I'm putting up with.*"

Ann lives with a serious chronic condition that affects her skin and her joints. When Ann was asked what she didn't like about being 48 years old her answer was, "*Sickness. My illness. I hate it.*" Ann is under a doctor's care; however, in the Indian Health Service system, doctors change often and there are certain outpatient clinics in some of the Indian Health Service hospitals. Ann has had to drive hundreds of miles to receive care. The illness is very frustrating to her and sometimes she despairs. She said,

Just two weeks ago I was so frustrated with the way I was feeling I came to a point where for that moment I wanted to give up everything and just, I was so tired of it. I am so (pause) for a moment I thought to myself that is it. I don't want to go any more. I hate my pain. I hate it because it's slowing me down. I can't do the stuff like I really want to do and I get really, really down. [Ann]

Health issues are common in middle age and these women are no different. Some are beginning to deal with chronic problems like arthritis and diabetes. A few women are

struggling with serious chronic problems. Accepting their illness, accepting the life changes and acknowledging the limitations that result from the illness is an ongoing challenge for the women as they deal with this newest dialectic in their lives.

This chapter has described, using the women's own words, their lives. The willingness and the honesty the women shared as they told their stories were amazing. From the data collected dialectics were created to frame the description of the findings. These carried through to the categories of economic status, family relationships, work, education, middle age and health.

The women have shown the progress they have made in transforming the instability in their lives to stability. Everyone changed her economic hardships from the early years to financial stability in middle age. Family relationships have matured as the women have aged. The instability of childhood years grew into stable relationships that include caring for their parents. The instability of raising children has become a stable relationship as the children have become adults. However, this is one area of the women's lives where the dialectic is likely to continue to change.

The dialectic between two cultures began to transform when the women started their formal education. This resulted in the women being able to be comfortable living in two worlds (not an easy task). The work ethic the women exhibit today began when they were youngsters. This trait has enabled them to take the instability of unemployment and convert it to the stability of employment. The instability of younger years transfigured into stability of middle age, and the women are comfortable with who they have become. One of the ongoing challenges is the dialectic of the instability of changing health and the stability of coping with those changes.

These 15 women were able to convert the many dialectics in their lives to a point in middle age where they are fulfilled and happy. How the women were able to take advantage of the turning points that transformed the dialectics will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Achieving Well-Being

In Chapter four the dialectics related to well-being were described. The overarching dialectic identified that the tension between instability and stability was the framework was used to describe the women's lives. Within the dialectic of instability/stability several domains were identified, including economic status, family relationships, education, middle age and health. The women were more or less able to bring stability to these domains of their lives and this stability resulted in well-being. The processes used to make the transformations are the subject of this section. The major well-being facilitators that the women utilized to make changes and reach well-being at middle age were culture, spirituality, determination, positive self esteem and personality. The final section of the discussion describes the paths these women took to achieve well-being in middle age.

Well-Being Facilitators

Culture

Culture is an integral part of a person's life. Leininger and McFarland (2002) refer to culture as the "learned, shared and transmitted knowledge of values, beliefs and life ways of a particular group" (p. 47). Culture influences thinking, decisions and actions in patterned ways. This includes how an individual pursues identity development, goals and happiness (Lopez et al., 2001).

The relationship between culture and well-being has been addressed in the literature. Keyes and Lopez (2002) examined well-being in different countries but not specific ethnic groups within a country. Horton and Shweder (2004) researched psychological well-being within ethnic groups: Puerto Rican Americans and Mexican Americans. They found that between first generation Mexican Americans and first generation Puerto Rican Americans there was no significant difference in mean scores of Ryff's well-being factors. Ryff, Keyes and Hughes (2004) examined the psychological well-being among African-American, Mexican-American and White American men and women. They found consistent psychological well-being across all the cultural groups and gender using Ryff's well-being indicators. A significant finding was racial minority status was a strong positive predictor of well-being. The authors speculate that certain aspects of well-being (self regard, mastery of the environment, personal growth) may be sharpened by challenges that are encountered by a person who is a racial minority living the United States.

It is evident the research on cultural groups and well-being for the most part excludes Native Americans; however, there is agreement that culture influences values, beliefs and ways of thinking about self and others. There is also agreement that well-being is influenced by the cultural context within which an individual exists. Culture does influence well-being.

In this study all the women mentioned being Navajo and the traditions they grew up with as an important part of their lives. Their culture is an integral part of who they are. In the interviews some were more eloquent than others about the role of culture but their actions reflect the importance of culture in their lives. Most of the women had lived somewhere outside the Nation at some point, but they are all now living in the Crownpoint area; one indicator of the importance of culture. In my interactions with these women over eight months they talked about the preparations for ceremonies; they shared stories about the Holy People, about skinwalkers, and the Long Walk. They dressed in traditional clothes; tied their hair in the traditional buns; and wore beautiful jewelry crafted by Navajo silversmiths; cooked fry bread, mutton and corn squash stew; and practiced traditional medicine. Many of the women weave, do bead work or other types of Navajo crafts, and they are all bilingual. Some have been involved in Navajo Nation politics at the Chapter and Nation level. The Navajo Nation and the Navajo culture are all around as well as in them.

The fact the Navajo are living on their ancestral lands adds a dimension to the milieu of culture. On a clear day the women can see Shiprock from Crownpoint and Mt. Taylor is in their view as they drive toward Grants; these are two significant landmarks in

the Navajo world. They hear Navajo being spoken and see the Navajo written language everywhere they go.

Many of the women talked about practicing Navajo traditions while growing up. These included greeting the dawn with corn pollen and a prayer; standing to the west in the evenings and praying with corn pollen; having medicine men come to the Hogan; participating in ceremonies; playing string games with their grandparents; and listening to stories.

