

JUBILEE WOMEN: IDENTITY AT 50 A Q-STUDY
OF WHITE AMERICAN WOMEN

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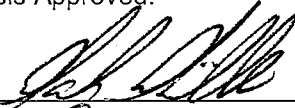
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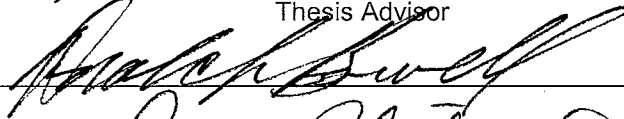
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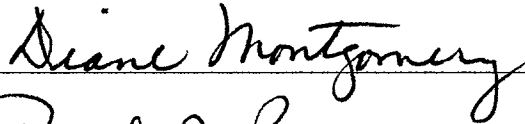
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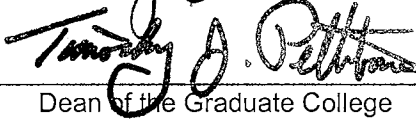
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a tragic story of a woman, Thea Skolver, who at fifty-three years of age jumped from her ninth-floor apartment in midtown Manhattan and landed in a bed of red tulips. Her suicide note read, "I'm out of the loop in every way. Both professionally and personally. I really don't belong anywhere!" (Rountree, 1993, p. 1). Chilling words from anyone, but especially those who approach the age of fifty, the new middle age.

Thea's plight represents a complex combination of intrapsychic and sociocultural factors. Her despair stemmed from her fear that at her age she would fail to find a permanent male partner. She worried that her financial resources would fail her in her old age, leaving her homeless. Thea felt isolated because of lost friendships and had become depressed during menopause. Thea believed society's notion that she didn't "belong" unless she had a male partner, money, glamour, and success. How many other women approach middle age trying to measure themselves against Thea's yardstick?

Of course, that is a difficult and complex question to answer. We do know, however, that the potential numbers are big and getting bigger. When Lillian Rubin (1979) conducted her midlife study of women in the 1970's, there were nearly 25 million women in America between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-four, representing almost one-fourth of the total female population of the United States. Today not only are the numbers larger, 41 million women in that age range, but they also represent nearly 30 percent of the total American female population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).

Besides the increase in total numbers and percentage, the picture of how women spend those years has changed. The median age for entry into a first marriage for women has increased

from 21.2 in 1975 to 25.0 in 1999. The number who choose marriage at all has decreased dramatically. In 1990, 63% of all women in their early 20's had not married compared to 36% in 1970. Thirty-one percent of women ages 25-29 and 16% of women ages 30-34, had not married in 1990. These percentages are nearly three times those of women in 1970 when only 11% of women 25-29 years and 6% of women 30-34 years were not married.

Childbearing statistics have also shifted. The number of single mothers has nearly tripled since 1970, rising from 3.4 million to 9.8 million in 1998. The number of childless women has also increased: twenty-seven percent of women in the 30-34-age bracket were childless in 1995 compared to 16% in 1976. Regarding women in their late 30's, 20% are childless now compared to only 11% in 1976. And 18% of women in their early 40's are childless as opposed to only 10% of women in that age range in the 1970's. More women with children are in the labor force. Fifty-five percent of women in the age range of 15-44 who have given birth were employed according to U.S. Census Bureau (1999) figures; in 1976 this figure was 31%.

Background

At the beginning of the 20th century, the life expectancy of White men and women in the United States was about 45 years (Reeves, 2000). The fullness of life at 50 and beyond was not a major concern when life expectancy at birth was 45 years. In the last century, life expectancy of women has increased, from 45 years in 1900 to 75 years in 1979, and again to 79 years in 1990. Indeed, life expectancy is projected to increase to 81 by 2010. The age of fifty, therefore, has the potential of becoming the true midpoint of life. Indeed the Census Bureau projects that 41% of the women who turn 50 in the year 2000 will live to celebrate their 100th in 2050 (Neuharth, 2000). With longer lives, fewer and later marriages, fewer children, more education and more employment, the statistics on women already are different in the 21st century than they were for the 20th century. But have the issues of midlife women changed so much?

As women in the United States, we have experienced a great deal of social change since the birth of the last women's movement. The challenge of shifting individual and gender

expectations, balancing professional and personal needs in a competitive job market, and economic issues are just a few of the areas of change that women in midlife are now facing (McQuaide, 1998). Women, born in 1950 into a culture where the patriarchal view of husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker seemed to be the unquestioned path to happy-ever-after, ride the crest of the post World War II Baby Boom. Into this seemingly happy picture came Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, newly translated and published in the United States for the first time in 1953. Many credit this book as a major contributing factor to a renewed interest, "the second wave" (Harlan, 1998, p. 23), in feminist issues during the 1960's.

When women born in 1950 started high school in 1964, the birth control pill had been approved for sale in the United States, the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement were making headlines, and President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women was working on overcoming discrimination against women in employment and education. Betty Friedan's (1963) book The Feminine Mystique gave middle-class housewives a language to describe their dissatisfaction, which previously had no name.

When this cohort graduated from college in 1972, they had experienced the birth of the National Organization for Women (NOW), the largest feminist political organization in the United States, and the coining of the phrase "Women's Liberation" at a Miss America pageant protest. In legal areas, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) had banned the use of sex-aggregated want ads, Congress had passed both the Equal Rights Amendment (although it was not ratified by the requisite number of state legislatures), and Title IX of the Education Act, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender in any federally assisted educational program or activity.

Now, in the year 2000, women born in 1950 have married, divorced, or chosen to be single, given birth to and raised children, enjoyed or endured careers, jobs, and professions, lived to see parents age and even die, survived illnesses and begun to face their own transience. Over the last thirty years, American woman have politicized and restructured their individual lives, exposing and trying to erase myths about middle-aged women. Despite these efforts and the diversity and complexity of issues facing women at this age, ageist, sexist, and medical/biological

stereotypes of midlife women persist (McQuaide, 1998). The issues most often associated with women at midlife are menopause, osteoporosis, hormone deficiency, depression, and empty nest. All of these issues represent some sense of loss to women; loss of reproductive capability, loss of bone density, loss of hope, loss of children/role as mother. Are these the issues that women at 50 identify for themselves as important? Do women describe this time in their lives as one of overwhelming loss? What sense do women at 50 have of themselves as adults in the year 2000?

Researcher's Perspective

A recent class exercise helps to illustrate some of the assumptions of the researcher. The class was divided into small groups and each group was given a cup of buttons. The groups were instructed to sort the buttons in any meaningful way. Sorts by size, shape, color, and number of holes were popular. Then we were asked to scramble the buttons and sort in other ways not using size, shape, color, and number of holes. This time sorts were performed by using function, utility, location, and gender as categories. The obvious metaphors were discussed in class. What stayed with me, however, was how clearly our sorts were based on externally derived criteria. If only we knew "button language" we could have asked the buttons how they would sort themselves. We could ask them to tell us their stories. "I lived a pampered life in an organized and well-ventilated closet." "I was ripped off in a moment of passion and spent my life under a hotel bed." Or, "Let me tell you what it's like to be a flashy, brassy button in a cupful of white, button-down-collar buttons."

The most interesting idea from this exercise was that the way we sorted told much more about us than about the buttons. We all knew buttons, and had a preconception of they were to be used and where they could be found. Color, size, shape, and function were important categories to us. So the point was made to me again, research often tells us more about the researcher than the subject.

And so it is with this research. I thought this project was my story as an adult woman of 49 years and the questions I would ask would tell more about me than the women who participated. As I approach 50, I find myself asking myself questions like "Who am I? Who do I want to be? In

relation to whom?" Astonishingly to me, they are the same questions that I hear my teen-age and young adult children asking themselves. But those questions are expected of adolescents and are accepted as part of normal growth and development. What place do they hold for me, a woman of 50?

Then, as I talked about my questions and listened more carefully to women around me, I realized that my story, though different in the details, and my questions were the same as many of the women of my age. And so this becomes their story, too. My approach to the stories of these women is influenced by my own liberal feminist philosophy and emphasizes a multiplicity of expressions of experience as opposed to a distinctive, universal, female standpoint (Enns, 1992).

Adult Development

The concept of adulthood as used in the United States today is a development of the 20th century (Jordan, 1978). We use a wide variety of biological, socially constructed, age-graded, and legal explanations for when one reaches adulthood but these are ambiguous and arbitrary (Levinson, 1996; Smolak, 1993). As yet, there is no universal definition of adulthood and how people's lives evolve within it beyond identifying that time that falls between childhood/adolescence and old age.

Identity Development

Identity refers to that congruence between one's meaning to self and to others (Erikson, 1968). It is not to be confused with the concepts of ego ideal or self (Marcia, 1994). Ego ideal represents that aspect of the super ego that includes internalized goals and aspirations. Identity may include aspects of the ego ideal but goes beyond this concept to involve internal processes as expressed in interaction with the environment. Self is the outcome of the separation-individuation process as undergone by the toddler. The initial self is continually responded to and

refined throughout the lifetime. Self precedes ego ideal and identity and is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for identity.

Although Erikson (1959/1980) named identity as the central task of adolescence, he did not suggest that this first identity would be permanent and life-lasting. Identity (Josselson, 1996) is continually modified during the life span, and builds on and incorporates earlier choices. Identity is a product and a process; it implies both change and continuity. This continual process is described by Bergson (cited in Jordan, 1978), "To exist is to change; to change is to mature; to mature is to create oneself endlessly" (p.198).

This process is not necessarily smooth and unrelenting as it may be represented by continuity and discontinuity, an orderly progression as well as times of no movement, times of feeling like one is going backwards, and even times of chaotic flow (Levinson, 1996). A start and stop, discontinuous process of development is especially relevant to women's lives (Miller, 1976/1986).

When discussing issues of identity development, it is important to be sensitive to the possibility that individual construction of identity is not an expectation of the culture or family (Marcia, 1994). Societally imposed identities may have no room for change or further development over the course of the lifetime.

Women At 50

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of seven weeks of years shall be for you forty nine years. Then you shall hallow the fiftieth year. It shall be a jubilee for you.

Lev. 25: 8, 10

The fiftieth year and beyond can be seen as a time of rich potential in women's lives. A variety of social, spiritual, historical, and biological factors come together around a woman's fiftieth year laying the groundwork, creating fertile space, for becoming all that we are meant to be (Harris, 1995). The term "Jubilee Women" has been used by Harris to describe women in their 50th year, connoting celebration and recognition of the concepts of "royal release" and freedom (Harris, 1995, p. xix).

The developmental strands that come together around the age of fifty for many women include menopause, recognition of physical limits of energy or stamina, changing metabolism, shifts in body appearance, and, for many, an occurrence of serious illness. Socially, there are several influences at this time. For those women who are mothers, this is the time children begin to leave home. A cause/effect relationship has been automatically assumed to exist between children's leave-taking and the co-occurrence of depression in mothers. A term which has come to dominate our public image of women at midlife is "empty-nest syndrome." Another media phrase which is gaining currency is "sandwich generation" used to describe those adults, primarily women (Baber & Allen, 1992), who still have responsibility for their young children or adolescents and who must simultaneously assume more responsibility for their own aging parents.

By fifty, deaths, divorces, births, successes, and failures are part of the repertoire of emotional events which have come together to influence how we identify ourselves. Though variable and unique in their effect on each, there are common patterns, "an interesting arabesque pattern" (Rountree, 1993, p. 5), that emerges. For some, spiritual, faith-related, or religious themes may take a new place of importance as sources for making meaning.

Some women of fifty have reconciled confusing cultural images of femininity and the standard of beauty presented by popular media and come to terms with their own changing body image. There are those who choose to battle the inevitable process of aging and its physical effects, opting for the surgeon's scalpel (Dinnerstein & Weitz, 1994).

Concerns about money and retirement seem to be at the forefront of women's thoughts, and for valid reasons. One in five women over the age of sixty-five lives in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Women who have stayed at home to raise children, who have interrupted careers and professions, or delayed entry into the work force, will soon recognize the financial implications of reduced or nonexistent retirement accounts.

The issues of women at 50 revolve around several critical domains including the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social. How women organize and integrate these domains internally and in relationship to their environment contributes to their sense of identity as adult women.

Statement of the Problem

In general, psychology has very few models of adult development and virtually no adequate theory of adult women's development, particularly identity development at midlife. What theories exist have been fashioned by men and generally are based on men's lives. Using the language of these theories to communicate with women about their experiences as adult women disallows the expression of women's subjective experience. Typically, research projects are developed for sample populations of available age groups, which tend to be college age adults or older adults who may be located in convenient group living centers. Despite the fact that women at midlife represent the largest segment of the adult female population, increased emphasis on the clinical issues and legitimate concerns of our aging society have tended to overshadow the experiences and needs of ordinary, non-clinical, adult populations. Changing demographics, increased life expectancy, and differences in cultural expectations of women in this new century make for profound alterations in the way we live and perceive ourselves. It is hoped that obtaining women's own descriptions of their experience of being adult at this time and place in history will contribute to a better understanding of women's development across the life span.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe women's experience of being 50 years of age in the year 2000. This study will provide a view of the multiplicity of social, psychological, emotional, physiological and spiritual experiences of adult women's development and will explore the adequacy of theoretical descriptions of adulthood to account for the perspectives on adulthood actually held by women.

For this study, theories that represent these identity domains were chosen for their relevance and comparative ease. Theories were chosen that stress a developmental process, are based on research with non-clinical individuals, place emphasis on intrapsychic processes versus

emphasis on sociocultural context, and share a common underlying assumption of individuation/differentiation as critical for adult identity development.

The choice of methodology for this study addresses criticisms of traditional methodological paradigms, which purport to have an "objective" perspective creating the potential for exploitation, power imbalance, and loss of unique voice in the research process (Wilkinson, 1999). A combination of focus groups and Q-methodology, used here, provide a relatively natural social context for making meaning. Balance of power is shifted from the researcher, even more so than in individual interviews. This allows for a diversity of people's own meanings and understandings without imposing a preconceived and predetermined set of definitions on what they say.

Another level of purpose for this study is related to its effect, not only on recipients of the results, but on the actual participants. The dialogical quality of the focus groups in particular may offer participants a venue in which to explore their own development of identity as adult women. The use of focus groups and the subsequent use of women's own "real" language of experience may foster recognition of group commonalities in areas that may have been previously considered very personal and individual experiences. This study has been developed to explore innovative concepts, methods, and applications for understanding and empowering women.

Focus group discussions of the first phase of the study phase will be employed specifically to generate the focus, vocabulary, and language of the Q-sample, the second phase of the study.

Research Questions

1. How do women describe their experience of adult identity at 50-years of age?
2. In what ways are current theories of adult development helpful in understanding women's subjective experience of adulthood?

Definitions

1. *Differentiation of self* (Bowen, 1978)--product of both biological and experiential factors--remains relatively fixed over life--unresponsive to environmental factors. Establishment of both physical and emotional boundaries at developmentally appropriate times between "me" and "not me," "differentiation is our ability to be close to others yet retain a separate identity, to interact with them without conforming to and reciprocating their emotional reactivity, and to tolerate pain and aloneness in order to grow" (Schnarch cited in Edwards, 1999, p. 262).
2. *Personal authority*--synthesizing construct, connecting differentiation and intimacy. Personal authority allows for both the differentiation of self, and simultaneously or subsequently, the conscious development of intimate connections with members of the family of origin, in particular with each of the parents (Williamson, 1981). Williamson assumes that for development as an adult through achievement of personal authority, the individual must "give up the parent as parent" (Williamson, 1981, p. 29). This can be experienced simultaneously as a disorganization within the self and a destabilization of intergenerational (and often spousal) relationships.
3. *Positive disintegration*--Dabrowski (Nelson, 1989) presents positive disintegration as an inner conflict that is generated by the disintegration process that is preparation for growth and developmental transformation. "Positive disintegration is a process whereby simpler and less mature psychological structures composing the personality break down in order for more complex and advanced structures to arise" (Nelson, 1989, p. 5).
4. *Spirituality*--Construed as spirituality, religion, and faith (Kelly, 1995) "personal affirmation of transcendent connectedness in the universe" (p. 4); a common view of human nature, which recognizes the longing for a reality beyond the physically finite and the search for a deep abiding meaning to life (Shafranske and Gorsuch, 1984); a human universal, which is experienced in a unique way by all individuals (Fowler, 1981). Fundamental to healthy

human life, it is interactive and social and requires community, language, ritual, and nurturance. Faith is not religious in its content or context.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study was primarily composed of educated, White/EuroAmerican women of middle-class backgrounds at the age of 50. Although the subject group was not representative of the United States population, the findings can be applied to a growing demographic group. More importantly, the aim of recruitment for Q-methodological research, the method of the current study, is not to achieve a sample that is representative of the population but to ensure that a wide range of relevant viewpoints are represented (Snelling, 1999).

Despite the apparent homogeneity of the participants, it was an expectation that a variety of different perspectives relevant to women's experiences of being 50-years-old would emerge from the data. Different combinations of life experiences and exposure patterns will join with individual strengths and weaknesses to create unique perspectives. Although not predefined by the researcher, it is assumed that these subjective perspectives will occur in patterns that can be identified and shared by groups of women.

The apparent homogeneity of participants across major categories (i. e., race, socioeconomic class, gender, age, education) allowed the researcher to explore other explanations for variability in perspectives. The women of this study represented a privileged class who seemingly have been able to become the people they wished to be. The possibility of choice in these women's lives affords the opportunity to examine how those choices brought them to a sense of adult identity at 50, if in fact, the choices were recognized.

Although particularly well-suited to obtaining a wide variety of perspectives of women's experience of being 50-years-old, the format of the focus group does have some limitations. Since it is important to hear from all the participants, it was difficult to explore any one theme in great depth. Also, although one of the major advantages of focus group interviews is their "loosening

effect" (Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub, 1996, p. 19), participants might have found some topics too sensitive to bring up in the group setting.

Although particular care is taken in the selection of statements for the Q-sort, there is a possibility that a viewpoint or perspective may not be represented in the Q-statements. The opportunity to respond to a post-sort question and/or a post-sort interview is provided to participants to diminish the likelihood of overlooking any perspective of an adult woman's experience.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to describe women's experience of adult identity at 50 years of age in the beginning of the new century. Literature within three general areas is reviewed, beginning with a review of the history of the concept of adulthood. The first body of literature addresses theories related to life span development, particularly as they relate to women. The next section is a review of the literature related to identity development and construction of adult identity. Literature related methodology is subsequently reviewed.