Betty believes that being Navajo is *“one thing that I’ll never forget or leave out of my life.”* Luci stated, *“I’ve always been a Navajo. I’ve never been anything else so being Navajo is just fine with me.”* Mary related that the traditional Navajo ways are very important to her. Agnes said that being Navajo is who she is and knowing that she is aware of her place in the world. As her grandmother told her, you don’t know yourself until you know your traditions. Betty stated, *“I love who I am and being Navajo is very wonderful.”* From these statements it is evident that being Navajo is part of these women’s identities. Walters and Simoni (2002) believe it is this realization and the actions the women take to enculturate themselves that act as buffers to the stresses middle aged Navajo women experience.

Two of the women used the term “unique” when asked what it was like being a Navajo woman. Susan believes the Navajo women have a lot of respect for themselves. She is proud of the fact that Navajo women are strong and believes that is so because of the struggles they face. Susan also believes it is the traditions and what you are taught that enables you to be strong. She stated:

So you know all these things. You know that you're as a woman) the support, the backbone of the family, that's what we're taught when we're growing up. [Susan]

The influence of culture is evident in the women's struggle to find stability in their family relationships. The importance of family in this relationship bound culture is found in five grandmothers in the group who are caring for and adopting their grandchildren (rather than have them living with non-family or in unsafe circumstances). It was evident by Luci and Ann who cared for their aunts as they grew older. The family relationship is especially apparent in the care of the aging parents in this group. No matter their health status every parent lived or is living at either their own home with the support of their children. or in their children's home.

In matters of coming to terms with aging, the women talked about remembering the teachings of their mothers and grandmothers about the role of women in the Navajo society, the intricacies of weaving, the art of beadwork and the secrets of life and growing old. When asked about the role of Navajo culture in forming the woman she is today, Cheryl answered,

Oh yea, yes my language, my language and my religion and the things that I was taught. My beliefs that they instilled in us and the traditional doings and everything, everything, yes. [Cheryl]

It is being Navajo that enabled these women to be strong. The history of their tribe is filled with examples of perseverance, strength, determination and adaptation. The Navajo people survived as a culture because of these traits. Efforts by the Spaniards, Mexicans, and the Anglos over the centuries to assimilate the Navajo into their cultures failed. Jack Page (1995), in his book *Navajo*, says the Navajo People "have a long

history of adapting to new situations, even the most painful situations, and coming out ahead” (p. 82). These same traits are evident in the women interviewed in this study and the traits enabled them to achieve well-being.

Spirituality

Spirituality is an individual’s personal effort to find purpose and meaning in life (Andrews & Boyle, 2003). A person’s spirituality is shaped by their unique life experiences, and culture is a part of a person’s life and plays a role in their spirituality. Walters and Simoni (2002) identified culturally relevant spiritual methods of coping among Native American women was associated with resilience and well-being.

As a culture the Navajo are very spiritual people. Their lives are intricately connected to the Holy People and other spiritual traditions that allow them to make sense of the world. So it was no surprise that spirituality was found to be another well-being facilitator often mentioned by the women. The women interviewed who talked about their religion were all Christian; however, most of the women are able to combine their Christian faith with the spirituality of the traditional Navajo beliefs. Attending a Squaw Dance ceremony on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday did not interfere with going to church on Sunday morning.

Susan believes a lot of the strength that enabled her to live through school placement in Utah and endure a bad marriage comes from God and from prayer. She said:

If I know that something's not right, you know, even if it's good I'm thankful. I always thank the Lord for who I am because He's the one that I gain my strength from.

[Susan]

Luci also believes that her strength comes from God. She recalls praying to God throughout her abusive marriage and through prayer realized she was not alone. Mary also credits her faith with keeping her strong during her illness. She says,

You know everybody tells me to be strong so of course I have faith, I have my prayers. Everybody's prayers. And that's another thing that keeps me real strong.

[Mary]

In managing the dialectic of her changing health Ann believes God is there for her during times of pain. She says,

My inner strength comes from God. I think He's there for me. He's carrying me when, at that moment when I said I'm tired. I don't want to go on. He picked me up and took me to my room and cried. He's on my mind constantly. He's there when I need Him, when I want to cry or when I want, um excited about something. He's there. He's with me even in the morning. I say, 'Oh Lord help me with my pains. Help me get through this day.' And He does. [Ann]

Agnes returned to the Catholic Church after a long absence and believes it was the people connected with the Catholic Church that helped her through some unstable times. She recalls with fondness the priest that assisted her with instructions. She says,

And he, he really was there and he didn't make me feel guilty, you know, my marriage to my husband, you know, he just said, 'God doesn't want you to be unhappy. He wants you to be happy.' And that was the first time anyone has ever

said that to me. So I think he's really influenced me a lot. And then the Sisters was always there listening to me. [Agnes]

Betty believes it was her traditional grandmother's modeling that taught her and her family about the Holy People. She says about her grandmother,

She always said that prayers are number one and that prayers are answers to every problem and to connect with your Divine Wisdom and then from there, you know, they (the Holy People) just know how to help us out with our problems and struggle. [Betty]

Betty has been able to combine her traditional beliefs with the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. She recalls,

So I came across Catholic. And the more I came to Catholic, you know, just visiting, visiting on Sunday. And the more I heard the lecturing and the sermon and the ways their traditional traditions are, how they run their services that kind of blend in with traditional. And as I was coming they had never said anything about leaving it (traditions) behind. And it was just something that I thought, 'Hey this is good maybe I'll start coming here.' So I started coming here and I started to pray for myself. I started to feel that love, you know, coming from the people that were here at the church, the nuns and the priests and the way, the words they use, it was kind of like, it just slipped right in for me. [Betty]

Betty thinks that with the coming together of her traditional ways and the traditions of the church, the foundation of her life has been stabilized. When questioned about the life and peace she has found, her comment was,

I always think that it's the Holy People, it's the good Lord. It's my, I guess you just have to have love in your heart that if you help yourself, if you just, you know, try to pray a lot and meditate and just respecting other people. Just good things, you know, it's just thinking good things in your heart and mind. [Betty]

Most of the women when asked about their inner strength, and their well being mentioned spiritual beliefs. Some are involved in particular religions. Others are adhering to the traditional beliefs and the spiritual life that is all around them. However, almost all participate in Navajo ceremonies in one way or another. These women are able to blend their beliefs into a seamless way of living that gives great peace. This peace lends stability to their lives.

Inner Strengths

The issue of who successfully maneuvers through life and who does not come down to inner qualities, personality, that makes the difference. Perhaps the essential qualities that facilitate well-being and enable the women to successfully navigate the dialectics in their lives are inner qualities each woman possesses. These qualities were developed and shaped by the women's lives and the circumstances surrounding their lives. The fostering of these qualities can be attributed to living in traditional ways, back to the culture.

Literature discusses these personality characteristics and frames them as the protective factors of resilience. Much of the literature is focused on children; however, those findings can inform the characteristics of adults. Benard (1991) wrote that problem

solving skills, autonomy, a sense of purpose, and a sense of future are protective factors in resilient children. These factors are also found among the women in this study.

When describing their inner qualities the women used a variety of words and phrases. During the 15 conversations some words were spoken more than others. I have divided these inner qualities into the following categories: determination, positive self-esteem and self acceptance and personality.

Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock (2003) found that for Native American adolescents the positive characteristics that fostered well-being and resilience are good self concept, a strong sense of direction and tenacity. These same qualities are seen in these middle-aged women. In describing their ability to make changes in their lives the women used the terms determination and perseverance instead of tenacity and a strong sense of direction.

Determination and perseverance helped the women handle the dialectics of instability. Jeanette said that in getting an education and raising her family she had a lot of determination. She continued by saying,

I didn't want, I thought no, I'm not gonna be just anybody. I'm gonna be somebody. That was my number one goal up here. I didn't want to be home, you know, collecting welfare checks and I didn't want to, you know, not have a home of my own and I just felt like it was up to me to so the best I could with whatever I've got. [Jeanette]

Joan also stated she had a lot of determination. She said,

I'm just determined. I want to do it, you know. I'm gonna do it. I'm a fighter. I'm not easily give up things. I just want to do it and then I do it and I feel good about it. [Joan]

Joan finished her thought on this topic and gave this advice, “*Get yourself strong. You can't be wimpy, you know, there's life out there.*” By using that simple philosophy Joan has been able to bring stability to her life so in middle age she can say, “*I'm happy cause I'm living everyday in a good life.*”

When Agnes talked about getting her education she spoke of wanting to give up and forget about it. But she was determined and recalled,

But then I think that I just kept going and going, kept going kind of like with your head down, just kept going and I didn't know my goal was getting closer and closer until it got close and it was there, you know. So that just to persevere through a lot of things. [Agnes]

The stories the women shared exemplified their determination. Sharon told a story about when she returned to college and found herself in a class she believed was beyond her ability. She left the class thinking this was not for her. But as Sharon thought about her situation she stated,

So I left. I probably went about two blocks down then I thought, 'No, I'm gonna go back and I'm gonna show them that I can do something.' So that's what I did. I went back. [Sharon]

Sharon successfully completed that course as well as others to earn her Master's degree in Special Education.

Alice talked about her journey to be a teacher's assistant. She applied for the job a few times but after being rejected a few times she asked what she had to do to get the job. The supervisor told her to work with children. So Alice left a well paying job with the Nation to work in a day care facility. After her application was rejected again Alice asked why she hadn't been hired and was told she didn't have the necessary education. Subsequently, Alice took classes related to child development, learning and curriculum. Alice has now been at her current job for the past 11 years. It was her determination and desire to be an educator that enabled Alice to find a way to get the job.

Ann is determined that her health problems are not going to interfere with her life. She says, "*no matter what get on your feet and do it.*" When questioned about that philosophy, Ann elaborated and said,

Just that determined, confidence, you see. I don't care my feet, my ankles hurt, my knee hurt, I don't care. I'm gonna get up and walk. I'm gonna do it. [Ann]

With this attitude the women were able to gradually change the dialectics in their lives from unstable resources, unstable family relationships and changes in health to accomplish their goals that lead them to well-being.

Ryff and Keyes (1995) identified six components of positive psychological functioning or well-being. These included self acceptance, autonomy and personal growth. The facilitators mentioned by the women were: positive self esteem, self acceptance, self reliance, problem solving skills and a positive outlook. Research on Native American youth found that a good self concept is necessary for well-being and resilience (Bergstrom et al., 2003). This finding was confirmed in this group of middle age women

These women are happy with who they have become and with the lives they are leading. The women who left their husbands due to domestic violence all said they didn't deserve the abuse. Marian believes she is a better person due to her past. She said,

I'm glad I left from what was there from and now I'm, I think I'm a better person and then I know where I'm going and I know I can get there and nobody's gonna hold me back. [Marian]

Alice related that the reason she was able to meet the challenges she faced was because she believed in herself. Susan was taught by her foster mother to stand up for what she felt was right. From that lesson Susan learned to speak up for herself. She learned that her opinions mattered and there was nothing she could not accomplish. This positive self esteem is an integral part of well being.