Although theories of adult development have been a topic of some study in the last fifty years, adult development in the specific context of women's lives has not been the focus. Identity development in women has been approached in the contexts of class identity, sexual identity, and career identity but research focused on identity as an overarching, personal construction that acknowledges but transcends social categories has not been the focus of our research attention (Frable, 1997). This study explores women's subjective experiences of a collective or wholistic adult identity beyond the socially designated pieces of identity.

Theories of Adulthood

Historical Perspectives. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word adulthood did not come into use until 1870 and seems to be largely an artifact of twentieth century American culture. The word "adult" derives from the past participle of the Latin *adolescere*, which means, "to grow up." The term adult has been located in writings earlier than 1870, for example, in 1726 one

author wrote, "an adult Age is above the age of Puberty and under that of twenty-five years" (Jordan, 1978, p. 192).

From its original use, we begin to see some of the ambiguity that surrounds this term. It does not seem that there is a specific language to describe the series of age levels after adolescence. We use words such as youth, maturity, and middle age, but they are arbitrary in their links with specific ages. There really is no definition of adulthood and, in contrast to our well-developed descriptions of human development from infancy through adolescence, only a sketchy description of how people's lives actually evolve within that period of adulthood. The predominant view of development proposes that there are three stages, or parts of life: (1) the first twenty years, the formative years before adulthood, generally identified as *childhood* or childhood and adolescence, (2) a final segment or stage, the sequel to adulthood, called *old age*, and (3) whatever years happen between these two defined terms, a not too well-defined time known as adulthood (Levinson, 1996)

Of course, in previous years very few members of any society lived beyond age 40, and most of the persons over age 40 were impaired by illness, accident, and/or bodily decline (Levinson, 1996). Shorter life spans and less advanced medical techniques gave little reason for cultures or individuals to develop the term "adulthood." There were other constraints as well. Until Euro/American theology (Puritanism and predestination) changed, and the family was depoliticized (King George--"Father" of the colonies, George Washington, "Father" of our country, "Father" Abraham (Lincoln), the concept of adulthood as we use it in the United States today could not be developed. Jordan (1978) points out that these shifts in theology and family definition did not take place until after the Civil War and not really until the twentieth century. In any case, the first symposium on adulthood -- (a sign that "adulthood" had been legitimized in the social sciences) -- was not held until 1975.

One approach to understanding the development of the concept of adulthood is through the lens of developmental theories or stage models. Widdershoven (1994) provides a summary of assumptions related to adoption of a developmental model. Specification of the notion of development underlies any discussion of developmental models. Development is related to

change. He explains that development implies change, including structural change. Although there must be qualitative change from one stage to the next, this does not include the notion of progress. Later stages in a developmental model, although possibly preferable to earlier ones, may actually show degeneration compared to earlier ones. In addition, it is not to be assumed that development is brought about solely by internal processes; it may very well take place in interaction with the external context (Widdershoven, 1994).

There are advantages and disadvantages to using a developmental or stage model. A developmental theory provides a way to bring order to observations and that order takes the form of a predictable, temporal sequence. This is helpful in a number of disciplines including education and psychology. The disadvantages of a developmental theory or stage model include the fact that seldom are people so clear and reliable. Therefore, it has been argued that we have allowed arbitrary terms to be interpreted as rules (Kastenbaum, 1993). Indeed what was previously thought to have great scientific basis may be little more than the reigning social values in disguise (Kastenbaum, 1993).

Adulthood, as we know it, is a fairly recent development. However, most academic theorizing has roots in ancient or classical Western thinking. Aristotle thought of life in three ages of growth, stasis, and decline. His thinking was in contrast to Greek medical thinking of his day which divided life into four stages, identified as childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. These corresponded to other famous "fours" of the time i.e., four humors -- black bile, phlegm, yellow or red bile, and blood; four qualities -- hot, dry, cold, moist; and, the four elements -- air, fire, earth, and water.

Aristotle thought that the middle adult years were the pinnacle of a man's life. Beginning a very long tradition, there was no discussion at the time of what years were the pinnacle of a woman's life. Aristotle started this long tradition in psychological theorizing by stating, "the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness" (Jordan, 1991, p. 140). Aristotle died at 61 years so his middle adult years were at about 30. Aristotle's concept of development proceeds from his concept of form moving from its potentiality to its actuality, as an oak is the actuality of the acorn and the acorn is

the potentiality of the oak. An important idea here is the concept of distinct forms that change in a planned and orderly way.

Euro/Christian writers put a different spin on the classical idea of life as mounting and descending by contributing the idea of spiritual ascent. As the body declined, the soul ascended. They also contributed to negative ideas of aging by explaining aging and death to be a result of original sin. This added spiritual or moral causes to the physical causes of aging.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century, the English word "age" referred primarily to a stage or period of life. Numerical age or numbers of years had little social significance. Few people knew exactly how old they were. Writing from this period identified several distinct life phases for men. We presume that women passed through distinct phases of existence, too, but until the seventeenth century, scholars, writers, physicians, and artists either subsumed women under the category of men or referred exclusively to men (Kastenbaum, 1993). Actually, in 1870, late nineteenth century, Augustus Kingsley Gardiner (as cited in Jordan, 1978) wrote in Conjugal Sins, "after menopause a woman was degraded to the level of a being who has no further duty to perform to the world" (p. 195). There seemed no apparent use for the concept of adulthood in women.

In the mid-seventeenth century, John Locke (cited in Kastenbaum, 1993) gave us more to think about when he proposed that a person does not simply actualize over time as Aristotle hypothesized. Instead, how a child develops depends on his/her experiences. His emphasis on children as children and as empty vessels waiting to be filled was in contrast to the prevailing depiction of children as "defective adults." Art of that time appears to reflect the notion of children as miniature adults.

Rousseau, from the eighteenth century, and the first liberal parent, said that we need to pay attention to the child as a child and let children develop in their own natural ways. He appears to be the first stage theorist who described four childhood stages. Rousseau's stage descriptions anticipated Piaget (Kastenbaum, 1993).

Beginning in the nineteenth century, modern biology and medicine, with improved knowledge, techniques, and equipment, wanted objective descriptions and explanations and tried

to understand human development without reference to religious beliefs and the influence of social environment. Cellular biology and bacteriology provided new models for development. Socially, there still was little call for understanding or defining adulthood; the large proportion of children in the nineteenth century went to school until the ages of 12 or 13 and then went to work. What was to describe--and who had time?

Moving into the twentieth century, we come to Freud. His theories have a strong developmental component and describe a process by which we become adult, an end product. His developmental process essentially stopped after adolescence (Anderson & Hayes, 1996; Levinson, 1996). Freud's adult was strongly influenced by what happened in infancy and childhood and achievement of adulthood in the Freudian paradigm featured the disentanglement of the individual personality from the parents (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1978).

Jung differed from Freud in that he pictured development as a lifelong process (Kastenbaum, 1993). He thought that personality development just could not progress very far by adolescence. After all, we had just begun to live as adults and assume the responsibilities of family, work, and community. In midlife, around 35 years to 40 years, the adult becomes aware of potentials that have not been actualized. This could lead to a period of uneasiness which led to the development of the concept of "midlife crisis."

Preoccupation with adolescence seems to be a central feature of turn-of-the-century European culture (Neubauer, 1994). Advancing industrialization and a new accumulation of wealth in Europe and America allowed, and eventually required, children to remain in school during their teenage years. Child labor laws and compulsory school attendance laws contributed to subtle changes in expectations for children and adolescents and consequently affected expectations for adults (Kastenbaum, 1993). G. Stanley Hall's Adolescence (1904) was a first clear attempt to place adolescence firmly as a distinct phase of life with identifiable inner and outer behaviors (Kastenbaum, 1993) but human longevity was still relatively short so adulthood was thought to be unworthy of close scrutiny (Anderson & Hayes, 1996).

Modern Theories.

Until the 1950's, the emphasis in the social sciences was on children and adolescents. Childhood, bound by predictable and changing physiology fits easily into developmental theories based on sequential stages (Anderson & Hayes, 1996). The next legitimate area for research and service that developed was in the field of geriatrics and gerontology (Levinson, 1996), effectively skipping those years that fall between adolescence and old age.

It was Erik Erikson who sought to create an integrated vision of the life cycle that was both descriptive and normative. In 1950 he published Childhood and Society. The theory of development he proposed was radical because he emphasized the process of living and the idea of life history as opposed to case history. He used biography as his chief research method instead of therapy or testing. As we all recognize, Erikson placed more emphasis on sociocultural influences than biological influences in development. His eight stages covered infancy through old age in the 60's, were considered universal, and occurred in a sequence of predictable environments. Unfortunately, Erikson's theory of adult development, based only on males, reflected the American culture of the 1950's which was male-dominated and emphasized "sequential linear growth, separation, differentiation, and increasing autonomy" (Anderson & Hayes, 1996, p. 4).

Daniel Levinson's work in the 1960's through the early 1990's provides another stage in the development of the concept of adulthood. He first published Seasons of a Man's Life in 1978 in which he focused on the adult life experience of men. Adapting his conclusions about men's lives to women's lives, Levinson's 1996 book The Seasons of a Woman's Life was published by his widow. His conclusions were based on Intensive Biographical Interviews of 40 males and 45 females. Levinson, who completed the interviews during the 1980's, was convinced that allowing a woman to tell her life story in her own words was much more fruitful than traditional survey research. Levinson characterized women's midlife as a complex time of transition encompassing experiences full of contradiction and change (Banister, 1999). Banister explains further that he emphasizes the number of losses which women face at this time in their lives and "each loss

contributed to an experience of the loss of a former, younger self and therefore had an important influence on each women's identity" (p. 529). Levinson (1996) utilized a gender perspective as a framework for understanding how men and women differ as they navigate their life course. Although he acknowledges the gradual cultural shift away from a rigid division between male and female, masculine and feminine, "gender splitting" is prominent in his work (p. 414).

In recent years, there seems to be a renewed desire for a deeper understanding of social and spiritual aspects of adult development and aging. As our expected, and actual, life spans continue to lengthen, we have more interest in understanding this period of life known as adulthood. Over the past three decades, research and theory on the adult years has helped expand our understanding of development beyond the child- and adolescent-centered views of the early part of the century. Although life-span perspectives have gained ground (Anderson & Hayes, 1996), major attention of researchers in the social sciences has been focused on the later years of the life cycle.

As before, the middle years of adulthood have been, largely, overlooked, and we know little about the meanings and definitions of midlife (Settersten, 1998). Lachman and James (1997) provide a number of reasons for this lack of emphasis on middle age. The first assumption is that midlife is a fairly stable, uneventful time, with the exception of a midlife crisis. Although midlife crisis has received much popular press it has seldom been subjected to systematic scientific inquiry. Second, it is difficult to reach a middle-aged population for research purposes. Popular age groups for the study of adulthood are 20-year-olds and those adults 60 years of age and older. The convenience of sampling these groups is obvious. Third, midlife is not a chronologically, clearly defined time period. Childhood and old age have clear age-graded markers related to school, legal issues, or the work cycle. Midlife is often defined by key events such as menopause and "empty nest." Finally, the experience and definition of midlife varies as a function of cohort, culture, and context.

Neugarten and Datan (1981) addressed the lack of definition of middle age by calling it "a distinctive period that is not necessarily based on chronological age but is qualitatively different from other age periods" (p. 274). The authors claim that individuals define their position in middle

age within the contexts of body, career, and family. According to the results of their intensive interview study of 100 men and women, middle adulthood is a period of maximum capacity and highly differentiated self.

As Helson (1997) describes, "The phenomena of middle age are the result of recurrent but not inevitable complexes of intersecting physiological, psychological, social, cultural, and historical factors. Thus middle age will have different meanings in different times and places for different individuals" (pp. 23-24).

Women and Adult Development

An unbalanced, male-dominated view of adult development prevailed until the 1970's and 1980's when a new "relational" view of development for women was proposed by female researchers. Emphasizing gender and gender difference, Chodorow (1974), Miller (1976/1986), Josselson (1987,1996), Gilligan (1982), and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986/1997) believed that women develop and gain a sense of identity within a context of relationships with others (Anderson & Hayes, 1996). Most major developmental theories feature a linear progression that fits men's lives rather than women's lives (Bateson, 1989; Gergen, 1990). The stopping and starting of careers for family responsibilities or the postponement of family responsibilities for professional needs is a familiar story for women. Women's lives are discontinuous and variable in patterns and do not fit well into linear theoretical models.

Even now psychology has no adequate theory of women's development, particularly development in adulthood (Josselson, 1996). "Within developmental psychology, women tend to be regarded as potential mothers, than as actual mothers who eventually confront an empty nest--and little else about their lives is articulated" (p. 9). Sometimes menopause is identified as a central developmental theme for midlife women, but this is as sensible as making menstruation the marker event of adolescence (Josselson, 1996).

In contrast to traditional theories of development that characterize "increasing self-control, a sense of self as origin of action and intention, an increasing capacity to use abstract logic, and a

movement toward self-sufficiency" as markers of the ideal, mature Western adult, feminist theorists propose a theory of "being in relation" (Jordan, 1991, p. 136). A central piece of this relational theory is the power of the "ethic of caretaking and relationship in women's lives" (p. 140). The feminist perspective of intersubjectivity vies with traditional (male) theories' primary perspective of the autonomous and separate self. Jordan (1991) emphasizes that this intersubjective perspective goes beyond saying that women value relationships, "...we are suggesting that the deepest sense of one's being is continuously formed in connection with others and is inextricably tied to relational movement" (p. 141). Interest in a relational theory of development has spawned investigation of the concept of mutual empathic understanding and the processes of forming and altering traditional boundaries between subject and object. The study of the development of empathy may "provide a route to the delineation of relational development and intersubjective processes" which has been missing in traditional Western models of development (p. 142).

The apparent lack of academic work in the area of women's development is not mirrored in the popular press. The availability and apparent success of numerous authors who have written about women's development and issues of adulthood is obvious at local bookstores. A classic, popular look at women's developmental issues, Gift From the Sea by Anne Morrow Lindbergh, was published in 1955 (Lindbergh was 49 years old). The Boston Women's Health Collective Our Bodies, Ourselves (1970) has been revised and updated in Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century (1998). An indication of the popularity of this book is the fact that it has been translated and/or adapted into 19 languages, the latest to be Armenian, French for Francophone Africa, Serbian, and Thai. Gail Sheehy's Passages (1984), New Passages: Mapping Your Life Across Time, and The Silent Passage: Menopause, focused attention on topics relevant to women's issues of development. New attitudes toward development and aging in women are presented in When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple (Martz, 1987), Inventing Ourselves Again: Women Face Middle Age (Chan, 1996), On Women Turning 50: Celebrating Midlife Discoveries (Rountree, 1993), and A Woman's Path (Giese, 1998). The generally positive outlook presented in these popular books provides an image of women at midlife that is one of growth, strength, and

optimism. The closing paragraph of Lindbergh's (1955) almost 50 year old book illustrates this attitude.

The waves echo behind me. Patience--Faith--Openness, is what the sea has to teach. Simplicity--Solitude--Intermittency...But there are other beaches to explore. There are more shells to find. This is only a beginning.

Identity Development

It is easy to lose one's way in a theoretical search for identity. The term is often confused or used interchangeably with self, personality, and character (Graafsma, 1994). Identity in combination is a popular research topic. A review of the literature reveals work on career and vocational identity, professional identity, gender identity, ethnic, cultural, and racial identity, national and political identity, and religious identity. Grotevant, Bosma, deLevita and Graafsma, (1994) claim that "basically there is no consensus about the phenomena that *identity* refers to" (p. 7).

The concept of identity, however, has a long history in philosophy, sociology, history, literature, psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. Given the variety of interpretations of identity in the classical and scientific realm, what is the definition of identity for the general layperson? According to The New Britannica-Webster Dictionary & Reference Guide (Ertel, 1981) identity is:

- the fact or condition of being exactly alike; sameness;
- distinguishing character or personality; individuality;
- the fact of being the same as something described or known to exist;
- an equation that is true for all values substituted for the variables.

Sameness, character, and being an identifiable person are elements of the concept of identity (Grotevant et al., 1994). A fruit tree during the four seasons is a good illustration of this idea of change while staying the same. From a bare-branched tree with no leaves in the winter, to spring blossoms, summer fruit, and autumn leaves, the tree remains the same tree. A human being undergoes many changes from birth to death, but remains the same person. The interesting thing as pointed out by Grotevant et al. (1994) is something cannot change if it does not stay the same.

Otherwise we would actually see a sequence. Even with these examples of change and sameness, we still are not sure of the identity of the tree or the human.

In modern history, identity as a concept comes up in the work of Locke, Hume, and Berkeley as *personal identity*. These thinkers emphasized two lines of thought on the topic, the essence of individuality and the means by which an individual can be identified. The first line of thinking led the philosophical, and then the psychological world, into a discussion of consciousness. Locke claimed that personal identity owed nothing to the identity of substance but instead was due to the identity of consciousness. In the one-line style of Descartes, Locke explained that, "I feel that I am the same person as I was yesterday" (Grotevant et al., 1994, p. 10).

Helson (1997) attributes one of the first theories of psychological health in middle age to Carl Jung. According to Jung, "The goals of successful midlife development are twofold: the first involves the completion of 'individuation'; the realization of the first makes possible the rare achievement of the second, which he referred to as 'transcendence'" (Lachman & James, 1997, p. 5).

Individuation for Jung involves the balancing of all the systems of the psyche (animus/anima, conscious/unconscious, mind/body, shadow/persona) to their fullest expression. When these systems are in balance, the true self emerges. The emergence of the true self is not, however, the mark of successful development. A more evolved self, made possible by the achievement of transcendence, is the marker of successful development. The transcendent self is able to live in harmony with all humanity and the laws of nature. Jung does not elaborate this discussion of external influences. His emphasis was on intrapsychic experiences.

Marcia (1994) warns that there are two concepts within psychodynamic theory that may be confused with identity and from which they should be discriminated. Ego ideal is the first concept to differentiate. Ego ideal refers to that aspect of the superego that includes internalized goals and aspirations. Adolescence is the time of most transition for the ego ideal as the teenager "exchanges parents for rock stars, and eventually, it is hoped, integrates also the values of prized teachers and mentors" (p. 71).

The second concept that Marcia (1994) identifies is the self. He describes the self as the outcome of the separation-individuation process that the toddler goes through. "Initial self must be continually responded to and reinforced throughout the lifetime. Self precedes both ego ideal and an identity and probably lies the deepest of the three within personality. A solid sense of self is necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an identity" (p. 71-72).

Contemporary psychological theorizing about identity has its roots in the work of Erik Erikson (1968). Erikson's theory develops the second line of thought in the classical concept of identity. Instead of starting with, "I feel the same as I was yesterday," the underlying premise is in the way that one can be identified as the same by his or her environment. All of Erikson's work with issues of identity stresses mutuality between the individual and his or her world. In Erikson's theory, the function of identity is bridging the gap between the psychological interior and the sociocultural context. Erikson wrote of many aspects of identity: identity as a structure, identity as a synthesizing process, but most significantly, identity as the intersection of individual and society (Grotevant, 1994). This integrative function of identity is described by Erikson (1974) as,

...that balancing function in mental life which keeps things in perspective and in readiness for action. With the help of a sound nervous system, it mediates between outer events and inner responses, between past and future, and between the higher and lower selves. Above all, the ego works at all times on the maintenance of a sense that we (and that means each of us) are central in the flux of our experience, and not tossed around on some periphery; that we are original in our plans of action instead of being pushed around; and finally, that we are active and, in fact, are activating (as well as being activated by) others instead of being made passive or being inactivated by exigencies. All this together makes the difference between feeling (and acting) whole--or fragmented. Obviously, to convince itself of such a position, each ego must maintain a certain sense of omnipotence as well as omniscience which, if not kept within the bounds of the shared omnipotencies and omniscencies of a joint world view will, in the long run make us criminal or insane. (pp. 92-93).

Erikson's life cycle theory describes eight developmental stages. The early stages parallel Freud's psychosexual stages but extend beyond them to cover the entire life cycle. Each stage is represented by its own task with alternative resolutions (e.g., Intimacy versus Isolation). These psychosocial stages represent a sequence of ego growth which occurs as the individual meets the dominant challenge and resolves the conflict of each particular stage. Identity within this context is a developmental achievement. Erikson assigns the task of resolution of identity to middle to late adolescence.

An interesting piece of Erikson's conceptualization of these stages is the breakdown of each stage into three components. As Marcia (1994) summarizes, the first component includes the individual's physical developmental needs and abilities. The second aspect includes relevant social sanctions and expectations, and the third component is the sense of oneself the individual develops as a result of the interaction between the individual and his or her cultural context. It is the confluence of these three components that produces the optimal interior and exterior environment for resolution of each stage task.

In Identity: Youth and Crisis (1968) Erikson devotes an entire chapter to his concept of identity for women. Originally written in 1964 during the height of the Cold War, Erikson was prompted by the threat of nuclear war and male leadership's apparent "limit of its adaptive imagination" to look toward women for peacekeeping and healing. For these characteristics, according to Erikson, were indeed what women "always stood for privately in evolution and in history (realism of householding, responsibility of upbringing, resourcefulness in peacekeeping, and devotion to healing)" (p. 262).

The step from youth to maturity is the crucial life stage for emergence of an integrated female identity (Erikson, 1968). It is at this stage that "the young woman, whatever her work career, relinquishes the care received from the parental family in order to commit herself to the love of a stranger and to the care to be given to his and her offspring" (p. 265). Erikson proposed that a woman's "inner space" (her female organs and hormones) predisposed her to activities related to union and care. Girls love the indoors and see their roles assigned to the indoors of houses and to "tranquil feminine love for family and children" (p. 272). Erikson purports that women find their identities in their bodies and in the needs of their offspring, "taking for granted that the outer world space belongs to the men" (p. 274) and that this is the domain of assertiveness and independence.

James Marcia (1994) incorporated Erikson's theoretical statements about identity and developed a model of identity status that has been used in numerous studies over the past 35 years. Marcia regards identity as a process of internal psychological development embedded in a

social process. Identity exploration and identity commitment intersect to define four identity statuses.

Marcia's (1994) definition of identity comes directly from Erikson's theory. "Identity refers to a coherent sense of one's meaning to oneself and to others within that social context" (p. 70). An individual's sense of identity is a coherent integration of past experiences, a meaningful present, and a future direction. One change that Marcia made to Erikson's stage theory is substituting "and" for "versus" between alternative stage resolutions (e.g., Identity and Identity Diffusion). He felt that this was more representative of the actual process of resolution in which individuals incorporate both negative and positive aspects of the stage.

Marcia's commitment to develop the validity and usefulness of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development for empirical study led him to recognize that research participants used a variety of styles to resolve the Identity-Identity Diffusion task of adolescents at Stage 5. The four identity statuses, Foreclosure, Moratorium, Identity Achievement, and Identity Diffusion, were formulated to capture these styles.

An interesting finding over the course of identity status research is the shifting distributions of the identity statuses according to different cultural conditions. For example, Marcia (1994) describes a resolution pattern called Alienated Achievement that was only found during the Vietnam period. He also identifies a preponderance of Identity Diffusions in a geographical area which suffered recent financial and political hardships. This shifting of identity statuses with changing cultural or historical conditions is consistent with Erikson's general psychosocial emphasis.

Ruthellen Josselson (1994) explores identity with the same Erikson-Marcia perspective, although with greater emphasis on the relational aspects of identity and women. In the relational view of identity, core and context are critical concepts. Rather than emerging from increasing separation and distinction from others, identity is formed from the continual redefinition and reintegration of ways of being with others and being with oneself. In developing a theory or model of relational development, "empiricism... has been hampered by the absence of a language in which to discuss relatedness" (Josselson, 1994).

Until recent years, much of what we have learned about identity development has focused on the importance of separation-individuation processes. The central issues of this theory primarily involve the development of identifications and ego functions independent of parental controls (Josselson, 1994). Adolescents were an obvious target for identity research with this theory because of their painful and public progress through this process of separation. Most research was also limited to male subjects. Therefore, although identity development had a theoretical basis in agency and communion (Bakan, 1966) separation and agentic features received validation in the research population.

More recent research, growing out of the study of women, has begun to counterbalance the forces of separation and agency. Or as Josselson (1994) states, "...speak in stereo, one speaker voicing the themes of doing and self, the other carrying the counterpoint of connection" (p. 89). As Jean Baker Miller (1986) suggested in her work, women's sense of self is organized around the ability to make and maintain relationships. In Gilligan's (1982) work with adolescent girls it is clear that they described themselves primarily in terms of their interpersonal abilities.

Although the development of identity through relationships has gained most popularity with feminist writers, Buber (1965) described this phenomena as such:

"An animal does not need to be confirmed, for it is what it is unquestionably. It is different with man; Sent forth from the natural domain of species into the hazard of the solitary category, surrounded by the air of a chaos which came into being with him, secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come to him only from one person to another" (p. 17).

Writing of Frankie in The Member of the Wedding, Carson McCullers (1946) portrays this desire for relationship most poignantly.

"[S]he had only been Frankie. She was an 'I' person who had to walk around and do things by herself. All other people had a 'we' to claim, all others except her. When Berenice said 'we,' she meant Honey and Big Mama, her lodge or her church. The 'we' of her father was the store. All members of clubs have a 'we' to belong to and talk about. The soldiers in the army can say 'we.' And even criminals on chain-gangs. But...Frankie had no 'we' to claim" (p. 51).

In an example of synchronicity, Carson McCullers died at the age of 50 and The Member of the Wedding, her most well-known work, celebrated the 50th anniversary of its dramatic production in the year 2000.

As people age, our relationships become more complex and each strand of our mutual influence becomes more entangled. Josselson (1994) explains, "each of these streams of relational development, each of these dimensions of 'being with,' has its own course and its own implications for identity" (p. 84).

Josselson (1994) proposed that there are eight relational dimensions that underlie identity formation. The first four dimensions are primary and their influence is largely internal, often preverbal and unconscious: holding, attachment, passionate experience (libidinal connection), and validation. The next four dimensions appear later in development, require cognition, and are conscious: identification, mutuality, embeddedness, and tending (care). These dimensions have not been subject to empirical testing but have the potential for improving understanding of the relational component of identity development (Grotevant, 1994).

Identity is an ongoing process for individuals who live in a culture and historical time that allows persons to construct identity as opposed to an environment, cultural or psychological, that imposes identity. Petersen (2000) recognizes the "profound impact of cultural roles imposed on developing Caucasian girls [which] leads to a decline of self-image, self-esteem, and self-perception" (p. 63). Marcia (1994) reminds us that in the context of construction of identity, the identity formed at adolescence is only the first identity and "successive life cycle issues make their claims for resolution" (p. 70). Petersen (2000) describes a context of forced identity for Caucasian women. Her interviews of White women reveal their struggle to consciously conform to culturally prescribed roles while remaining aware of their true identity or making an active decision to repress their identity.

The adult, however, has the opportunity to modify identity throughout the life span by building on and integrating former choices. "Identity is always both product and process; it embodies continuity and change" (Josselson, 1996, p. 399).

Women and Identity Development

The majority of identity research has focused on identity in college age individuals. Our major developmental designs bring us through adolescence but do not provide a language to describe the age levels beyond adolescence. In addition, the research for these models was, for the most part, conducted with men. As Josselson (1996) points out, "Psychology has no adequate theory of women's development, particularly in adulthood" (p. 9). Midlife is, admittedly, a fluid and arbitrary time period. As life expectancies change and good health is maintained for longer years, midlife shifts as a specific age. Even considering this, almost no space is devoted to women at midlife in recent psychology textbooks. Gergen (1990) explains that, surprisingly, even psychology of women textbooks present midlife women as fragmented topics such as sexual development, marital relations, mothering, widowhood, and sexual crimes. These topics do not begin to represent the complexity and integration of identity issues for women in midlife in the twenty-first century.

While trying to fit women's development to the linear stages of men's development, another issue of women's identity development was overlooked (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987; Miller, 1976/1986; Belenky et al, 1986). Interpersonal relatedness and the role of affiliation in the quest for meaning in life are examples of issues that have been demonstrated to be important to women's sense of identity and well-being but have been underemphasized or ignored in male-based developmental theories.

Belenky et al. (1986) provide "five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority" (p. 3). How women view the reality of their own identities can be addressed through an understanding of five perspectives. These perspectives may be understood as a developmental model and include silence; received knowledge (listening to the voice of others); subjective knowledge (inner voice and quest for self); procedural knowledge (voice of reason and separate and connected knowing); and, constructed knowledge (integrating the voices) (Belenky et al., 1986).

Contemporary theories of identity have been grounded in Erikson's work with men, and primarily male patients. All Erikson had to say about women was "that much of a woman's identity resides in her choice of the man she wants to be sought by" (Josselson, 1987, p. 22). Also, as Jordan (1991) points out, in Erikson's developmental schema, "identity is early predicated on establishment of autonomy. Intimacy is established later, only after identity is consolidated" (p. 138). The concept of relationality of development is therefore missing in much of Erikson's approach to identity development.

Gilligan (1982) popularized "a different voice" for women. This voice was more person-centered and empathic, more emotionally connected. Men's goals seemed to be dominated by images of power, autonomy, and hierarchy. Men are visualized as desiring to be "at the top" while women prefer to be "at the center." Gilligan presented women's dominant fear as one of being stranded or isolated. When Helson (1997) investigated women's most influential and difficult time at midlife, the most common themes were a search for independent identity and abandonment.

Constructions of Adult Identity

In recent years, many words and constructs have been developed to define identity achievement in adulthood. Bowen's (1978) goal of adult development is differentiation of self from one's family of origin. Differentiation of self involves the ability of the individual to be in control and distinguish their own thoughts and feelings from those of others. The differentiated individual has confidence in his/her own decisions and assumes responsibility for his/her own behavior.

Levinson (1996) distinguishes between separation-individuation during the first few years of life and the process during adult years. Establishing a boundary between the "me" and the "not-me" is the identity task for the early years. During adult years, separation-individuation issues are more sophisticated requiring "consolidation of an adult identity, greater differentiation from parents, and preparation for future life as an adult" (p. 419). That individuation is not selfishness or ego-centrism is important for an understanding of the concept. Individuation involves creating a balance between being responsible to and for others and being responsible to and for oneself.

Williamson (1991) proposes two tasks for adult development. These are leaving home psychologically and becoming one's own person and simultaneously maintaining intimacy with one's parents. Achievement of these tasks results in a state of "personal authority." Personal authority is "continuing emotional freedom and energy to initiate, sustain, review, and renegotiate, or terminate the experience of emotional intimacy at any given time in any relationship" (p. 41).

A core aspect of adult identity appears to be related to spirituality or "faith." In Judeo-Christian traditions, faith, (Fowler, 1981) is a human universal. Our environment and our relationships shape the expression of faith in our lives. While our faith or spirituality may be expressed through our culture, it precedes and transcends culture ("White Paper on Spirituality," 1999). Fowler offers a theory of growth in faith based on the developmental theories of Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg. The dynamics of change and transformation with a concurrent focus on equilibrium and continuity characterizes Fowler's theory of faith development and, although presented as stages, are not to be understood as achievement scales. Fowler's stages encompass the life span and range from infancy and undifferentiated faith to the emergence of a universalizing faith in late adulthood.

Traditional self-concept research as conceptualized by William James (cited in Heckhausen, 1991) developed a classification system identifying the material, social, and spiritual self. McQuaide (1998) identifies what may be of importance to persons in midlife: "issues of loss, aloneness, meaning, purpose, acceptance, transcendence, and mortality" (p. 10). Do women at midlife experience these issues in the context of a faith or spiritual reality? How do women make sense of these issues?

Dabrowski (Nelson, 1989) stresses the affective aspect of development. Movement from a non-reflective, egocentric stance to a position, which is intensely self-aware and altruistic, is achieved through a process of *positive disintegration*. In this process there is a breakdown of simpler and less mature psychological structures giving rise to more complex and advanced structures.

An important assumption of Dabrowski's theory is that without self-awareness there is no differentiation and no individuation (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983). Another assumption articulates the role of suffering and inner conflict.

Neugarten and Datan (1981) recognized the central importance of "executive processes of personality" in a group of middle-aged men and women. They identified self-awareness, selectivity, manipulation, and control of the environment, mastery, and competence. The most striking characteristic was the ability for reflection "...the stocktaking, the heightened introspection, and above all, the structuring and restructuring of experience..." (p. 283).

Methodology

Often studies seek to discover a "hypothetical" norm or average picture. On the contrary, the point of interest in this research was the subjective experience of social, psychological, emotional, and spiritual events in the lives of a particular population of adult women at or near the celebration of their "jubilee year" i.e., 50 years of age. In other words, how women in their own words describe their experience of adult growth and development. The internal frame of reference that this subjectivity calls for precludes the use of an external frame of reference brought to the task by the researcher (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

One method that has been used to allow a person to communicate his or her own point of view in a scientific study of subjectivity is Q-methodology. As described by Brown (1980), Q-methodology examines the world from the "*internal* standpoint of the individual being studied" (p. 1). Q technique is a set of procedures that organizes thoughts, opinions, or factors in a significant order with respect to the individual person. The factors are grounded in concrete behavior, reliable and replicable, and subject to statistical analysis.

Snelling (1999) describes some of the positive outcomes of the use of Q-methodology. Many perspectives can be accommodated by this methodology, even perspectives that may not have been previously suggested by a theoretical framework. Areas of agreement among

individuals holding different views can also be identified because Q-methodology allows similarities between factors to emerge.

Q-methodology has been effectively utilized to investigate women's subjective points of view on such issues as pornography (Senn, 1991, 1993), lesbianism (Kitzinger, 1987; Kitzinger & Rogers, 1985), women's responses to inequality (Breinlinger & Kelly, 1994), women's perspectives on feminism (Snelling, 1999), accounts of health and illness (Stainton Rogers, 1991) and conceptions of human rights (R. Stainton Rogers & Kitzinger, 1995).

Focus groups are particularly suited to research questions that involve the construction or negotiation of meanings (Wilkinson, 1999). Focus group interviews have been a popular research technique in the marketing and business areas for the last 30 years and have currently expanded to fields such as communication, health, education, and psychology (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Krueger (as cited in Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) describes focus group interviews as "organized group discussions which are focused around a single theme" with the goal of creating "candid, normal conversation that addresses, in depth, the selected topic" (p. 4). Focus groups have been identified as a methodologically sound solution for several problems inherent in traditional research. Artificiality, decontextualization, and exploitation are potential problems in traditional research, which are more easily dealt with through the utilization of focus groups.

Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) point out that focus group interviews are particularly appropriate when conducting exploratory research. The four assumptions underlying the focus group interview are especially congruent with a study that has as its goal a description of individuals' own experiences without using language imposed by the researcher. The first assumption is that people are valuable sources of information about themselves. Secondly, people are capable of giving information about themselves and can articulate their opinions, feelings, and perceptions. A third assumption expresses the belief that a structured group conversation with a proficient moderator is the best means of eliciting people's opinions and feelings. The fourth assumption relates to the effect of group dynamics. J. M. Hess (cited in Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) offers five advantages of focus group interviews over

individual interviews. These five advantages are synergism, snowballing, stimulation, security, and spontaneity.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to describe women's experience of being an adult woman of 50 years of age. Q methodology, a research strategy that allows participants to define an issue from their own subjective viewpoints, was used in this study. The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase included the development of the instrument to be used in the proposed study; the second phase consisted of the collection of data using the research instrument, the Q sort, and the data analysis and interpretation. The description of both phases is explained in sequence in this chapter.

The First Phase--Focus Groups

Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited in a purposive manner from acquaintances and friends of the researcher. Forty women between the ages of 45 and 55 years of age were contacted by letter and follow-up phone calls, and thirty of these women were subsequently assigned to one of three, 2-hour focus groups. Women in this age span were selected to elicit a wide range of experiences to which women who are 50 years-old in 2000 could relate. Focus groups were moderated by Christine Johnson, Ph.D., Director of the OSU Bureau of Social Research, a certified focus group moderator.