Many other phrases were mentioned by the women to describe their inner strength. Rose referred to her self reliance as a strength. Rose attributed her self reliance to her boarding school experience. She said,

I think it (boarding school) made me strong and I could survive any where and I had my own responsibility as to I could make it, that I didn't need my parents right there. [Rose]

Jeanette is goal oriented and believes it is necessary to be strong in the face of challenges. She maintains that you set your goals and work towards the goals and not worry about anything else. She said,

So that (education) was like a star right over there and I was trying to reach for it like this, that was my goal and I made sure that I was going straight for it not be doing this and that. [Jeanette]

Margaret believes that not shirking your responsibilities is an inner strength and is necessary to face challenges. Responsibilities toward her family, her home and her job enabled Margaret to stay on the straight and narrow. She said,

It's like I knew in my head that I have this responsibility and like the Mormons they always say there's that small voice in the back of your head and it tells you right from wrong. And I always thought about that, you know, and it's like when I do something that I'm supposed to do there's that voice back there that says, 'Margaret you're not supposed to be doing that. [Margaret]

Being reflective and cautious are well-being facilitators Agnes relies on in her life. Being able to think things out enabled her to make valuable decisions that were effective against the challenges she faced. Agnes related,

I think that's a strength is to just step back look at it and then decide. And also to do a lot of reflection. I do a lot in the way that I, you know, I reflect back to the past because I draw on a lot of what happens in the past. I draw on, you know, what my mother would do, what my grandmother would do. [Agnes]

The personality trait that Betty and Susan share is positive thinking. Betty related that she tries to put the positive above the negative and she does this by using meditation, walking long distances and reading spiritualities. In Susan's experience the use of positive thinking has enabled her to weather some hard times. She said,

So you know sometimes I think that God allowed me to go through these things so I could share it with other, you know, everything, there's a reason for it. There's a reason for everything that happens. [Susan]

I believe that the women have reached well-being as defined as optimal psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). They are happy with their lives. They also have the personal characteristics associated with well-being as identified by Keyes and Lopez (2002), autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations with others and self acceptance. The women have autonomy as evidenced by the fact the women are self determined and independent. Examples of this would be Marian and Luci who divorced their husbands after instances of abuse; and Sharon leaving her husband to care for the children when she returned to school. They have each shown personal growth as confirmed by all of the women feeling knowledgeable and effective in their work situations; the continuing education towards advanced degrees for Cheryl and Betty; and the search for cultural competence by Agnes. Environmental mastery is apparent in all 15 women as they negotiate living in the complex environment of the Navajo Nation. The personal characteristic defined as purpose in life fits all the women perfectly. They all have goals and a sense of direction. For example, Claire and Jeanette who grew up in poor circumstances, resolved to have better lives and they have succeeded. Alice realized she wanted to be a teacher and changed jobs and went back to school to achieve that goal. Another aspect of this characteristic is that present and past life is meaningful. The women stated in different ways that where they were are now in their lives is where they are supposed to be. And they each hold beliefs, cultural and spiritual, that give purpose to life.

Positive relationships with others also defines well-being and these women spoke with vivacity about their children, grandchildren, spouses, parents and other family members. They are concerned about others as confirmed by Sharon and Margaret

adopting their grandchildren; Susan and her husband volunteering time to tutor and mentor the youth of the Navajo Nation; and Mary being involved with an environmental group on the Nation. Their actions show they are capable of strong empathy, affection and intimacy. Half the women have been married for an average of 20 years and all the women have children who they dearly love. Every woman stated that their family is the reason they are happy. Another quality of positive relationships with others is understanding the give-and-take of human relationships. The stories the women told about their parents and children and how the relationships have changed as everyone is getting older exemplifies this give- and-take.

Self acceptance is the last personal characteristic identified by Keyes and Lopez (2002). Possessing a positive attitude toward self was obvious when Mary stated that being Navajo was wonderful. All the women expressed similar sentiments in their interviews. When the women talked about being members of the Navajo world and the Anglo world they acknowledged and accepted multiple aspects of themselves which is another trait of well-being. The last component of self acceptance is feeling positive about past life. The women told me about their past lives and were proud of where they came from and where they had been and that the lives they lead now are products of those experiences. The women have met all the criteria for well-being. These criteria also fit the requirements for resilience as defined by Masten (2001) and the American Psychological Association (2003). That is these women are able to adapt in the face of adversity and grow as a result of the challenges. The women interviewed were successful in engaging life's challenges. According to Ryff, and colleagues (1998), their ability to

maintain, recover, or improve in mental or physical health following challenges makes them resilient.

Hobfoll's (2002) conservation of resource theory is also upheld by the women. The women have spent their lives obtaining, retaining and protecting resources. When the resources were unstable there was stress. When the women were able to successfully obtain, retain or protect their resources there was stability. For example when Ann's health was threatened by an undiagnosed illness, there was much stress in her life until she was able to obtain the proper diagnosis and medication to restore her health. Every woman had a similar story where a resource was threatened and until some stability was found there was stress. It was stress that caused the women to make changes, to bring stability to their lives.

The findings from this study are consistent with the findings from the research conducted by Markus, Ryff, Curhan and Palmersheim (2004). They asked middle aged people the meaning of a good life. The majority of the participants responded that relationships with other people (especially family) mattered most. Physical health and financial security were also mentioned. When asked the reasons for their good life, the participants ranked their upbringing as the most influential. The influence of parents and grandparents and a loving family were credited. Other factors cited were self-development, faith, educational attainment and a job.

All of the above factors were also found in this study. The main reason the women stated for their well-being was their relationships with their families. Financial security, in the guise of employment, was recounted by the women as a factor in their

well-being. The group also described the importance of their upbringing and the influence of their parents in the person they are today.

Paths to Well-Being

All these women at middle age said they are happy; they have well-being. As Campbell (1981) stated, well-being is subjective so each woman's concept of the phenomena may be different. However, they all said they have achieved well-being. Each woman is unique and each took a different path in maneuvering the dialectics in their lives to reach the common goal of well-being. But we do know all the women were in agreement when they say they are happy because of their family and that they have financial stability due to employment. Being Navajo and living on the Navajo Nation was also significant in determining well-being for these women.