The 3 focus groups were conducted in a private room of a local restaurant and a meal was served. Participants completed an Informed Consent Form and a Demographic Data Form

before the start of discussion. Discussion followed the Question Route (Appendix A) which had been previously developed by the researchers and moderator. Discussions were audio-taped. Participants were paid \$20 at the end of the focus group discussion. The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (Appendix B) granted approval for this phase of the study through IRB # ED00277.

Analysis of Focus Group Data

Audio-tapes of the focus group discussions were transcribed by staff of the OSU Bureau of Social Research. During transcription, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to maintain confidentiality. Data were analyzed by the researcher according to emerging themes and patterns, characteristic of qualitative research. Discussions were analyzed in ways that could take full advantage of the group dynamic and interaction among research participants. Statements were chosen by the researcher to represent a diversity of viewpoints, experiences and opinions expressed by the women in the focus groups. Naturalistic statements were examined to ensure a representation of the range of theoretical viewpoints relating to adult development.

Concourse development.

A concourse refers to the domain of subjective interest (McKeown & Thomas, 1988), and may be developed using a variety of procedures. Because focus groups offer insight into participants' subjective points of view as well as a group interaction and dynamic, this method was conducted to provide the rich text necessary to develop the concourse of all possible opinions and reactions of the participants in this study toward the topic, women's experience of adult identity. As in qualitative research, the strength of focus groups resides in its inductive approach, its focus on specific persons in specific times, and contexts, and its emphasis on words not numbers. As such, this approach formed the basis for the development of the concourse. Women's personal

opinions about their experience of adult identity in the new century, expressed during focus group discussions, were the basis for the first step in the development of an instrument for this study.

Instrument development.

A list of approximately 150 statements representing a variety of experiences of women's adult identity at 50 was extracted from the focus group data. These statements were selected because they seemed to represent the full range of social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physiological experiences of being a women of 50 that the women in the focus group expressed. These topic areas also represent the emphasis of major theorists (i.e. Williamson, Dabrowski, Bowen, and Fowler) on the topic of adult development. Because of the time required to perform a Q-sort, suggested maximum and minimum limits for the Q-sample range from 50 to 100 statements (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). In selecting the 60 naturalistic statements, the goal was to have an approximately even number of statements for each domain of experience (social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physiological) while remaining true to the expressed experience of the women in the focus groups. In a few instances, naturalistic statements were supplemented by theoretical statements from social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual developmental theories to ensure that a wide and complete range of possibilities for sorting was provided. This combination of naturalistic and theoretical statements represents a "hybrid type" of Q-sample and was utilized as a tool for instrument development (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 27). A list of 60 statements, reflecting Jubilee women's experiences of adult identity, formed the naturalistic Q-sample used in Phase 2 of this study. (See Appendix C for list.)

Phase 2--The Present Study

Participants

Participants in the Q-sort phase of the study were obtained from the alumnae list of an all female, private, Catholic high school in a midwestern city. Ninety-nine women who graduated in the years 1967, 1968, and 1969 were mailed materials in a Q-packet for completion. As the attention in Q methodology is given to the statement samples, the person-sample, although not unimportant, is approached with a different orientation than in traditional quantitative methodology (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). As Brown (1993) explains,

And since the interest of Q methodology is in the nature of the segments and the extent to which they are similar or dissimilar, the issue of large numbers, so fundamental to most social research, is rendered relatively unimportant. (p. 94)

Names were chosen from the alumnae lists in a random manner. The objective was to obtain completed packets from participants who represented a variety of the demographic possibilities within the chosen population.

A total of twenty-five (25), which is 31% of the total number, completed Q packets were returned (18 packets were returned for change of address). Of these participants, fourteen (14) were in their first marriage, two (2) were in a second marriage, seven (7) were single after having been married, and two were never married. Age at first marriage ranged from 19 years to 31 years with average age at first marriage 24.4 years.

Twenty-three women had children with average age at birth of first child 28.7 years. Among these women, they had a total of 62 children for an average of 2.8 children. Of the 62 children, 75%, or 47, were still living in their mother's home and/or described by their mothers as financially dependent.

In the realm of education, twelve women had bachelor's degrees, six had master's degrees, and one had a doctoral degree. On average these women received their highest degree at the age of 29.1 years.

Economically these women described themselves as middle class (12), upper middle class (11), and wealthy (2). In terms of actual gross annual income reported there was a range from \$21,000-40,000 to more than \$200,000. Average annual gross income reported was \$75,000-81,000. Fifteen women stated they could name their personal net worth within a 10% range.

Sixteen women, or 66.3%, had moved from the state they lived in at the time of high school graduation. The average number of years they had lived in their present respective states is 23.1 years.

Both parents were still living for fourteen of the participating women while both parents were deceased for six women. The remaining five women had one living parent. Twenty-three women reported having been employed as full-time workers for an average of 12.7 years. Not all of this employment had been salaried as one person reported having been a full-time homemaker for 22 years with no overt financial reimbursement.

Materials

Each research packet mailed to participants included a letter of invitation, a consent form, a set of instructions, a Demographic Data Form, a deck of Q-statement cards, a Q-sort form sheet to aid in sorting, a Q-sort record sheet, a request for honorarium form, and two stamped envelopes. The record sheet included a request for phone number in order to contact the participant for post-sort interview.

The Q-sort requires the use of a form board or sheet to indicate the range and distribution of the Q-sort design. A participant revealed her point of view by rank ordering statements along a continuum of significance as directed in the condition of instruction. The condition of instruction serves as a guide to the Q-sorting process (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). The condition of instruction for this study was in the form of a question, "What is your experience of being an adult woman of 50 years?"

Data Collection

Participants received a set of instructions with their Q packet. Consent forms were read and signed first and demographic information was recorded on the Demographic Data Form. Participants were asked to read through the cards to become familiar with them. As the participant did this, she sorted the cards into three stacks. The stack on the right contained statements that were most like her experience of being 50, the stack on the left were statements that were least like her experience, and in the center was the stack of statements about which she was ambivalent, neutral, or uncertain. Participants were then instructed to pick up the right hand, or "most like" cards, and from this pile choose the three statements that were the best descriptions of their own experience of being 50, and place those on the form sheet in the squares above #11. The order was not important. The participant was then instructed to turn to the left hand pile, or "most unlike" statements, choose three statements that were the worst descriptions of her experience of being 50 and place those cards in the squares above #1. Participants returned to the right hand pile, choosing four "like" statements to place in the squares above #10 on the form board. Alternating from right (most like) to left (most unlike) and working toward the middle (neutral), the participants positioned the statement cards on the form board (See Appendix C, e.g., Form Board). Cards could be rearranged at any time before their positions were recorded on the record sheet.

Each individual's own viewpoint was revealed through sorting the Q-sample (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). In a further attempt to gather data which would reveal the individuals' subjective experience of adult identity, the participants were asked to respond to a post-sort question on the reverse side of the record sheet, "What else would you like to say about your experience of being an adult woman of 50 years?" Participants were asked to provide a telephone number if they would permit a follow-up call to discuss their responses.

Participants mailed the completed Demographic Data Form and the completed record sheet in the stamped return envelope to the researcher. Signed consent forms and payment request forms were mailed separately in the other stamped envelope to guarantee anonymity of

the responses. Participants received \$10 by return mail or had \$10 donated to a charity of their choice in gratitude for their participation.

Upon receipt of the completed Q-sorts, data were entered and analyzed using PQ Method 2.09 (Schmolck, 2000), a software program designed specifically for the analysis of Q-Method data. Patterns of similarities among the subjective representations were identified through factor analysis. Principal component analysis on an $N \times N$ correlation matrix of participants followed by a Varimax rotation was used to determine the factors.

The meanings of the factors were interpreted based on the content of the theoretical arrays that emerged on the Q-sorts representing the structure of the beliefs of the women who participated. Each of the factors represented a view of adult women's identity that is shared by the women whose Q-sorts loaded significantly on that same factor. The factors represent qualitative categories of experience as opposed to quantitative representations. Although we do not know the proportions of the factor types which exist in the general population and we do not have evidence of other points of view that might exist, "we can nevertheless proceed to compare and contrast the [three] distinctive ways of thinking which we have located with full confidence that they really do exist (demonstrably so)..." (Brown, 1993, p. 120).

Factor scores were calculated for each statement on each factor. A "factor array" (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 53) of all statements was created for each factor. This ordering contributed to the task of understanding and interpreting the meanings of factors. Statistical differences in statement ranks for any given pair of factors also contributed to understanding and interpretation of the factors. Patterns of consensual and divergent subjectivity were emphasized. Written responses to the post-sort question and verbal responses to follow-up phone calls were used to provide another level of understanding for the factors. Chapter IV details the outcome of the factor interpretation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Q-Method was used to determine the predominant perspectives on being 50 years of age held by a group of White American women. This chapter discusses the results of the analysis and an interpretation of each of the factors as revealed in the data. Interpretation of the factors are based on the factor structure with the loadings that signify a defining factor (Table II), factor arrays (Appendix D, Table D-1), rank statement totals for each factor (Table III), and responses to an open-ended post-survey question. The demographic data is presented as relevant to the revealed factors.

Research Question One

The intent of this research was to answer two questions, the first of which was, "How do women describe their experience of adult identity at 50 years of age?" Through the Q-sort, statements were rank-ordered by the participants. With the use of PQMethod, a principal component analysis was performed on the correlation matrix of the raw data. After the factor analysis process a VARIMAX rotation was performed. Factors were flagged according to significant factor scores. A calculation of z-scores for statements on each factor discriminates between the factors based on the original Q-sort statements. Two, three, and four factor solutions were run. The 2Q factor (i.e., the factor on which only two women's Q-sorts loaded) appeared consistently in the two, three, and four factor solutions and captured a perspective that provided insight into women's experience of midlife. The three factor solution was chosen for interpretation as it maximized the explained variance and minimized the number of confounded Q-sorts and

amount of factor correlation (Table I). The three factor solution which accounted for 55% of the total variance is shown in Table II.

TABLE I
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN FACTORS

	1	2	3
1	1.0000		
2	0.3102	1.0000	
3	0.6946	0.2881	1.0000

This factor solution suggests three distinct experiences of adult identity at 50 years for these women. One group of women, designated as Women of Strength in Resilience, described their experience as getting stronger, being better persons than when younger. The experience of tough times had given them a confidence that they could handle other things that may happen to them in their lives. A second group of women, Women of Strength in Doubt, provided an experience of looking back, wishing, wondering, seeking, waiting or being on hold. The third group of women, Women of Strength in Conviction exuded an assurance of who they had become, enjoying a balance in life that they have grown to appreciate.

TABLE II
FACTOR MATRIX WITH X INDICATING A DEFINING FACTOR

QSORT	1	2	3
1 Louisa	0.1144	0.7058X	-0.0441
2 Eleanor	0.3736	-0.0623	0.6996X
3 Susan	0.5503X	0.2801	0.4166
4 Katharine	0.4467	0.4217	0.4596
5 Sally	0.5551	-0.0211	0.5749X
6 Anne	0.2355	0.2503	0.7266X
7 Amy	0.7970X	0.2464	-0.0151
8 Amelia	0.6262X	0.1132	0.3209
9 Dorothy	0.4712	0.2357	0.4173
10 Billie	0.7900X	0.0312	0.1474
11 Emily	0.7136X	0.0045	0.4347
12 Margaret	0.4331	0.0839	0.6579X
13 Claire	0.4342	0.1243	0.5780X
14 Juliette	0.4493	0.2746	0.5736X
15 Elizabeth	0.7456X	0.1159	0.1711
16 Beverly	0.5097X	0.2450	0.3820

TABLE II (Cont.)

17 Barbara	0.1680	0.8021X	0.1248
18 Diane	-0.0559	0.3646	0.3229
19 Kelly	0.7661X	-0.0623	0.3260
20 Gloria	0.3593	0.2638	0.5084X
21 Rachel	-0.0240	0.1307	0.7824X
22 Jean	0.5839X	0.3074	0.4228
23 Erin	0.3168	-0.0398	0.5645X
24 Ellen	0.4437X	0.1342	0.3368
25 Christine	0.3780	-0.2321	0.3975
% expl.Var.	25	9	21

Note: X is determined at .05 level of significance

Factor One, Women of Strength in Resilience. Of the ten participants who loaded on factor one, five were in their first marriage. They had been married an average of 24.7 years. Five were single after having been divorced with the average age of divorce being 45.6 years. These ten women had thirty children among them, twenty-five of whom were still living in their mother's home or considered financially dependent. The average age that these ten women gave birth to their first child was 28.7 years. Eight of the women had bachelor's or master's degrees with the average age for completion of last degree being 31.1 years. Of the ten women, four had lost one or both parents to death. Average family income was reported in the range of \$66,000-81,000. Ten of ten women reported regular participation in an organized religious group. Women who were identified in this factor reported engagement in full-time occupations ranging from 1 - 28 years. One woman identified her occupation as homemaker while others identified their occupations as those typically assumed to be predominantly female such as teacher or administrative assistant.

These women were designated as Women of Strength in Resilience. The emerging experience presented by these participants indicates the belief that at 50 years these women were stronger and better than when younger. This strength was gained through the experience of a difficult event which gave them confidence that they could handle whatever comes next in life.

TABLE III
RANK ORDER AND Z-SCORE STATEMENT TOTALS FOR EACH FACTOR

No.	Statement	Factors						
		No.	1		2		3	
			z-score	Rank	z-score	Rank	z-score	Rank
1	I have a sure sense of where I'm going with my life	1	-0.17	35	1.07	11	1.59	5
2	I don't feel any different than when I was younger: I	2	0.29	28	0.44	21	-0.01	27
3	I don't necessarily want to be in charge of my own lif	3	-1.05	47	-1.91	59	-1.47	57
4	I don't like realizing that my children are growing up	4	-0.50	41	-1.31	55	-0.08	31
5	I used to worry a lot about always doing what other pe	5	0.41	25	1.14	9	0.46	20
6	Whatever is going to happen to me in a day is my own c	6	0.64	15	1.51	6	0.55	19
7	I used to think of 50 as "one foot in the grave" but I	7	0.36	27	0.94	15	0.00	26
8	My parents saw me as grown up when I got married.	8	-0.13	34	-0.10	32	-0.59	40
9	My whole core of freedom is taking care of myself fina	9	0.78	13	-0.27	36	-0.04	29
10	I feel like I've always been a grown-up. I missed out	10	-1.26	53	-0.13	33	-1.06	52
11	Empty nest is the best thing about being 50.	11	-0.65	43	1.51	6	-0.64	42
12	I spend more time on the important relationships in my	12	1.22	8	-0.50	40	1.43	6
13	I've always considered my primary occupation as mother	13	0.53	19	-0.94	50	-0.16	33
14	I never felt like I was a kid because I didn't do the	14	-1.22	52	-0.91	48	-0.76	48
15	I realized I was grown-up when I became a parent and r	15	0.58	18	0.87	16	-0.32	36
16	I was in my forties when I first realized I had choice	16	0.48	22	0.27	25	-0.27	35
17	I don't feel like I'm grow-up. I feel like I'm playing	17	-1.14	49	-0.67	44	-0.75	47
18	I was scared to be grown-up.	18	-1.34	56	-2.01	60	-0.80	50
19	I have never thought of my dad as a peer of my own.	19	0.07	32	0.67	19	0.61	18
20	I miss the social life that revolved around my childre	20	0.17	30	-1.91	59	-0.74	45
21	I like having the experience; it's not necessarily wis	21	0.12	31	0.27	25	0.97	11
22	If someone asks me my opinion I feel more confident th	22	1.50	5	0.40	22	1.23	8
23	I like feeling I don't have to be perfect.	23	0.88	11	0.60	20	0.91	15
24	I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learni	24	0.61	16	1.58	4	-0.09	32
25	I wish I had taken more risks, tried out more things w	25	1.04	10	1.64	2	-0.25	34
26	I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages	26	2.05	1	1.58	4	1.99	1
27	I've come to realize that God is not a people-pleaser	27	1.08	9	-0.44	39	0.93	14
28	There aren't bad things and good things in life necess	28	0.83	12	0.37	23	0.62	17
29	I think that the best part of my life is over.	29	-2.11	60	0.97	14	-1.66	58
30	There came a time in my relationship with my husband t	30	1.25	6	1.14	9	-0.06	30
31	The only important thing that has ever happened to me	31	-0.86	45	-0.94	50	-1.40	56
32	I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, edu	32	0.45	23	-0.17	34	1.82	4
33	When my parents were unavailable to me I realized I ha	33	-0.23	36	-0.34	38	0.07	25
34	Handling hard things in my life has given me a great s	34	1.83	2	0.70	18	1.36	7
35	My greatest sense of failure is the loss of my marriag	35	0.50	20	-1.68	57	-1.84	59
36	I feel like my role with my parents has reversed and n	36	-0.09	33	-0.70	46	-0.74	46
37	I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes	37	-1.30	54	-0.84	47	-0.76	49
38	I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes	38	-0.85	44	-0.97	52	-0.42	38
39	As a woman I am not as responsible for supporting my f	39	-1.51	58	-0.70	46	-0.41	37
40	I feel that I'm somebody's wife and somebody's mom and	40	-1.43	57	-0.20	35	-1.91	60
41	IN the big picture I feel like I'm in control of my li	41	-0.28	37	-1.31	55	-0.59	41
42	I don't have to worry about periods anymore but now I	42	-0.48	40	1.04	13	0.94	12
43	I think it's amazing how young I still feel at 50.	43	1.70	4	1.04	13	1.18	9
44	My body feels old but my mind is still young.	44	-1.16	50	-0.54	42	0.09	24
45	I am enjoying thinking about my spirituality.	45	0.27	29	-0.07	30	0.93	13
46	If I had known at 30 what I know now, I would have had	46	0.50	21	-0.57	43	0.29	22
47	I have a hard time relating to the idea of changing ro	47	-0.89	46	-0.34	38	-1.31	55
48	I feel like at 50 I'm starting my life over, redefin	48	0.67	14	1.34	7	-0.02	28
49	I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a di	49	-1.32	55	1.64	2	-1.02	51
50	I'm not sure what to do with the quiet that I have in	50	-0.40	39	-1.04	53	-0.65	43
51	I wish I had not been so career-oriented when I was yo	51	-1.12	48	-1.68	57	-0.54	39
52	I feel like my life has been on hold.	52	-0.62	42	0.84	17	-1.18	53
53	I think my faith now is different than my religion.	53	0.61	17	-0.07	30	0.28	23
54	I am excited about the possibilities coming up in the	54	1.83	3	0.03	28	1.96	2
55	I am the same person at 50 that I have always been.	55	-1.17	51	0.07	27	0.40	21
56	At 50, I have a new sense of understanding for or mayb	56	1.22	7	-0.10	32	1.07	10
57	I feel grown-up in all of my relationships.	57	0.41	24	-0.54	42	0.85	16
58	I've been looking for myself for 50 years.	58	-1.60	59	1.07	11	-0.73	44
59	When I graduated from high school, my career choices w	59	-0.40	38	0.10	26	-1.19	54
60	I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best	60	0.40	26	-0.97	52	1.93	3

Inferences about the commonalities of experiences held by the individuals who loaded on factor one were drawn from the rank statement totals contained in Table II, which also includes the normalized z-scores with the rank. The statements most like their experience of being a 50 year-old woman were placed in the +5 column on the Q-sort form sheet (Appendix D). The

following table (Table IV) lists factor one statements based on the seven statements with the highest positive valence (most like), the seven statements with the lowest negative valence (or most unlike), and the most distinguishing statements. Distinguishing statements are identified on the basis of an absolute difference of two between factor scores.

TABLE IV

FACTOR ONE, WOMEN OF STRENGTH IN RESILIENCE: SEVEN HIGHEST (MOST LIKE), SEVEN LOWEST (MOST UNLIKE) RANKED STATEMENTS AND DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS

Statement No.	Statement	z-score
Seven Highest Ranked Statements		
26	I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages...	2.054
34	Handling hard things in my life has given me a great...	1.835
54	I am excited about the possibilities coming up in the...	1.825
43	I think it's amazing how young I still feel at 50.	1.703
22	If someone asks my opinion I feel more confident...	1.505
30	There came a time in my relationship with my husband...	1.254
56	At 50, I have a new sense of understanding for, or...	1.220
Seven Lowest Ranked Statements		
29	I think that the best part of my life is over.	-2.107
58	I've been looking for myself for 50 years.	-1.596
39	As a woman I am not responsible for supporting my...	-1.510
40	I feel that I'm somebody's wife and somebody's mom...	-1.430
18	I was scared to be grown up.	-1.339
49	I wonder whether I've accomplished anything...	-1.321
37	I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes them...	-1.304
Most Distinguishing Statements		
34	Handling hard things in my life has given me a great...	1.835
9	My whole core of freedom is taking care of myself fina...	0.78*
29	I think that the best part of my life is over.	-2.11*

P < .05; Asterisk (*) Indicates Significance at P < .01

Ranked statements and comments in response to the post-sort question and follow-up interviews suggested a three-fold experience encompassing some precipitating event, a change in attitude or perspective, and the development of an increased positive attitude toward self, present circumstances, and the future. The two highest ranked statements, #26 (+5, 2.054) and #34 (+5, 1.835) alluded to strength and confidence gained as a result of "handling hard things." The numbers in parentheses following the statement number refer to the factor scores and

corresponding z-scores for the statement. One woman, Amelia,* expressed this experience in the following manner:

One aspect which seemed to be touched on only lightly was being part of the 'sandwich generation.' I used to laugh about being at the club sandwich level as for 2 1/2 years I had three elderly relatives in town to look after (visits, doctors' appointments, personal needs, etc.). I took it on willingly--there were other options--but could have never predicted what was involved. Neither could I have prescribed the effect on me as a person--on my faith and spirituality.

The precipitating event for Amy was her divorce six years ago, described as "the bottom of the barrel." In response to a follow-up question "What does being a woman mean to you?" she remarked,

That's a broad question...[Laughs]...What a pun...Freedom...I don't know...um, I think a lot of liberties that I didn't think I had when I was younger...now I know nothing will hold me back...it was the divorce...there hadn't been a test before...

A sense of freedom in #34 (+5, 1.835) was the result of handling hard things, "...a great sense of freedom...freedom to know I can handle something else because I know I've already handled this."

Growth promoting events were not necessarily adult experiences, as explained by Susan, "...I have worked very hard to have a better family than the one I grew up in and I have achieved this goal." Nor were all the experiences negative, as noted by Beverly, "Have taken a mission trip to Brazil with 420 teenagers this summer. Amazed that I missed all this when I was younger."

These women recognized and affirmed their own sense of learning and growth by their disagreement with statement #55 (-3, -1.170), "I am the same person at 50 that I have always been." These women are not only different than they have been but, as Billie asserted, "It's

* Names have been changed to protect anonymity of participants

wonderful--and exciting--the happiest time in my life."

Growth and learning seem to be expressed in terms of acceptance of less control over events as expressed by Amelia, "Events of the last few years have taught me what a limit there is to control we have over the course of our lives." Billie states, "I've reached a place of peace--and realized I can't fix everything--and that's fine. I've learned to let go of my mistakes and also forgive myself for them." Sense of loss of control was also expressed as openness or flexibility to new or different possibilities in life by a neutral or ambivalent ranking of statements #60 (+1, 0.40) and

#1(-1, -0.17). These women expressed pleasure at not having to be perfect, #23 (+3, 0.884), also indicative of an attitude of "giving up control."

Along with this apparent sense of giving up control is the sense of reliance on something or someone outside the self, "I don't think I'd be where I am (mentally and physically) if I didn't have my faith." Faith? "Yeah, belief in someone other than human to help me out." And Amelia wrote, "Neither could I have predicted the effect it had on me as a person-- on my faith and spirituality."

Although events experienced by these women are described as traumatic or life-changing, they maintain an overall positive attitude toward self, present circumstances, and the future. This positive attitude is expressed by rankings of statement #54 (+5, 1.825), which expressed excitement at the "possibilities coming up in the next half of my life" and #29 (-5, -2.107), which revealed strong disagreement with the thought that "the best part of my life is over." Amy expressed this as, "I like to think the glass is half full. I have an optimistic outlook on the future."

Susan, even more emphatically, asserted that, "So far it's wonderful! The next phase of life feels wide-open with possibilities and choices."

Factor Two, Women of Strength in Doubt. Two participants had pure loadings on factor two while two other participants achieved a split load on factors two and three. Of the women whose Q-sorts loaded purely on this factor, one was in her first marriage of 31 years and one was in a second marriage of 19 years after a first marriage of 10 years. These two women had six children between them, only one of whom was still financially dependent or living at home. One woman was 20 years old when she was first married and the other was 19 years, for an average of 19.5 years. Both of these women had less than 2 years of college. Both parents of both women were still living. Average family income was reported in the range of \$81,000-125,000. Both women reported that they participate regularly in an organized religious group. These women had been employed full-time for 13 and 16 years. They named their occupations as secretary and legal secretary.

Of the two women whose Q-sorts split loaded on factors two and three, one was married, had two financially dependent children, had a bachelor's degree, and had lost her father to death. The second woman was single, never married, had two dependent children, a master's degree, and had lost her mother to death.

The emerging pattern of experience for these individuals was designated as one of possible regret, looking back instead of forward in time, and some sense of resignation with self and circumstances. The inferences about experiences of the individuals who loaded on factor two were derived from the same statistical sources as factor one, normalized factor z-scores and distinguishing statements, (See Appendix D, Table D-II) for factor two. Some of the distinguishing statements were:

- #49 I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a difference to anybody. (+5)
- #24 I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learning about who I am. (+4)

The following table (Table V) lists factor two statements based on the seven statements with the highest positive valence (most like), the seven statements with the lowest negative valence (or most unlike), and the most distinguishing statements.

TABLE V

FACTOR TWO, WOMEN OF STRENGTH IN DOUBT: SEVEN HIGHEST (MOST LIKE), SEVEN LOWEST (MOST UNLIKE) RANKED STATEMENTS, AND DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS

Statement No.	Statement	(z) Score
Seven Highest Ranked Statements		
25	I wish I had taken more risks, tried out more things when I was younger...	1.645
49	I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a difference to anybody.	1.645
24	I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learning about who I am.	1.578
26	I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages and I...	1.578
6	Whatever is going to happen to me in a day is my own choosing.	1.510
11	Empty nest is the best thing about being 50.	1.510
48	I feel like at 50 I'm starting my life over, redefining myself.	1.342
Seven Lowest Ranked Statements		
18	I was scared to be grown-up.	-2.014
3	I don't necessarily want to be in charge of my own life.	-1.913
20	I miss the social life that revolved around my children.	-1.913
51	I wish I had not been so career-oriented when I was younger...	-1.678
35	My greatest sense of failure is the loss of my marriage.	-1.678
41	In the big picture I feel like I'm in charge of my life but...	-1.309
4	I don't like realizing that my children are growing up and...	-1.309
Most Distinguishing Factors		
49	I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a difference...	1.64*
24	I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learning about who I am.	1.58*
58	I've been looking for myself for 50 years.	1.07*
29	I think that the best part of my life is over.	0.97*

(P < .05; Asterisk (*) Indicates Significance at P < .01)

Comments on the post-sort question by Barbara suggested an orientation in the past,

Coming from the 1960's as a teenager with all the changes socially, morally, and politically, it was a great time to learn and experience change. The choices were not so rigid for women and courage to show the men of the world we can produce more than meals and children. It was hard making choices when so many were changing and options could be available.

A sense of inner conflict, of being pulled in different directions, was present in her words as she continued, "...weighing the right and wrong and feeling 'gray' in moral values--what to keep and what works is a life choice constantly." The impression of being overwhelmed by choices when young is also supported by the statements that the women of factor two chose as most descriptive of their experience of midlife. The placement of these statements illustrated a desire for more time spent exploring identity options when they were younger, "I wish when I was younger I had spent

more time learning about who I am," (#24; +4, 1.58) and "I wish I had taken more risks, tried out more things when I was younger" (#25; +5, 1.645).

Statement #24 portrayed an experience of midlife for women of factor two that was distinctly different from the experience of women of factors one and three (+2, +4, 0). The women whose Q-sorts loaded on factor two were married shortly after high school at a much younger average age than women of factors one and three, and gave birth to their first children shortly thereafter.

The women whose Q-sorts loaded on this factor continued to exhibit some inner conflict into midlife as demonstrated by their placement of statement #58 (+3, 1.074), "I've been looking for myself for 50 years." The dilemma of seeking self into midlife distinguished women in factor two from those women whose Q-sorts loaded on factors one and three (-5, +3, -2). Other ranked statements indicated conflict for the women of factor two in their experience of midlife. The apparently forward looking attitude of statement #48 (+4, 1.34), "I feel like at 50 I'm starting my life over, redefining myself," seems to be in direct contrast to the almost despairing sentiment of #29 (+2, 0.97), "I think that the best part of my life is over." The experience for women of factor two that the best part of life was over at 50 was in stark contrast to the experience of women of factors one and three (-5, +2, -5).

Statements sorted to the middle of the form board, an area of neutrality or ambivalence, portrayed areas of adult midlife experience that seemed to have little or no meaning for the women of factor two. "I have a new understanding for or maybe just peace with the things in my life that seem like contradictions, " (#56; 0, -0.10), and "I'm excited about the possibilities coming up in the next half of my life," (#54; 0, 0.03), combined with the statements that did have meaning (positive or negative), provided an impression of an experience of conflict and contradiction. Added to these statements was the sentiment expressed in #49, "I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a difference to anybody," (+5, 1.645), and a picture of confusion and serious questioning emerged. The apparent lack of confidence about contributions to others set the women of factor two significantly apart from the women of factors one and three (-4, +5, -3).

Women who split on factor two held the viewpoint of other women whose Q-sorts loaded on factor two as well as viewpoints of women whose Q-sorts loaded on factors one and three. They contributed post-sort comments which supported the attribution of a sense of no growth, resignation, and regret. Diane wrote, "I feel the same as I did at 18 or 21, but I am much older." A tone of no growth and resignation is presented by another woman, Katharine,

I felt like a child pretending to be a grown-up for a long time, even after I had children. But sometime in the last five years I realized that I felt differently about myself, that I did feel "grown-up." The reason was this: I heard about someone getting married and my reaction wasn't "oh, how wonderful" but "good luck." I feel like I have lost some of my optimism. I know that people face difficult times, in their families, with their health, their work, etc. and I guess that cumulative weight of experiences makes me feel that people need some luck and willingness to work through obstacles. Great things are still possible, but I realize it isn't easy."

Despite the fact that women who scored on this factor expressed a sense of regret or wistfulness about their experience at midlife, one of their defining statements #26, imparts an optimistic tone, "I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages and I'm proud of who I am, but I'm still not done." (+4) This is similar to the ranking of this statement (+5) by women of the other two factors.

Factor Three, Women of Strength in Conviction. Of the nine participants who loaded on factor three, five were in their first marriage with an average of 23.8 years of marriage. One woman was single, never married, one woman had been in a second marriage for ten years after a first marriage of six years and subsequent divorce; a third woman was single and a vowed religious after a first marriage which ended in divorce. The average age of first marriage for this group of women was 25.8 years. Six of the women had sixteen children, twelve of whom were still financially dependent or living in their mother's home. First birth of a child occurred on average at age 28.6 years for these women. Of these nine women, five had a bachelor's degree, one had a master's, and one had a Ph.D. For five of these women, one or both parents had died. Average family income was reported to be in the range of \$81,000-125,000. Eight of nine women reported participating in some organized religion on a regular basis. These women had been employed full-time for years ranging from nine to twenty-seven. Two women identified their occupation as homemaker.

The emerging experience of being a woman of 50 years was one of acceptance, conviction, and confidence. Statements such as the following define the pattern of experience for these individuals:

- #60 I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best suited to do in this life. (+5)
- #32 I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, educational, and spiritual pieces. (+4)
- #29 I think that the best part of my life is over. (-5)

A positive assurance and conviction of who and what they are seemed to permeate the responses of women who loaded on this factor.

Again, inferences about this group's experience of being 50 years old are derived from the rank statement totals and the distinguishing statements for factor three (Appendix D, Table D-3). The seven statements with the highest agreement, the seven statements with the lowest agreement and distinguishing statements are contained in Table VI.

TABLE VI

FACTOR THREE, WOMEN OF CONVICTION: SEVEN HIGHEST (MOST LIKE), SEVEN LOWEST (MOST UNLIKE) RANKED STATEMENTS, AND DISTINGUISHING STATEMENTS

Statement No.	Statement	z-score
Seven Highest Ranked Statements		
26	I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages and I...	1.993
54	I am excited about the possibilities coming up in the next half of my life.	1.961
60	I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best suited to do in this life.	1.931
32	I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, educational, and spiritual pieces.	1.820
1	I have a sure sense of where I'm going with my life.	1.590
12	I spend more time on the important relationships in my life.	1.430
34	Handling hard things in my life has given me a great sense of confidence...	1.360
Seven Lowest Ranked Statements		
40	I feel like I'm somebody's wife and somebody's mom and that...	-1.908
35	My greatest sense of failure is the loss of my marriage; I...	-1.838
29	I think that the best part of my life is over.	-1.657
3	I don't necessarily want to be in charge of my life.	-1.465
31	The only important thing that has ever happened to me is the birth...	-1.405
47	I have a hard time relating to the idea of changing roles at...	-1.312
59	When I graduated from high school my career choices were teaching, nursing...	-1.191
Most Distinguishing Statements		
60	I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best suited...	1.93*
32	I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, educational, and spiritual pieces.	1.82*
45	I am enjoying thinking about my spirituality.	0.93*
40	I feel that I'm somebody's wife and somebody's mom and that...	-1.91*

Note: Based on normalized factor z-scores

Comments on the post-sort question from women whose Q-sorts loaded on factor three contribute to a sense of growth without identifying a strong precipitating event as described by women of factor one. As Anne related, "I wish I knew at 21 what I know now! I have felt better about myself in the last 22 years than I did for the first 26!" Erin wrote, "All has happened to bring me to this peace of relative self-satisfaction and acceptance of who I am and what my place in the world is."

The strong sense of contentment expressed by these women in their positively ranked statements, #60 "I feel like right now I'm connected to what I am best suited to do in this life," (+5, 1.93), and #32 "I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, educational, and spiritual pieces," (+4, 1.82) was enhanced by an excitement for the future as expressed in other ranked statements. Positive salience of statement #54, "I'm excited about the possibilities coming up in the next half of my life," (+5, 1.96), and negative assignment of statement #29, "I think that the best part of my life is over," (-5, -1.66), combine to portray a sense of happiness in the present and excitement about the future.

Rachel, the highest scorer on the factor Women of Strength in Conviction, alluded to her happiness more than once during her post-sort interview, "I'm happy...so many great things to look forward to...the last few years have come together and feel good. I have a rich, full life." Eleanor, another high scorer, described her experience in glowing terms, "I have a very good job, a wonderful husband, two great children. Everything is wonderful."

Allusions to "things" that have happened to produce this confident happiness were not described as specific events. The high ranking of statement #34, "Handling hard things in my life has given me a great sense of freedom--freedom to know I can handle something else because I know I've already handled this," (+4, 1.36), implied that critical events had happened in these women's lives. During the post-sort interview, Rachel spoke of her father's death within the year and four hip surgeries of her own during the last five years. When asked, however, "What stands out in your life over the last few years that has helped you be who you are now?" She replied, "I stopped kicking and screaming about getting old...it's not a resignation but a new maturity. It's like a ...like I'm going to go through this...I'm getting older and it's going to be good." Eleanor also

replied to that question without any mention of events in her life (divorce, parents' deaths) that may have precipitated her growth, "I think getting old. I never thought I'd be 50 even though I never really believed that was old. Old is 80. But 50 was a major change."

The ranked statements that referred to faith or spirituality and were assigned positive salience by these women, #53 (+1, 0.28), #45 (+2, 0.93), and #32 (+4, 1.82), did not adequately express the importance of faith and God for Rachel and Eleanor. Eleanor said, "Spirituality? BIG TIME! Very important...absolutely." What about religion? "Absolutely not...God is most important...without God you couldn't get through life." She then began to explain to the interviewer that, "if you have God in your life, your dissertation will be just fine." Rachel was equally as strong in her endorsement of God and faith in her life, in fact, no question was answered without some mention of God or God's plan for her life. When asked to tell the interviewer something about her life right now, Rachel explained, "It's like God is operating in a close, tangible, real moment...my faith is stronger. If I didn't have that I'd try to pull the pillow over my head. I used to feel like a pawn in a chess game, and actually now I might be playing the game, but it's God's game."