By analyzing each path individually it is possible to identify similar facilitators that lead to well-being. These similarities can be used to develop pathways based on the women's life histories, which provide some guidance in identifying common characteristics, and illustrate the various paths these women have taken from childhood to well-being in middle age. These different life history paths are a classification device that can be used to describe a phenomenon such as well-being. This classification device was used by Ryff and colleagues (1998) in their research on resilience in adults. In the context of this research the life history pathways of the women interviewed assist in understanding how they reached well-being in middle age. All the women have drawn upon and embraced their Navajo identity as a tool that has enabled them to reach well-

being in middle age. Therefore, culture is the common denominator that guides these pathways typologies. Most of the women grew up in their early childhood years on the Nation. Some have lived on the Nation their entire lives, some left and came back, some moved to the Nation after growing up away. All began in family situations that could be described as economically challenged. From an early age most decided that poverty was something from which they would rid themselves and their children. All used the inner strengths described earlier to finesse the many dialectics they faced to accomplish the goal. The life history pathways that emerged from the study are The Traditional, The Blended, and The Discoverer.

The Traditional Pathway

These women were born on the Nation and were exposed their entire lives to their native culture. They have seen the traditional role of Navajo women as providers and caregivers as the people who hold the families together and who teach the children the ways of their people. These women completed high school at either a BIA school or a public school, then married and raised their family in the Crownpoint area. They have been exposed to the Anglo world through school and media and because of that exposure they became bilingual. Subsequently, they chose to remain on the Nation and practice Navajo traditions.

This group is very comfortable with their culture. They enjoy being Navajo because it makes them unique and provides them with opportunities to interact with the world around them. They find strength in the close family ties generated by living on the Nation, and they find strength in cultural traditions that teach them to persevere even

when things seem to be going badly. They use their culture to search for order in the relationship between the various aspects of their lives to help them achieve well-being in middle age. The eight women who fall into this classification see themselves first and foremost as Navajo.

Blended Pathway

This is a group of women who were born on the Nation and spent their early childhood there. This group left their families at a relatively young age to attend schools away from the Nation either in boarding schools, placement in Colorado, or with Mormon families in Utah. For this group the school experience was their first exposure to non-Navajo life. They were forced to abandon their native language and lifestyle and adopt the ways of the Anglo school authorities or their foster families.

The exposure to a world outside the Nation led to conflicts with family and uncertainty about their roles in the family and the Nation. After returning from high school placements many of the women of this group explored life further off the nation by continuing their education. All of the women eventually returned to the Nation to live in the homeland of their ancestors. For these women the conscious choice to return to the Nation realigned them to their Navajo culture. While they can and have functioned in the Anglo world and continue to interact with it, they have used their native culture as one of the tools to help them achieve well-being in middle age. Four women conform to the characteristics of this pathway. They see themselves as being Navajo first with the Anglo influence as second in their lives.

Discoverer Pathway

The last of women were born and raised off the Nation; therefore they were not exposed to the Navajo culture and traditions. Navajo was not their first language. They were not taught how to weave by their mother and grandmother. It was only following their marriages and moving to the Navajo Nation that they were exposed to the Navajo ways. For this group the Anglo conventions influenced their lives first and the Navajo impact came later in life. After living on the Nation and seeing the society around them, a desire to know more about their ancestors and the traditional ways and beliefs of current Navajo was awakened. They are learning to speak Navajo, learning to weave, and are discovering an array of experiences that have connected them to their Navajo roots. They believe that those connections have led them to inner peace and harmony with their surroundings. The discovery of their Navajo heritage has helped them achieve well-being in middle age. As Agnes said,

I think being Navajo, I like it now. I feel like I'm unique. I'm very unique and I'm proud of who I am. [Agnes]

Three women fit in this life history pathway.

These three life history pathways exemplify the commonalities as well as the diversity of these women. Each woman faced the common dialectics of economic stability, family relationships, education, middle age and health. They all used the facilitators of culture, spirituality, determination, self-esteem and inner strength to cope with the dialectics and growing up while living on the Nation. These facilitators are evident in each pathway. The degree of usage of the certain facilitators was different for each pathway. However, it is clear from the analysis of the interviews that the multiple

pathways lead to well-being. This conclusion is substantiated by the work of Ryff , Singer, Love and Essex (1998) who found in their study of 168 women from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study that rather than a uniform pathway, the women used diverse pathways to reach psychological well-being.

In spite of the diversity in pathways towards well-being, the following trends have emerged. The majority of the women in the Traditional group mentioned spirituality as a facilitator in dealing with family relationships and health. This is in keeping with the spiritual aspect of the Navajo culture as the majority of women in this pathway stayed close to Crownpoint most of their lives. Most attended public schools in the community and were able to continue to learn and participate in traditional practices. The effects of learning English in school were countered at home by being babysat by their grandparents who only spoke Navajo.

Most of the Blended group mentioned positive self-esteem as a facilitator in managing their lives. This personality characteristic is necessary to be able to withstand the stress of blending two cultures. These women were exposed to the Anglo world early in their lives through placement in Anglo homes off the Navajo Nation for most of their academic careers. They became strong and came to believe in their abilities to be part of this new world and the Navajo world. All but one of this group attended college. That experience further honed their ability to make wise choices and live in two worlds. These women believe that they have the best of both worlds.

The majority of the Discoverer group used determination to finesse the dialectics of their life. This strong personality trait is necessary to make a go of it on the Nation especially if most of the women's lives were spent living off the Nation. These women

are fairly new to the facilitator of culture and are discovering its importance in making meaning in their lives.