The relatively neutral position of statement #6, "Whatever is going to happen to me in a day is my own choosing" (+1, 0.55), in combination with the concept of playing "God's game" promoted a sense of a scripted plan for life. Rachel elaborated, "God's looking at me...he has a plan...it's 'I'll lead, you follow."

The women whose Q-sorts loaded on factor three expressed a strong conviction that they were doing what they were meant to be doing, "I feel like right now I'm connected to what I'm best suited to do in this life" (#60; +5, 1.93), and "I have a sure sense of where I'm going with my life" (#1; +4, 1.59). Their confidence in respect to being in the right place in their lives (#60) set them apart from the women of factors one and two (+1, -3, +5).

Josselson (1987) described a group of women who in their search for identity, bypassed the search, and committed to family or cultural role and identity expectations. She described these women as "rigid and moralistic, though hardworking and high achieving" (p. 34). In her 1996 follow-up study, she called these women *Guardians* who "had made identity commitments without a sense of choice, carrying forward the plans for their life mapped out in childhood or designed by

their parents" (p. 35). Eleanor' described how her sense of self as a woman had changed over the last years,

Things have changed for women in general. There's more opportunity for younger women...but not really...women are more accepted but not really. Not really. The glass ceiling is still there. It's changed a little bit but not a lot. There's no reason for that to bother you...I knew I couldn't get where I wanted to go so I just settled for what I got.

Eleanor talked about who she was in terms of her husband and children and "wondering about who they will marry" and being a grandmother. Being a woman to her meant, "Respect. And potential grandmother."

Rachel described what being a woman meant to her,

Everything. It's a gift. And a role, a clear and defined role that women should play in the world. Primarily the lingo tells you what the role is...nurturer. It's our role to co-create. What a gift...incredible gift. More than half of our societal problems are due to the fact that we forgot God's plan...that clear, distinct division of labor...roles.

These women seem to represent a clear commitment to traditional, cultural expectations of women and their roles. Among four different styles of coming to identity among women, Josselson (1996) found women who adopted this clear commitment to traditional roles to have the "highest levels of obedience to authority, and the lowest levels of anxiety" (p. 277). The confidence, balance, and assurance of Women of Strength in Conviction is congruent with this. This may also contribute to the apparent lack of an identifying precipitating event for identity growth.

Two women split on factors one and three and their comments on the post-sort question provide a combination of the emerging themes of growth precipitated by an event although not specifically named, a sense of acceptance and a positive attitude toward self, present circumstances, and the future. Dorothy described her growth as a result of events in the abstract,

Experiences of the last 10 to 15 years have changed my priorities. Most of my friends feel the same. Looking back you can see how in your 20's accumulation of "things" seemed to be important. 30's we wanted bigger and better cars, houses, and things. I've spent my 40's trying to get rid of "things" and pare down on houses and cars. Material possessions aren't nearly as important anymore. (Actually aren't important at all.)

This woman's positive outlook toward the future was expressed as, "Turning 50 doesn't scare me- -I've had great role models and family members and friends that have turned 50 so gracefully and accomplished a lot in the second half of their lives."

The second woman, Christine, who split on the first and third factors defined an event which precipitated a sense growth or changed attitude of acceptance in her life.

I recently was diagnosed with breast cancer, and have had a mastectomy with reconstruction surgery. As there is no family history, and I've always been in excellent health, it was a total surprise for me and my family. The past few months I have had to let go of being the care-taker, and allow myself to be cared for.

Considering her story, this woman's last line is testimony to a positive attitude toward the future, "I am planning to return to graduate school for a Master's Degree in either Public Health or Public Administration."

Research Question Two

The second question to be addressed by this study was, "In what ways are current theories of adult development helpful in understanding women's subjective experience of adulthood?" Theories of adult development emphasizing social, emotional, psychological, and spiritual themes were chosen to frame this question. Positive developmental themes that evolved from the factor analysis include an emphasis on growth and change, a positive sense of self, and an interest in or new reliance on faith or spirituality. In another vein, a theme of doubt or "looking back" also appeared in the factor analysis. What follows is a brief description of how the current data support or do not support major tenets of adult development theory presented earlier. Emphasis is given to themes of midlife as a positive time of growth and development, the interaction of environmental events and personal identity, the importance of relational patterns, and the place of spirituality in a theory of adult development. These themes are relevant to the data as expressed by the participants in their experience of midlife. Although not in an integrated fashion, these themes also appear in current theories of adult development.

Bowen's (1978) goal for adult identity features differentiation of self, a product of both biological and experiential factors, which remains relatively fixed over life and is unresponsive to environmental factors. The experience of learning, growth, and change among women who scored significantly on factors one and three does not seem to be supported by Bowen's

presentation of adult identity. An identified responsivity to environmental factors seemed to be particularly prevalent among women of factor one.

Williamson's (1981) synthesizing construct of personal authority assumes that development as an adult requires that the individual "give up the parent as parent" (p.29). This giving up of the parent as parent is described as coming to recognize parents as peers. Statement #19, "I have never thought of my dad as a peer of my own" was ranked as neutral (0; 0.07) by women who scored on factor one, as +1 (0.67) by women on factor two, and +2 (0.61) by women on factor three. The scores on this statement, ranging from neutral to +2 does not seem to support this view of parent, at least father, as a peer for these women.

Dabrowski's (Nelson, 1989) theory of positive disintegration emphasizes movement through stages of growth and developmental transformation. Identification of a precipitating event or conflict for growth in women of factor one could have some resonance in Dabrowski's emphasis on the role of suffering and inner conflict in advancing development.

Spiritual development or faith development as presented by Fowler (1981) incorporates dynamics of change and transformation with a concurrent focus on equilibrium and continuity. Statement #32, "I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, educational, and spiritual things" was a distinguishing statement for factor three individuals (+4; 1.82). "I'm enjoying thinking about my spirituality" was also used to describe women of factor three's experience (+2; 0.93). Rountree (1993) proposed that for those women who had forged an identity at fifty from an amalgam of "deaths, divorces, births, successes, and failures...spiritual, faith-related, or religious themes may take a new place of importance as sources for making meaning" (p. 5). Fowler's (1981) construction of a stage model of faith development with emphasis in the adult years of stage transitions "precipitated by changes in primary relationships, such as divorce, the death of a parent or parents or children growing up and leaving home" seems congruent with some of the participants' experiences (p.181).

Feminist theorists have emphasized women's adult development as one of growth in and through relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Chodorow, 1978; Miller, 1986; Jordan, 1991; Josselson, 1991). Women who scored on factors one and three identified highly with the statement "I spend

more time on the important relationships in my life," ranking it, respectively, +4 (1.216) and +3 (1.430). In contrast, women who identified as factor two scored that item as -1 (-0.50) and statement #11 "Empty nest is the best thing about being 50" as +4 (1.51). The high salience of statements having to do with relationships for the women in this study seems to support the importance placed on relational perspectives by feminist theorists.

Neugarten and Datan (1981) identify manipulation and control of the environment as characteristics of an adult identity at midlife. However, women in all three factors (+3, 0.88; +1, 0.60; +2, 0.91) identified positively with the statement, "I like feeling I don't have to be perfect." Factor one (+4; 1.22) and three (+3; 1.07) women identified positively with the statement "At 50, I have a new sense of understanding for or maybe just peace with the things in my life that seem like contradictions."

Attitudes of loss surrounding a woman's identity at midlife are predominant themes in literature concerning women's midlife identity. McQuaide (1998) identifies the "dominant discourse of a woman's midlife aging" as focused on loss of fertility and role as reproducer (menopause), loss of bone (osteoporosis), loss of children and role as mother (empty nest), loss of spouse through abandonment or widowhood, and loss of social power (p. 533). Petersen (2000), on the other hand, ascribes unhappiness at midlife to events that take place much earlier in a woman's life. She describes decisions by White adolescent females to forego their own unique identity development in lieu of conforming to dominant cultural demands. Petersen found that women either "remained aware of their identity while consciously conforming to the roles expected of them, or made a decision to repress their identity" (p. 67). Reactions to the cultural pressure to abandon the self result in conformity, withdrawal, anger, or depression.

Was the sense of looking back, wistfulness, and regret for Women of Strength in Doubt a result of conscious or unconscious early decisions or a reaction to a general sense of loss at midlife? Statement #24, "I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learning about who I am" was a distinguishing statement for Women of Strength in Doubt, ranked +5 (1.58). They also ranked #11, "Empty nest is the best thing about being 50" as +4 (1.51), #20, "I miss the social life that revolved around children and their activities" as -5 (-1.91), and #4, "I don't like realizing that

my children are growing up and don't need me like when they were younger" as -4 (-1.31). Sadness at the loss of children from the home and loss of role of mother does not seem to describe the experience of these women; perhaps decisions to conform to cultural role expectations, made in adolescence, have affected these women's experience of midlife.

Another orientation to aging is presented by the positive identification of women of Factors One (+5, 1.83) and Three (+5, 1.96) with statements of promise for the future "I'm excited about the possibilities coming up in the next half of my life," and well-being, "I think it's amazing how young I still feel at 50."

Summary

Q-methodology allowed an exploration of the subjective experience of adult women in their jubilee year, that is, 50 years of age. Women communicated their experience of adult growth and development from their own "internal standpoint" (Brown, 1980, p. 1). Q-Method provided a systematic process for evaluating these subjective experiences by utilizing the statistical application of correlations, factor analysis, and the computation of factor scores. Women's own comments, either written in response to a post-sort question or elicited in post-sort interviews, added another level of understanding of a variety of experiences.

This chapter analyzed the data provided by twenty-five, fifty year old women. Data were presented in the form of a rank order of statements about an individual's experience of being a 50-year-old woman. The data were then subjected to statistical analysis. The resulting factors represent the individual experiences of the participants, indicating distinct vantage points.

Three distinct factors emerged from the factor analysis. These factors represent areas of agreement. The Women of Strength in Resilience represented the experience of a defining event that precipitated growth and a new strength as well as a positive sense of self and the future. The Women of Strength in Doubt shared a "looking back in time" perspective mixed with some regret or doubt and a sense of resignation. The Women of Strength in Conviction represented their experience of adult women of 50 as one of balance, confidence, and assurance. Women of

Strength in Resilience and Conviction shared their positive, forward-looking point of view.

Rankings and comments of Women of Strength in Conviction evoked a sense of easy confidence and growth, whereas Women of Strength in Resilience presented a more hard won confidence with an emphasis on self-reliance or personal responsibility.

Another distinction among the three groups of women can be made in reference to time orientation. Women of Strength in Resilience could be described as having a future orientation as reflected in the ranking of statement #54, "I'm excited about the possibilities coming up in the next half of my life." (+5) as compared to the lower salience assigned to #60, "I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best suited to do in my life." (+1). This is in contrast to Women of Strength in Conviction whose distinguishing statements were #60 (+5) and #32 "I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, educational, and spiritual things." (+4) which could represent an orientation to the present. The orientation of Women of Strength in Doubt to the past has been discussed. The factors as well as follow-up comments provided insight into these jubilee women's experience of mid-life. Although they shared some aspects of their experiences, they offered a variety of perspectives.

Segments of current theories of adult development are helpful for understanding some of the aspects of the participating women's experience of being fifty years of age. Themes of change, growth, and strength, whether precipitated by a defining event or not, the importance of a personal spirituality or faith, focus on relationships, and acceptance as opposed to control and manipulation dominated these women's subjective experience of midlife. A theory of adult development which provides an integration of these factors would seem to be most helpful.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe women's experience of being 50 years of age and to explore the adequacy of current theoretical descriptions of adulthood to account for the perspectives on adulthood actually held by women. This chapter summarizes the study, details the findings, and discusses implications of the findings for theory, practice, and further research. Concluding remarks are included.

Summary of the Study

This study investigated women's subjective experience of being 50 years of age. The participants, a P-sample of 25, were recruited by a mailing to 1967, 1968, and 1969 alumnae of a midwestern high school. The participants were primarily White, middle class, educated women.

An instrument combining naturalistic and theoretical statements was developed for this study. The naturalistic statements were developed from the discussions of three focus groups conducted with twenty-eight 45 to 55 year old women. Naturalistic statements were supplemented by statements that represent current theories of adult development. The Q-sample, therefore, consisted of 60 statements describing women's experience of being 50 years of age. A post-sort question provided the participants the opportunity to express in their own words any other ideas about their experience of being a woman of 50 years. Participants could also provide their phone number for a follow-up discussion of their experiences.

Twenty-five women answered the demographic questions, completed the Q-sort, and responded to the post-sort question designed to answer the questions:

1. How do women describe their experience of adult identity at 50-years of age?
2. In what ways are current theories of adult development helpful in understanding women's subjective experience of adulthood?

Four processes were used in the data analysis: correlation, factor analysis, calculation of z-scores for statements, and factor interpretation. The factors in this study represent the different experiences of being 50 years of age as expressed by women of that age. The three perspectives were named and interpreted as emerging patterns of women's experience of being 50 years of age. The interpretation revealed the following summary of three experiences:

- ◆ Factor one: Women of Strength in Resilience -- These women represent the experience of a defining event that precipitated growth and a new strength as well as a positive sense of self and the future.
- ◆ Factor two: Women of Strength in Doubt -- The pattern of belief shared by these women is one of "looking back in time" with a mixture of regret and resignation.
- ◆ Factor three: Women of Strength in Conviction -- These women present their experience of being women of 50 as one of commitment in balance, confidence, and assurance.

The demographic data comparisons among factors indicate that for those women who are Women of Strength in Resilience and Women of Strength in Conviction, age at birth of first child was 28.7 years and 28.6 years respectively, as opposed to Women of Strength in Doubt whose age at birth of first child was 22.5 years. This disparity is reflected in average length of time married with Women of Strength in Resilience and Conviction having an average marriage length of 24.7 and 25.8 years while the third group represent an average of 30 years of marriage. Women of Strength in Doubt also had less than two years of college as opposed to the other groups of women who primarily had at least a bachelor's degree. Twenty-two of the twenty-five participants reported they had children while only four women identified their occupation as mother or homemaker.

Implications of the current findings are presented and discussed in the next section followed by concluding remarks.

Implications

I hear the singing of the lives of women, the clear mystery, the offering and pride.
Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980)
American Poet

Women at midlife comprise an ever-increasing portion of the American population as baby boomers reach the age of 50 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Demographics alone indicate a need for research in this underrepresented population. Even more compelling, however, is the understanding that not only is our information sparse in many areas of midlife women's experience, but it is also often incorrect as it is biased by ageism and sexism (Banister, 1999).

There are several contributing factors to the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women's experience of midlife in the research arena. The concept of adulthood as used in the United States today is a development of the 20th century (Jordan, 1978). Increasing life expectancies and improved health care have contributed to growing interest in and importance of the years between adolescence and old age. Even with increased recognition of the concept of adulthood, there is no universal definition of adulthood and our understanding of how people's lives evolve within it is thin.

Midlife is an even more ambiguous and arbitrary construct. At the dawn of the twentieth century women rarely outlived the age of 45 (Reeves, 2000). A woman, born early in the century who was fortunate enough to survive the ravages of childhood diseases, grew up, bore an average of eight children, and then died (Sheehy, 1993). In this scenario, thirty was considered middle aged. Old age was not far behind, and this definition from a medical publication of the 1930's sheds light on the prevailing attitude toward a woman's middle years: "The climacteric [menopause] is an indication for woman that the period of her vigor is beginning to disappear forever. With more or less rapid steps but steps which admit of no return, woman now proceeds toward old age" (Huffman & Myers, 1999, p. 259).

Besides cultural influences on our understanding of women's adult and midlife experiences, biases in theory and research have provided stereotypic views of women's adult lives. Until recently, adult development and midlife transitions have been described exclusively by men and about men (e.g., Erikson, 1950, Levinson, 1978). When attention has been given to

women's experience of midlife, the emphasis has been on the negative aspects of this period of life, characterized as a time of overwhelming loss (Gergen, 1990; McQuaide, 1998; Banister, 1999). Banister (1999) also points out that the complexity of women's midlife experience has been inadequately described by traditional, quantitative approaches to inquiry.

Curiosity about the reality of women's experience of midlife prompted the research questions for this study. In light of the emphasis on women's actual experience of being 50 years of age, a Q-sample was constructed from statements made by women who participated in focus groups discussing issues of importance to them at 50. Statements that represent current theories of adult development supplemented the naturalistic statements resulting in a "hybrid type" of Q-sample (McKeown & Thomas, 1988, p. 27). This provided participants in this study a wide range of possibilities for sorting statements according to their own experiences. The women, through sorting the hybrid type Q-sample, had the opportunity to reveal their own subjective experiences of being women of 50 years of age. Through comments made in response to the post-sort question and follow-up interviews, individual interpretations of experience of midlife were further explored. This allowed for a greater sense of the variety and uniqueness of experiences.

Women of Strength in Resilience

One of the marvels of personality is its resistance to prediction. One man's paralyzing trauma is another man's invitation to take control of his life; one woman's grounds for insanity is another woman's goad to a dramatic shaping of the self. Rosellen Brown, American Writer

Women of Strength in Resilience described their experience at midlife as one of new found strength, confidence, and self-reliance. The experience of tough times had given them the confidence that they could handle other things that may happen in their lives. Development for these women had continued past adolescence into midlife as they became aware of their own potential which had not yet been actualized. The experience of periods of uneasiness or instability, produced opportunities for increased confidence and belief in self for these women. These participants readily identified specific events such as death, divorce, illness, and separation as precipitating events for their growth. The benefits of crisis in midlife are described by Levinson

(1996) for "formation of a life structure more suitable for the self and more viable in the world" (p. 36). Banister (1999) cites developmental theorists, Chiriboga and Erikson who posit that states of conflict and instability are necessary components of human development.

These women, by their rankings, indicate that they are not the same at 50 years as they have always been; they are stronger, more confident, and accepting more responsibility for themselves. Levinson (1996) characterized midlife as a complex time of transition, full of experiences of contradiction and change, and the experience of these women seems to be similar to this as opposed to a characterization of midlife as a fairly stable and uneventful period of life (Lachman & James, 1997).

Traditional Western theories of adult development characterize "increasing self-control, a sense of self as origin of action and intention, an increasing capacity to use abstract logic, and a movement toward self-sufficiency" as the standard measure of a mature Western adult (Jordan, 1991, p. 136). These women have come to accept and recognize their own sense of strength, of being a "whole complete person on my own," of "feeling I can take care of myself financially" but they indicate in their post-sort comments and ranked statements that a major sense of who they are at 50 does not include having to "be in control or be perfect." This recognition of their own strength and responsibility to self is such a major transition for women who have internalized cultural messages that require them to "put others' needs first and to be self-caring in light of being considered selfish" (Banister, 1999, p. 531). Our Western Christian conception of sin as pride and self-assertion contributes to conflict for women at midlife, whose "temptation or 'sin' conversely relates to *lack* of self-assertion...failure to assume responsibility and make choices for themselves, failure to discover their own personhood and uniqueness rather than finding their whole meaning in the too-easy sacrifice of self for others" (Carr, p. 8). Circumstances of their lives provided Women of Strength in Resilience with the opportunity for reevaluating their lives and coming up stronger persons.

Critical, disrupting events happen in all person's lives and not all persons are able to reevaluate their sense of self and turn the crisis, or period of disintegration, into a positive, growth promoting situation. The Women of Strength in Conviction, in post-sort comments, temper their

new found strength and self-sufficiency with a sense of reliance on something or someone "bigger than myself." Faith and God make important contributions to these women's ability to handle the tough times in their lives. We know that these women had a religious background as children and adolescents, and that they attended organized religious activities on a regular basis as adults but they did not name a *religion* as their support. The importance of faith or God to these women was apparent from their comments, and regular attendance at religious services indicates the apparent importance of this activity for these women. Spirituality has been shown to moderate the effects of negative life experiences and psychological adjustment, especially depression (Young, Cashwell, & Shcherbakova, 2000). Women of Strength in Resilience ranked their statements to indicate a difference between their faith and their religion; further study could develop the interaction between the two themes of spirituality and religion and their influence on women's sense of identity at midlife.

Besides having "handled hard things" and becoming stronger, the Women of Strength in Resilience exhibited a generally positive attitude and orientation to the future. Although five of these women were divorced and had remained single, their general reported socioeconomic status may have protected them from the financial problems normally associated with this population as described by Crittenden (2001) and contributed to their positive attitude toward the future.

Women of Strength in Doubt

Time is like a series of liquid transparencies. You don't look back along time, but through it like water. Margaret Atwood, Canadian Writer

The pattern of experience for these women is one of looking back in time, wishing and wondering about what might have been. Midlife for them is about "wondering whether I've accomplished anything," or "wishing I had taken more risks, tried out more things when I was younger," even wishing "to do it over." These women express concern and uncertainty about their identity, wishing "I had spent more time as a young person learning about who I am." This is not a sudden realization as "I've been looking for myself for 50 years." There is a sense of instability or

uncertainty about how these women see themselves. There is a lack of confidence about purpose and meaning in life.

These women married shortly after high school, did not finish college, and had children soon after marriage. They may not have had the luxury of a period of exploration, or as Erikson named it "psychosocial moratorium" (Marcia, 1994, p. 78). They appear to have conformed to cultural role expectations early in their young adult life. Whether they "remained aware of their identity while consciously conforming to the roles expected of them," or "made a conscious decision to repress their identity," these women are struggling at midlife to reconcile who they are with who they would wish to be (Petersen, 2000, p. 67). "If I had it to 'do over,' I would choose to do it over." We can only speculate at what things this woman would choose to change if she were to do "it" over. Unlike Petersen's (2001) women, she is aware of the impact of the culture on her self-definition, "show the men of the world we can produce more than meals and children," and "women have to 'blow our own horns' as personal achievements are not acknowledged as much for women" [as men].

Levinson (1996) enumerates the great benefits that a woman who freely chooses to participate in a "Traditional Marriage Enterprise" may accrue, but the downside is the danger of developing too strong a sense of self. Women of Strength in Doubt, who lived in their father's home until they moved to their husband's home, in collusion with the culture, stifled their own sense of self as independent person. The question for these women is whether they can find or define their authentic selves or if they will progress from wistfully wondering to despair.

Although both of these women report attending organized religious services on a regular basis, their ranked statements indicated an ambivalence toward faith or spirituality. Again, it would be helpful to understand the difference for these women between religion and faith or spirituality and the relative importance, or contribution of each toward a sense of self at midlife.

Despite their lack of confidence about who they are, these women are not mourning the loss of their role as mother. They do not "miss the social life that revolved around children's activities," nor do they mind realizing that children are growing up and don't need "mothering like they did in the past. In fact, "Empty nest is the best thing about being 50." They are not holding on

to the role of mother to bolster their sense of identity. Hopefully, these women will discover a whole sense of self, because despite their regret, they call themselves "strong." And despite their orientation to the past, they recognize "I'm still not done."

Women of Strength in Conviction

Eeny, meeny, miney, moe...catch a baby by the toe. My mother told me to pick the very best one...

Playground Rhyme

The third pattern of experience that emerged from this study indicates one of acknowledgement of growth and change, a sense of conviction, and orientation in the present. Change for these women may not represent a different self, but a growth in commitment to whom they are or are meant to be, "Not that I'm looking to change...I like the way I am...but I want to live to get better. My faith is stronger. I want to be better at the best I want to be...am meant to be." These women endorsed the importance of their faith or spirituality, both in their ranked statements and in post-sort interview comments. It is important to reemphasize that the women who participated in this study were chosen from the alumnae lists of a private, Catholic high school so it could be assumed that at least at one point in their lives, albeit a formative point, religion may have been a value of their parents, if not also of themselves. The articulation of themes related to these women's endorsement of faith or spirituality in their midlife experience may be related to the influence of their early religious background.

Although these women have experienced crises of death, divorce and illness in their lives, they did not choose to identify these as change points or precipitators of growth in their lives.

These women expressed an acceptance of who they were and their place in life that was peaceful but "not stagnant...more of a dynamic present." These women have eliminated the conflict between cultural expectations and their own identity by making cultural role expectations their own. When asked to describe herself to me in the post sort interview so that I would have a good sense of who she was, the first word Rachel used was "faithful." Petersen's (2000) description of the anger and depression that are a result of this conformity has not affected these

women. Through their ranked statements and their post-sort comments and interview replies, they present a picture of happiness, conviction, and contentment. This contentment may be disrupted at some point in the future, and these women may find some incongruence between a culturally determined role expectation and their own identity, but then again, they may not. The assumption that all women feel that they must repress or abandon their own unique identity to cultural demands does not allow for different perspectives on development among women (Josselson, 1987). These Women of Strength in Conviction are carrying forward plans for their lives based on a cultural or family design rather than through an exploration of their own. The acceptance and contentment with the present expressed by these women is congruent with Josselson's (1996) assertion that women who develop their own identity by adopting cultural or family expectations experience low levels of anxiety. They are generally "well-functioning traditional conscientious women" (p. 277).

Experience of 50

The emerging patterns of themes expressed by the women participants revealed a variety of experiences. In contrast to the despair at midlife of Thea Skolver (Rountree, 1993), or an overwhelming sense of loss at midlife (McQuaide, 1998; Gergen, 1990; Banister, 1999), or the depression, anger, and dissatisfaction described by Petersen (2000), women who participated in this project described experiences of growth and strength, balance and confidence. Even those women who related a sense of wistfulness or regret at this time in their lives expressed a sense of pride in whom they had become.

One issue most often associated with women at midlife is the experience of "empty nest" when children leave home, leaving women with a sense of loss and sadness (McQuaide, 1998). This sadness was not ascribed to by Women of Strength in Doubt as they described empty nest "as one of the best things about being 50." For Women of Strength in Resilience and Conviction, empty nest was not ranked as a positive or negative experience. As the women in these two groups had married later and had borne their first child later than Women of Strength in Doubt,

most of their children were still either living at home or still financially dependent. If women continue to marry later and bear children at older ages, "empty nest syndrome" whether positive or negative, real or imagined, will not be an experience of midlife but instead of "old age" though this is a moving target.

The issue of motherhood provided an important and curious insight into these women's sense of identity. Of twenty-five women who participated in this project, twenty-two were mothers but only four women identified their occupation as mother or homemaker. Even a woman who had been a mother for 24 years and still had children in the home described her occupation, in which she had been employed for one year, as "supervisor of mentally retarded/developmentally disabled population." Petersen (2000) claims that nothing throws White women into more self-doubt than mothering, "Nothing damaged their self-identities as much as motherhood" (p. 67). Women who are able to leave families, educate themselves, and to seek early careers in life find it much more difficult to resist the very strong cultural expectations for mothers and mothering. Petersen (2001) found that the White women in her study "found themselves thrown into self-doubt as mothering came into direct conflict with how they perceived themselves" (p. 67). Perhaps ignoring the years of mothering allowed these women participants to preserve their self-identity. The occupations claimed by the women in this study were not high profile or high status occupations. They, in fact, covered the realm of typically female occupations including teacher, nurse, secretary, realtor, and social worker--all vital and important occupations. However, it is interesting to try to understand what it does for a woman's identity to spend half of her life performing a task (occupation) that she herself does not even consider worth naming. Is it a coincidence that the women in this project, Women of Strength in Doubt, who had been mothers for the longest percentage of their lives expressed their experience of 50 years of life in wondering, wishing, wistful terms? It is not that motherhood is easy or does not require much attention, as Ann Crittenden (2001) describes,

Being a good-enough mother, I found, took more patience and inner strength--not to mention intelligence, skill, wisdom, and love--than my previous life [as foreign correspondent for Newsweek, financial reporter for New York Times, and Pulitzer Prize nominee] had ever demanded (p. 11).

If women themselves continue to devalue their identity as mothers and their contribution to society as homemakers, it will be a long time before the rest of society recognizes the tangible contribution of mothers and homemakers to that society.

For the White women in Petersen's (2001) study, education was a critically important piece of their identity. Most of the women in her study used the pursuit of further education as an escape from repressed identities. The women in this study were a highly educated lot for the most part. Women of Strength in Doubt, however, reported less than two years of college. Is the actual degree the point of difference that education makes? Or is it a culturally acceptable way to delay repressing identity and committing to cultural role expectations of wife and mother?

Despite the popular culture's emphasis on youth and beauty, all of the women described themselves as "amazed at how young I still feel at 50." Concerns about physiological changes or bodily concerns, "...sagging, wrinkles, gray hair..." and "hot flashes," were expressed in the response to the post-sort question in terms of "I just deal with it." Emphasis on youth and beauty was not a concern for Eleanor but health was, "The look is not as good as it was...could be better, but I'm over that. The P.S. is...am I going to be healthy?"

The generally positive outlook of this study's women toward self, present circumstances, and the future, although unsupported by current theories of adult women's midlife development, is congruent with themes expressed in the popular press (Chan, 1996; Giese, 1998; Lindbergh, 1955; Rountree, 1993) and is especially clear in Harris' (1995) depiction of women in their 50th year as "Jubilee Women." Using biblical metaphors, Harris describes the 50th year as a time of celebration for women who are entering a "period of royal release, freed to become all that we are meant to be, committed to bringing the walls of ageism tumbling down at last" (p. xix).

This contrast between popular and theoretical presentations of women at midlife may represent various implications. "Popular" becomes popular because people purchase the books, the more the better. Do people buy popular books because they identify with the stories or lives portrayed? Or do they buy these books because they seek inspiration and aspire to be like the women whose lives are depicted in these popular books?

The descriptions of the experiences of the women in this study are meant to be just that-- descriptions of these women's experiences. They are not meant to describe all women's experience. However, a positive experience of midlife is presented by these women and as such can be said to exist.

Theoretical descriptions of women's development, written for a scientific audience, have been based on a model of women's development which has not ventured much beyond a biological/medical understanding of development. A theoretical frame that is based on biology or biologically based role expectations, may not be able to free itself from a sense of deterioration or loss.

In short, some women may experience midlife in terms of sadness and loss, but some women experience midlife in terms of happiness and freedom. Theories of adult development should acknowledge both of these experiences, or a combination of these experiences, and remain open to the possibility of even others.

Theories of Adult Development

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) describe the need for theoretical convergence in career theory as necessary to bridge some of the differences in competing theories to form an organized and coherent account of behavior. Likewise, the need for theoretical convergence in adult development. The objective is not a "single, monolithic position" but rather a more realistic presentation of adult development for women (and men) throughout the life span (p. 375). The objective is a theory of life span development that emphasizes themes and constructs that are not tied to biological functions, that do not focus on developmental task demands and exclusive end goals of autonomy and independence but rather, perhaps, multiple relational patterns (Gergen, 1990). New ways of relating development without predicting sure decline and dismay at midlife are needed. Themes that emerged from the experience of the women in this study, which could be included in a theory of adult development, addressed the concepts of growth and change, the

influence of life events that precipitate changes in self-identity, the importance of patterns of relationship, and the place for spirituality in a balanced life.

Change. Themes expressed by the participants through the ranking of statements relate the concept of change or growth through midlife, the role of precipitating events for a sense of strength, spirituality or faith development, and an appreciation of relational development. The expression of these themes is supported by bits and pieces of current theories of adult development, but there is no complete and integrated theory that seems to account for or appreciate all of these themes or the complexity, in general, of White women's midlife experiences.

The theme of change and continued growth which emerged most distinctly from the Women of Strength in Resilience and Women of Strength in Conviction and present even in Women of Strength in Doubt contradicts the assumption that midlife is a fairly stable, uneventful time (Lachman & James, 1997). Excited anticipation of even more growth in the future supports the need for an understanding of this period of life as a developmental midpoint as opposed to an endpoint. One approach to understanding the development of the concept of adulthood is through the lens of a developmental theory or stage model. Widdershoven (1994) specifies that development is related to change and stages should be considered as just stages, not achievement scales. A criticism of traditional developmental theories by feminist theorists has been that women's lives are discontinuous and variable in patterns and do not fit well into linear theoretical models (Bateson, 1989; Gergen, 1990). The Women of Strength in Resilience, Doubt, and Conviction report lives that look discontinuous and nonlinear. The picture of educational goals met at nontraditional ages, combinations of full, part-time, and volunteer employment, gaps in paid employment, some concurrent with bearing and raising children and some not, contributes to the idea that women's development is stop and start. Could it be, however, that the events of women's lives are discontinuous and variable in pattern but that normal identity development proceeds in an orderly manner? Or, as the data seems to indicate, because of the nonlinearity of

life events, particularly in adulthood, their psychological impact on identity necessarily occurs in "stops and starts."

Importance of events for growth. Although a reflection of the prevailing cultural mindset, it is hard to overlook Erikson's stereotypical, confining presentation of female identity development and find value in his thoughts. Nevertheless, as Marcia (1994) summarized Erikson's conceptualization of eight developmental stages, he emphasized the three components of each stage. The first component includes the individual's physical developmental needs and abilities. The second aspect includes relevant social sanctions and expectations, and the third component is the sense of oneself the individual develops as a result of the interaction between the individual and his or her cultural context. Erikson's focus on sociocultural influences and the integrative function of identity as the intersection of the individual and society seem to be helpful concepts in women's development.

The theme of a precipitating event for growth as expressed by Women of Strength in Resilience seems congruent with the interplay of components in each of Erikson's developmental stages. Widdershoven (1994) contends that it is not to be assumed that development is brought about solely by internal processes, but that development may well take place in interaction with the external context. Ranked statements and written comments from Women of Strength in Resilience indicate these women's understanding of the importance of development in light of the interaction with the external context as manifest in divorce, death, separation, mission trips, and care-taking activities. Women of Strength in Conviction spoke in the abstract of events as precipitators of growth. They did not seem to choose to define their growth in light of a specific life event.

Dabrowski's (Nelson, 1989) theory of positive disintegration is predicated on the important role of suffering and conflict in a life to generate a disintegration or destabilizing process that prepares one for growth and transformation. The positive interpretation that Women of Strength in Resilience and Conviction make of their own growth after precipitating events is supported by Dabrowski's identification of his process as "positive" disintegration.

Relationship. Erikson's emphasis on "sequential linear growth, separation, differentiation, and increasing autonomy" with the "achievement of identity predicated on the establishment of autonomy and the capability of intimacy only after identity is consolidated" is not consistent with feminist theorists' insistence on a relational model of development for women (Jordan, 1991, p. 138).

Statements of relationship had a high positive identification for Women of Strength in Resilience and Conviction and a high negative salience for Women of Strength in Doubt. Whether positive or negative, relationships seemed to help to define these women. Even in the written comments one woman explained that she was "different" than other women, not because of who she was as a person but because of the relationships or lack of relationships in her life, "I'm a Roman Catholic sister" living in a community, and "both of my parents died when I was in my 20's." Josselson (1994) explained the critical concepts of a relational view of identity as rather than emerging from increasing separation and distinction from others, identity is formed from the continual redefinition and reintegration of ways of being with others and being with oneself. The problem is we have been "hampered by the absence of a language to discuss relatedness" (p. 83).

In light of the apparent omission of the importance of relational aspects of development for women, Josselson (1994) tried to balance the forces of agency and communion by encouraging researchers to "speak in stereo, one speaker voicing the themes of doing and self, the other carrying the counterpoint of connection" (p. 89). Strip away the biased statements about women from Erikson (1968) and he proposes that identity is that congruence between one's meaning to self and to others. In feminists' efforts to counteract the emphasis on "men" in adult development theories by calling for a relational model of women's development, is the basic injustice perpetuated? Or, is this an attempt to bring Erikson and adult development theories more in line with the themes of development expressed by women themselves? Results of the current study appear to support the latter. What would a relational model of development look like for both genders?

Spirituality. A fourth theme suggested by the women in this study was the importance of spirituality or faith in their lives. Rank statements for Women of Strength in Resilience and Women of Strength in Doubt do not indicate a particular interest in thinking about spiritual issues, however, responses to the post-sort question and follow-up interview place an important emphasis on these women's reliance on their faith. Women of Strength in Conviction identified positively with a statement of balance in their lives among social, educational, and spiritual spheres. These are the statements that overtly address spiritual development. Women of Strength in Resilience and Conviction assign high positive salience to more subtle indicators of spiritual or faith development such as purpose in life (Young, Cashwell, & Shcherbakova, 2000), importance of other, and appreciation of ambiguity (Fowler, 1981).