Conclusions

In beginning this study I proposed to study the strengths and resources that middle aged Navajo women use to face the challenges of being middle aged and living and raising families on the Navajo Nation in the 21st Century. I found that the group of women I interviewed met those challenges by relying on their Navajo culture, their spirituality, determination, self esteem and positive lessons learned with aging. They have been successful in navigating the dialectics of their lives and transforming challenges into resources that have enabled them to reach well-being in middle age.

All of the women started life in what would generally be described as poverty. Through a variety of dialectics and turning instability to stability they got through tough times. They endured poverty as children were; separated from family at an early age; forced to give up their native language and customs; experienced conflicts with parents about lifestyle and culture; dealt with alcohol and physical abuse by spouses; had difficulty obtaining an education and trouble finding employment. They also dealt with a harsh environment, health issues, and cared for aging parents as well as “returned to the nest” children. For the most part they have been successful in turning challenges into resources, instability into stability, in a way that allowed them to persevere in dealing with new challenges they continue to face.

These women are resilient. They got through tough times and are stronger for it. They are survivors. This is a Navajo characteristic. They all suffered through adversity, but were able to rise above it to be where they are today in middle age (where they are employed, happy and with family). They are proud of who they are and what they have accomplished. They are all looking forward to the future that involves their children and grandchildren. The women want to teach their children and grandchildren all they know because they (the children) are the future of the Navajo Nation.

All 15 women are rich in family relationships, cultural practices, community relationships and the knowledge of who they are and their place in the world. The women have a unique way of looking at life. Marian summed it up when she said, *“It’s always good to go zigzag instead of trying to get there fast.”* Betty also mentioned the zigzag or staircase design found in Navajo weavings as being indicative of her philosophy of life. She said:

Some days, you know, you will progress. Some days it will be level. Some days you may fall and fall and you may fall in your struggle but you can always get back up and go up again and then go down again. But the stripes in the middle symbolize that, you know, to keep yourself in line with your spirituality. So that’s kind of how I see my design in everything. Navajo design. Everywhere I go when I see that in a rug, when I see that in a Navajo basket, when I see that in people’s clothes, the things they wear. It just symbolizes a lot of that beauty, happiness. No matter what you fall, you struggle, you live in a good way, you’re living right, any way it’s still good. [Betty]

Taking one day at a time is the lesson to be learned.

Credibility of the Study

The credibility of the study has been established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing and member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The researcher spent the most part of eight months in New Mexico in preparation for and gathering data for the study. This prolonged engagement with the culture, community and women allowed for increased understanding of the issues faced by the women and of the impact culture has on the women in this study.

Peer debriefing, which involved communicating with the dissertation advisor about the project, tentative findings and conclusions as well as field stress, was included as part of the study. This allowed the researcher to have a sounding board for ideas and a check and balance system in place. The dissertation advisor confirmed initial iterations of the data analysis and challenged the researcher to substantiate conclusions with the data.

Member checking was executed informally throughout the entire process by asking the women during the interviews if they had similar experiences. Member checking was also done formally at the end of the data collection and the beginning of analysis with two formal group meetings. During these meetings the women discussed the findings and commented on the preliminary analysis. There was confirmation of the results.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the broad age range used for middle age. There was a 20-year difference in the ages of some of the women interviewed. Their childhoods and early experiences on the Nation were very different. Also, all the women were employed and that fact played a large part in their well-being. Perhaps women who were not employed have a different view of well-being. All the women I interviewed were bilingual and for some, Navajo was their second language. Women who spoke only Navajo would perhaps have differing views about middle age and happiness.

The women I interviewed all lived in the Crownpoint area and a few were born and raised there. Crownpoint is a large town by Navajo Nation standards and has all the amenities of a large town. Women who lived in the rural areas of the Nation may have different things to say concerning their lives.

The interviews on the average lasted one hour. More in depth information may have been gathered, if another interview with each woman had been conducted. There were times when a topic was not delved into because of time constraints put on the interview by the participant.

A limitation that cannot be ignored is the fact that the author is Anglo. The interviews were conducted with an Anglo's sense of timing and conversation. The findings and conclusions have been written through the Anglo lens. Perhaps some meanings have been misunderstood and nuances misinterpreted.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to the literature concerning well-being in middle aged women. In particular this study increases the knowledge about middle-aged Navajo women. There is a tremendous lack of information about these women, and this study adds to the knowledge about the role that culture plays in well-being and resilience.

The results of this study lend credence to the concept of well-being and its usefulness in describing the lives of middle-aged Navajo women. Whether the term is psychological well-being, the good life, the good path, or happiness, it was found that there is a relationship between these constructs and the Navajo's ideal of "walking in beauty." The majority of women did not mention hozho in particular, however, they described the goal of a balanced and happy life. Those who mentioned hozho felt that they would never reach that level of well-being or that level of tradition. Rose stated ,

I think walking in beauty means to me somebody very precious, traditionally. Maybe I imagine a woman that is stress free, healthy, and just really nothing bothering them and most of all they have their traditional, the values, just the figure of the Navajo woman with the bun, I mean, you know, moccasins and all this. That's to me harmony. [Rose]

However, even if the women did not mention hozho by name they all described the goal of a balanced and happy life.

The women interviewed considered themselves to be happy and the fact that they were living on the Navajo Nation was partly why they were happy. Eleven of the 15 women have lived off the Nation sometime in their adult life and they have returned.

When asked the question would they consider living somewhere else all 15 said no. The quality of life on the Navajo Nation for these women is good.

The significance of this small study for the Nation is to affirm programs already in place and to supply data to support the development of future programs that will enable the women of the Nation to be able to navigate middle-age successfully.

The importance of economic development that creates employment on the Nation is imperative. All the women based their well-being on their ability to be financially stable and have a job. Many of the women have been in their current positions for over 20 years and voice concern about the employment possibilities that exist for young women today. Job training availability is a great idea, but the jobs being trained for need to be on the Nation.

All the women were able to take advantage of educational opportunities in the form of public education, boarding schools, placement, business schools, university programs and GED programs. Many of these opportunities were available for the women through tribal scholarships, grants, and Navajo Nation, Federal, state and county programs. Programs that grant financial support for education need to continue and provide additional funding.

The programs that already exist on the Navajo Nation that encourage the exploration of the Navajo culture by children need to continue. Many of the women became more knowledgeable of their own heritage when they assisted their children in learning what it means to be Navajo. Classes and programs for adults that involve further opportunities to examine and practice Navajo ways would be of assistance to those who may have lost their way.

Many of the women care for and have adopted their grandchildren. Any support the Nation can give these middle-aged women would be useful. This would include social services, counseling, and financial support. It is also important to continue to support programs that would help those who are having problems with drug and alcohol abuse including domestic violence. Many of the women or members of their families have benefited by past and existing programs.

This study also has implications for nursing. Learning about different cultures from books and articles is a start in reaching cultural competency. However, the lessons learned from interaction with members of a cultural group are far more important and applicable to the goal of nursing which is to assist people on their journey towards well-being.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study needs to be duplicated with middle aged Navajo women who live in more rural areas of the Navajo Nation. The isolation of living far from town may influence well-being. All the women I interviewed live in a relatively large town and work for agencies of the Navajo Nation, the Federal Government and schools in towns - especially those that are headquarters for major regions of the Navajo Nation.

This same research format could be repeated with other subgroups of middle aged Navajo women such as women for whom Navajo is their primary language; women who are unemployed; women who are struggling with addictions; and women who live in other parts of the country. The results may be different for these groups.

Recommendations for further research include duplicating this project with middle-aged Navajo men. The amount of literature on Navajo middle- aged men is sparse. All of the women listed family (including spouses) in their determination of well-being. It would be interesting to discover what the men think. A male member of the Crownpoint Chapter suggested this work be done.

Further research is necessary to do a cross-cultural study of well-being in middle aged women of many cultures including many different Native American tribes, nations and pueblos. This research would be able to determine the commonalties of well-being and what roles culture plays in determining well-being.

Future research needs to embrace the importance of cultural differences. I was surprised by what I learned with each interview and encounter. Preconceived ideas and attitudes were transformed in the process. The lessons ascertained were reflected in my

understanding of the themes as they emerged and developed. The lessons were also echoed in the final analysis and understanding of well-being in middle aged Navajo women.

I have had the privilege of getting to know 15 remarkable women. From my Anglo viewpoint it seems these women had nothing. They did not drive fancy cars, they lived in Navajo Housing Authority housing, and they lived in Crownpoint with no shopping mall, bank, restaurant or movie theater. Many looked older than their stated years and their stories sometimes made me very sad. However, they had no self pity, no regrets, no ranting about how life has treated them. Instead I found women who were happy with their lives. They were glad to be living in the Crownpoint area where they knew everyone and knew where everything was and how it worked. Driving 50 miles to the nearest bank was just part of living in rural New Mexico. They did it and enjoyed the journey. They had their family nearby and that made them especially happy. I learned a lot from these women and I want to thank them for teaching this bilagaana (Anglo woman) the qualities of being a Navajo woman.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form



PRESIDENT
JOE SHIRLEY, Jr.
VICE PRESIDENT
FRANK J. DAYISH, Jr.

23 April 2004

Jane Weilert, RN, MPH
345 S. Poplar
Wichita, Kansas 67211

Dear Ms. Weilert,

The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (the Board) reviewed your research study number **NNR-04-141** entitled **"Well Being in Middle Aged Navajo Women."** The Board took the following action on April 20, 2004.

1. The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board approved your study and the approval is from April 20, 2004 to April 20, 2005;
2. The consent form is to include Bea Boyd-Bowman's name;
3. All audio taping is to be stored in a secure location on site.
4. The Principal Investigator is to provide a copy of the finished thesis.

The following are standard requirements that apply to all research studies:

1. The Navajo Nation retains ownership of all data obtained within its territorial boundaries. The Principal Investigator shall submit to the NNHRRB a plan and timeline on how and when the data/statistics will be turned over to the Navajo Nation.
2. Only the approved informed consent document(s) will be used in the study;
3. Any proposed future changes to the protocol or the consent form(s) must again be submitted to the Board for review and approval prior to implementation of the proposed change;
4. If the results of the study will be published or used for oral presentations at professional conferences, the proposed publication, abstract and/or presentation materials must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program for Board review and prior approval;
5. Upon Board approval, three (3) copies of the final publication must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program;
6. All manuscripts must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program for Board review and prior approval;
7. The Principle Investigator must submit a dissemination plan on how the results of the study and how these results will be reported back to the Navajo Nation. The Principal Investigator must share specifically how these results will generally benefit or improve the health of the Navajo people. This can be completed by:

- a. Conducting an educational in-service for the community people and health care providers on the Navajo Nation and present the findings. Provide documentation of these in-services presented.
 - b. Developing educational materials for use by the health care providers and the community people and providing the training on how to use the materials; and
 - c. Presenting and sharing the results of the study at a research conference sponsored by the Navajo Nation for its health care providers and the Navajo people.
8. The Principal Investigator is expected to submit documentation on 7a, b, & c.
 9. The Principal Investigator must submit quarterly and annual reports as scheduled.

If you have any questions, please call the Navajo Research Program at (928) 871-6650.

Sincerely,



Beverly Becenti-Pigman, Chair
NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RESEARCH REVIEW BOARD

cc: NNR-04-141
IRB chrono file

ALICE BENALLY
Council Delegate
MITCHELL W. CAPITAN
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Vice-President
LAURETTA ARVISO
Secretary / Treasurer
LINCOLN PERRY, SR.
Land Board Member
ARLENE ARVISO, B.S.W.
Community Services Coordinator
JACYNTHIA R. JOHNSON
Office Specialist

CROWNPOINT CHAPTER

P.O. Box 556 • Crownpoint, New Mexico 87313
Email: crownpointchapter@hotmail.com Website: crownpoint.nndes.org
Email: crownpoint@navajochapters.org



Community Land Use
Planning Committee

STEVEN BEGAY
President
WILLIAM MURPHY
Vice-President

MARCELLA CAYATINETO

Secretary
MAE BILLIE
Member
LEO MARTIN
Member

RESOLUTION OF THE CROWNPOINT CHAPTER CPC 04-02-038

SUBJECT: REQUESTING THE NAVAJO NATION INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD SUPPORT OF THE RESEARCH OF JANE WEILERT, RN, MN, MPH, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF NURSING, NEWMAN UNIVERSITY, WICHITA, KANSAS, TO STUDY WELL BEING IN MIDDLE AGED NAVAJO WOMEN.

WHEREAS:

1. The Crownpoint Chapter, located in McKinley County, is a certified local government unit of the Navajo Nation, and is authorized by 2 N.T.C.'s 4001 and 4028(a) to review and promote matters that affect the local community and to make appropriate recommendations to the Navajo Nation, Federal, State, County and local agencies for consideration and/or approval; and
2. The Crownpoint Chapter residents value efforts to research the strengths and resources middle aged Navajo women use to meet the challenges of being middle aged, living and raising families on the Navajo Nation; and
3. The Crownpoint Chapter agrees that this research would provide information that would be useful to the Crownpoint Chapter and be beneficial to the Chapter members, especially the women; and
4. The researcher, after the project is complete, will provide the Crownpoint Chapter with an written report and oral presentation of the results: and
5. The researcher will present a copy of the completed research report to the Crownpoint Chapter.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Crownpoint Chapter respectfully requests the Navajo Nation Institutional Review Board approve and support the research of Jane Weilert, RN, MN, MPH, to study the well-being of middle aged Navajo women in the Crownpoint community and nearby rural areas.

Phone No: (505) 786-2130

Fax No: (505) 786-2136

CERTIFICATION

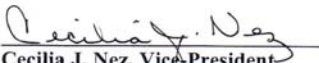
WE HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing resolution was duly considered by the Crownpoint Chapter at a duly called meeting at Crownpoint, (McKinley County) New Mexico, at which a quorum was present and that same was passed by a vote of **28** in favor, **0** opposed and **2** abstained, this **18th** day of **February, 2004**.

Motion: Shirley Ellsworth

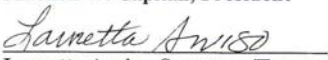
Second: Rita Capitan



Mitchell W. Capitan, President



Cecilia J. Nez, Vice President



Launetta Arviso, Secretary/Treasurer

Alice W. Benally, Council Delegate

Appendix B

Key Interview Questions and Prompts

1. Describe what it is like to be a woman living on the Navajo Nation.
Potential Prompts:
In your opinion, how is it different being a woman than a man on the Nation?
Tell me a story about a time in your life when being a woman made a difference.
How does being Navajo affect your life?
How does living on the Nation affect your life?
2. How would you describe yourself to others? How did you come to be this person?
Potential Prompts
Describe your personality.
Describe a quality of yourself that people admire.
What are your strengths?
Tell a story of how you came to know yourself.
How does your family; culture; living on the Nation influence who you are?
3. As you think about your life, what is going well for you? Why do you think that is so?
Potential Prompts
How are your family; parents; work doing?
Tell me a story about something that has gone well in your life.
Why do you think that is so?
4. What do you like about being the age you are now? What do you dislike?
Potential Prompts
What do you like/dislike physically; emotionally; socially about the age you are now?

Is middle age what you thought it would be?
Tell me a story about your experiences of mid life.
5. Many women experience a number of challenges throughout their lives. What makes you strong in face of challenges?
Potential Prompts
Tell me a story about a time when you were strong.
Who has influenced your ability to be strong?
What had influenced your ability to be strong?

6. What are you looking forward to in the next decades?
No prompts

Appendix C
Institutional Review Board

**Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 3/25/2005

Date: Friday, March 26, 2004

IRB Application No ED0497

Proposal Title: Well Being in Middle Aged Navajo Women

Principal
Investigator(s):

Jane Weillert
345 S. Poplar
Wichita, KS 67211

Colleen Hood
315 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

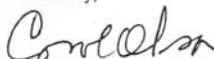
Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, colson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Jane Kemezis Weilert

Candidate for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Thesis: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WELL-BEING IN MIDDLE
AGED NAVAJO WOMEN LIVING ON THE NAVAJO
NATION

Major Field: Health Education

Biographical: Education: Graduated high school from The Academy of the Holy Angels, Demarest , New Jersey in May 1968; received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology from St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri in 1972; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from St. Mary of the Plains College in Dodge City, Kansas in 1979; received a Master of Science degree in Nursing from the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas in 1984; received a Master of Science degree in Public Health from The University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in 1989. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Health and Human Performance at Oklahoma State University in May 2005.

Experience: Taught science in middle school from 1973-1977 in Missouri and Kansas. After receiving the BSN began working as a Registered Nurse. Worked as a field nurse for the Wichita- Sedgwick County Health Department; field nurse for Via Christ Home Health; staff nurse at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center; staff nurse for Hospice Inc. Started teaching nursing at Newman University in 1981. At present an Associate Professor of Nursing at Newman University. All employment as a Registered Nurse has been in Wichita, Kansas.

Professional Memberships: American Public Health Association,
Kansas Public Health Association