In light of the generally positive outlook of the participants toward self, present circumstances, and the future, despite having experienced separation, divorce, death, and personal illness, it would be helpful to examine the role of faith or spirituality in their lives in more depth. Young, Cashwell, and Shcherbakova (2000) demonstrated the effect of spirituality as a buffer against the undesirable effects of stressful life events. Although the literature indicates a distinct difference between spirituality, "a personal affirmation of a transcendent connectedness in the universe," and religion, "the creedal, institutional, and ritual expression of spirituality" (Kelly as cited in Young, Cashwell, & Shcherbakova, 2000, p. 49), 24 of the 25 participants in this study indicated a commitment to regular participation in an organized religious group. The participants were all graduates of a private, religious high school. It would provide insight into the place of spirituality and religion in women's lives to explore these and other women's understanding and expression of spirituality in greater depth.

Adult Identity

Bits and threads of various theories seem to address a variety of issues in these women's adult identity and experience of midlife. The experiences of the women in this study, which break along themes of strength and resiliency, regret and seeking, and commitment and balance, are

very similar to three of the groups of women described by Josselson (1987; 1996) in her longitudinal study of women. Josselson's work, based on Marcia's (1966) identity research, which was based on Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation, explores the process by which women arrive at a sense of identity. Investigating experiences of exploration and the making of firm identity commitments, Marcia (as cited in Josselson, 1987) identified four pathways to identity:

Identity Foreclosure--commitment in the absence of a searching or crisis phase. Premature identity formation carried forward from either parentally derived expectations or childhood plans without question or scrutiny. Can be viewed as either loyal or rigid, cooperative or conforming.

Identity Achievement--commitment through crisis. Proceed through process of testing options, and then making commitments. Largely seen to be independent and self-directed.

Moratorium--struggling to make commitments but have not yet found the right ones. May be judged either flexible or indecisive, philosophical or anxious.

Identity Diffusion--not experiencing crisis or commitment. Drifting, avoiding identity formation task. Can be seen as either carefree or irresponsible, creative or disaffected.(p. 30)

Josselson (1987) initially used this framework to describe the identity experience of a group of senior college women. In 1996 after follow-up studies of these same women at the ages of 33 and 43, Josselson asserted the stability of the initial identity pathways. She renamed the pathways *Guardians, Pathmakers, Searchers, and Drifters*. The resemblance of the experiences of the women in the present study to the first three identity pathways is very apparent. Women of Strength in Conviction, who appear very confident in their happiness, assured of their place in life, and clear about their participation in a larger (God's) plan, echo the description of *Guardians*, "have made identity commitments without a sense of choice, carrying forward the plans for their life mapped out in childhood or designed by their parents" (p. 35). They make no mention of events in their life that precipitate change or growth because they are already committed to a sense of identity.

Women of Strength in Resilience, who described themselves as stronger, and better, and more sure of themselves because of having handled hard things, or having gone through tough times, share the experience of *Pathmakers* "who have experienced a period of exploration or crisis and then made identity commitments on their own terms" (p. 35).

Searchers are "still in an active period of struggle or exploration, trying to make choices but not yet having done so," and so the Women of Strength in Doubt of this study (p. 35). These women look back on their lives with some wistfulness and wish they had thought more about their own identity when they were younger; wonder if they have made a contribution or accomplished anything; and continue to look for themselves.

FIGURE I

COMPARISON OF PERSPECTIVES OF ADULT WOMEN OF 50 WITH IDENTITY STATUSES OF MARCIA (1966) AND JOSSELSON (1987)

ACHIEVEMENT	PATHMAKERS	WOMEN OF STRENGTH IN RESILIENCE
FORECLOSURE	GUARDIANS	WOMEN OF STRENGTH IN CONVICTION
MORATORIUM	SEARCHERS	WOMEN OF STRENGTH IN DOUBT
DIFFUSED	DRIFTERS	

A fourth group of women to duplicate the experience of Josselson's (1996) *Drifters* did not appear in the present study. If participation in this study had been by face-to-face contact rather than mail-in participation, perhaps this other theme would have emerged. Josselson describes this group of women as "a few 'free spirits'" or "preoccupied with unresolved emotional problems that showed themselves in impulsivity, depression, or personality fragmentation (p. 39) and she reported difficulty in recruiting them to her study. These categories or pathways are not intended to be evaluative but only descriptive, however, that description does not seem like a profile of persons who would voluntarily participate in a mail-in study of women's experiences at 50.

Implications for Further Research

This study revealed the variety of experiences of being a 50-year-old woman of a particular segment of a specific population. This study targeted a purposefully homogeneous (gender, age, race, class, educational level) group of participants. The purpose of Q is not to develop perspectives for comparison or generalization but to investigate the possibilities and

presence of subjective experiences. It would be interesting to explore these issues with women of different racial, cultural, class, and sexual orientation backgrounds. There is no indication of the experiences of women who did not respond. It can only be said with confidence that these three perspectives do exist. Further research with participants of varying racial background, socioeconomic class, and educational levels is indicated.

The emergence of themes in this group of women's experience raises many questions for further exploration of adult identity development in general, adult women's identity development, and the social and cultural influences upon development. In light of the complexities of women's experience of midlife and a renewed sensitivity to the contextualist perspective in life span research (Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997), careful attention should be paid to the methods of gathering information. In order to effectively explore the interaction between social and cultural influences and development, Van Manen and Whitbourne (1997) express the need for more sophisticated measures of life experiences. Current techniques for measuring life experiences can be seen to be particularly biased against women or men who choose to be full-time homemakers. The construct of "life experience" incorporates areas of development in the worlds of work and relationships. Life experiences in the work domain are indexed by socioeconomic status, which includes educational level and occupational prestige. Full-time homemaker warrants a low socioeconomic score similar to manual workers because of low occupational prestige (Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997).

Gergen (1990) offers another way of processing the need for new research approaches,

Instead of trying to force women's lives into traditional forms, narratives might better be created that are more resonant with alternative lifestyles...lifespan developmental approach that is less concerned with meeting developmental tasks, future-oriented goals, and logical endpoints than with carrying out multiple relational patterns" (p. 486).

Narrative modes of inquiry were recently touted by Flum (2001) for investigating the interplay between relationships and development and their interface with work. A narrative mode of inquiry "is a journey of discovery aiming to uncover the multifaceted meanings of lived experiences and to create an interpreted description" (p.267). Of particular interest in the exploration of women's adult development, an area that has received little attention, is the value

that life stories or life histories have in areas where much is unknown and has to be explored. Communication between research and practice can be facilitated through this approach and theory building may be enhanced.

Adult women in midlife are underrepresented in research studies (Banister, 1999). One reason for this is the assumption that it is difficult to reach a middle-aged population in order to conduct research (Lachman & James, 1997). The experience of Banister (1999) and this researcher seem to contradict this assumption. Banister (1999) intended to conduct one focus group discussion to explore women's midlife experience of their changing bodies. Her participants, midlife women between 40 and 55 years, insisted on meeting two more times "in their eagerness to continue sharing stories" (p. 524). Similarly when thirty potential focus group participants for the first phase of this study were contacted, 100% of the invited replied "yes" on first call, and friends of the invited called of their own initiative to ask if they could be involved. Requests were made for follow-up discussions. It is interesting to note that although the topic was essentially the same in the focus groups for phase one of this study and the Q-sort, response to the focus group discussions was significantly higher. Written comments on the returned Q-packets indicated that those who did complete the Q-sort enjoyed it and were interested in further information but future plans for research may note the eagerness of women to be in face-to-face discussion.

During analysis of the demographic information the arbitrariness of common identifying terms became obvious. An example of this arises with two apparently easy categories of marital status, "single" or "married." But what do they mean? If a person is single, are they single because they have never married, because they were married and are now separated, divorced, widowed? Is a person single because she is a vowed religious? Or has not met the person she wishes to marry? Or is in a committed relationship but is considered or considers herself legally single? If a person calls herself married, does it make a difference if she is in her first marriage or second or third? Does calling it "marital status" imply that marriage is the standard of status?

Another major identifying category that warrants further reflection is that of socioeconomic status. In this study there were two questions in reference to socioeconomic status. One question

asked the participant to choose from word categories (poor, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, wealthy) how she would describe her economic status. The other question asked the participant to check her own and her family's approximate gross annual income. Each of the participants identified herself as middle class or higher although personal or family gross annual income ranged from \$21,000-40,000 to over \$200,000. Of those identifying as "middle class" the range of gross annual income was from \$21,000-40,000 to \$126,000-200,000.

Just as thoughts of the ambiguity of single, married, or social class surface,

...one might finally wish to call into question the utility of the notion of 'gender' itself. One might ask the extent to which its capacity to rend humans into a permanent bisection does more harm than good. One might even question the sexually repressive effects of this form of segmentation on intimacy and sexuality. Must we have two sets of gendered developmental theories? (Gergen, 1990, p. 483).

Flum (2001) points out that a growing challenge exists from within psychology to the marginalization of relatedness and that in fact autonomy and relatedness are not mutually exclusive. The need for relatedness and for autonomy are not opposed. Josselson (1992) has operationalized a language and structure to think about the role of relational connections in development. The application of this language and structure to future inquiries about adult development provides exciting possibilities of study.

This ambitious project provides an overview of the experiences of a small group of women at 50 years of age, more in-depth exploration of issues presented among these women would be warranted. In particular, those women who present perspectives different than their cohort, for example the Women of Strength in Doubt, could be involved in a narrative mode of inquiry in the style of Flum (2001) or Gergen (1990).

Implications for Practice

There are several ways that the information from this group of women could be applied to counseling practice and educational endeavors. The generally positive tone of these women toward their experience at midlife could be expressed to dispel stereotypical presentations of women's midlife experience as one of overwhelming loss and despair. The relatively small

emphasis given to physiological changes defies previous emphasis on only physiological/biological developmental issues at midlife. Continued reliance on a biomedical model of women's adult development, which makes menopause the benchmark experience of midlife and defines menopause not only in terms of loss but as a disease, perpetuates the cultural and personal myth of decline and desperation for women at midlife. Current results reveal that an equal emphasis on the variety of social, emotional, psychological, physiological, and spiritual events of a woman's midlife experience, the interaction among all of them, and the potential for positive change and growth in all domains, could provide a hopeful look at the future for all ages of women.

There is, also, the reality of loss at midlife. Persons at this time in their lives have experienced death, divorce, illness, and loss in real or abstract terms, and it is important to acknowledge the importance of these events, not as endpoints or inevitable periods of crisis, but as part of the continuous transformation of life. Persons who have experienced these events can be encouraged to recognize and adequately mourn the reality of these losses as well as discern their meaning for the larger picture of their life. The cumulative effect of losses at this, or any period of life cannot be ignored. The ability to handle hard things may have provided women in this study "the freedom to know I could handle other hard things" but the toll on emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical reserves when multiple losses are experienced can be devastating.

Women who have conflicts of identity at midlife may have made decisions as adolescents or young adults that precipitated their unrest at midlife. Increased efforts for educating young persons as to the very real influence and pressure, although subtle and covert, of cultural expectations on identity, may provide opportunities for more informed decisions by these young people. Women who have reached midlife and find themselves in these dilemmas of identity could also benefit from exploring the influence of the subtle, and not so subtle, cultural role expectations on their early decisions and their midlife decisions. Options and choices for continued or renewed identity development can be discussed in existential terms and in terms of real life choices, perhaps involving education or career change.

The eagerness of women to talk about their lives could be capitalized on in group formats, either formal or informal, therapeutic or self-help. Encouraging women to build connections sounds like telling the Pope to go to church, but in the busyness of catering to multiple levels of need, women may discount their own needs and become isolated in their continued attempts to do everything for everyone. Validating relationships promote physical and emotional well-being and may be individual or group relationships.

Finally, it is important to find ways to validate the contribution to society of women who are mothers and homemakers in a way that is real and valid so that women who choose this profession can say that is who they are with pride.

We have considered general implications for practice but it is also important to consider the connection between these specific women's identities at midlife and the possibility of psychological interventions that would be most successful. Each of the groups of women represented in this study could be expected to have different needs and expectations of counseling at different times in their lives. Under normal conditions, Women of Strength in Conviction would be expected to be least likely to seek psychological counseling. Their firm belief that they are "connected to what they are best suited to in life" and their strong conviction in reference to their internalized cultural ideals precludes any necessity for counseling. And Josselson (1994) indeed found this type of women to have low levels of anxiety. Therapists are cautioned to be sensitive to the possibility of their own bias concerning traditional cultural expectations, and not unnecessarily disarm the legitimate defenses of these women. If, however, for whatever reason, the strong ideals that these women base their identity on become severely tested, they could be psychologically shattered "bereft of any internal guarantor of self-esteem and thence to risk an acute depressive episode" (Marcia, 1994, p. 79). Counseling may be particularly difficult to seek as it may not be an acceptable option in their cultural schema. If this hurdle can be overcome, the formation of a new foundation for identity may take place in a safe context of exploration and deconstruction of existing ideals.

Women of Strength in Resilience, proud of their resilience, but aware of the effect on their lives and identity of events or crises, would generally be expected to work things out on their own,

but may seek help during or following times of crisis. The opportunity to process events in the bigger context of one's life may have some appeal for these women. Focus on strengths would be a natural avenue of intervention. The caution for these women would be that intuitively focused on and proud of their strength it might not be within their reach to recognize or admit any weakness. The opportunity to identify, explore, and express normal reactions to loss and be affirmed in their grief are possible goals for these women when experiencing crisis.

Psychological interventions for women who are still searching for themselves at midlife (Women of Strength in Doubt in this study) could provide affirmation for the search itself. Exploring and clarifying the process of seeking identity may provide more benefit than scrutiny of choices made and not made. Group interventions have already been described as particularly appealing to women in general, but this group of women may benefit specifically from group work. The opportunity to recognize and participate in similar experiences of others and to tryout new expressions of identity in the safe context of a like-minded group could provide a helpful environment for exploration and eventual commitment to identity for these women.

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APPENDIX A
Focus Group Question Route

How would most people define “adult”?

Would you define “adult” and “grown-up” in the same way?

How would you define...?

What is different about being an adult and being grown-up?

When did you first think of yourself as grown-up?

When do you think your parents first thought of you as grown-up?

Do you think of your parents as peers? If yes, when did this shift to “peerdom” occur?

Do you think the experience of being grown-up is the same or different for men and women? How?

Do you think it is important for a person to be self-supporting to be considered a grown-up? What does that mean? Financially? Emotionally?

What would it feel like to be “in charge of your own life”? How does this fit in to the idea of being grown-up?

What is it like to be a 50-year-old woman in the year 2000?

What have you found to be the best things about being 50?

What have you found to be the worst things about being 50?

What things are important to you now that you are 50 that were not so important when you were younger?

What do you worry about now that you are 50 that you didn't worry about when you were younger?

What are some things you know now that you didn't know when you were younger?

What do you know about yourself now that you are 50 that you did not know when you were younger?

What do you know about yourself now that you are 50 that you did not know when you were younger?

What events in your life have contributed to your sense of being grown-up?

College? Marriage? Children? Divorce? House? Car? Possessions? Death? Successes? Failures?

What have you learned from life?

What is your fantasy of aging?

Do you have a metaphor or an image or a book title you would use to describe this time in your life?

What would you like our daughters' experience of being 50 to be like?

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Letter

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 10/12/01

Date : Friday, October 13, 2000

IRB Application No ED0130

Proposal Title: JUBILEE WOMEN-IDENTITY AT 50: A Q-STUDY OF WHITE AMERICAN WOMEN

Principal
Investigator(s) :

Patricia Darlington
437 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Marie L. Miville
401 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature :



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Friday, October 13, 2000

Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX C

Q Packet

October, 2000

Dear Fellow Ursuline Alum,

Greetings from Oklahoma!

I am working on my dissertation for a doctoral degree in counseling psychology at Oklahoma State University. For my research, I am interested in examining the experiences of women at 50 years of age. As a woman of 50, you are invited to participate in this study. I have chosen your name from our Class of '67, '68, and '69 alumnae lists, estimating that you are either 50 years old or very close.

The statements for this instrument were taken from conversations with 28, 50-year-old women during focus group discussions held this summer in Stillwater, OK. Many of our psychology and counseling theories are based on research with college age persons, primarily males, leaving some possible gaps in our understanding of adult women's development. It is anticipated that the data collected in this research will provide important information about the adult development and identity of women in midlife for psychology and counseling.

The entire process should take about one hour of your time as you reflect on your experiences as a woman of 50. You are asked to rank-order statements about experiences of being a 50-year-old woman in the order of similarity to your experience. These responses will be factor analyzed and, therefore, will not indicate individual viewpoints but significant categories of responses. You are also asked to provide some demographic information. I hope that this process will be kind of fun, increase your self-knowledge, and provide some insight about other women's experiences. Plus I'll send you \$10 for participating.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at 405-377-8719 or by e-mail at sunrise_osu@osu.net. Even if you don't want to know more about this study, I'd love to hear from you!

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,



Pat O'Brien Darlington, M. S.
Ursuline Class of 1969

P.S. Thanks for returning everything by **Monday, November 20.**

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read and sign blue Consent Form.
2. Complete lavender Demographic Data Form.
3. Read through the statements on the yellow "Q-cards" to become familiar with them. As you are doing this, sort the cards into three piles: On your right, place the cards that are most **like** your experience of being 50, to your left place the cards that are most **unlike** your experience, and in the middle place cards about which you are neutral or uncertain.
4. Put the pink Form Sheet on the table in front of you. Pick up your right hand, or "most like" cards, and from this pile choose the three statements that are the best descriptions of your experience. Place these cards in the squares above # 11. The order of these three items is not important.
5. Turn now to the left hand pile, or those statements "most unlike" your experience, study these items and choose three statements that are the worst descriptions of your experience. Place these three cards on the form sheet on the left side in the squares above #1. Again, the order is not important.
6. Return to the right hand pile and pick four items that are more like your experience than the remaining ones among the grouping but which are not as significant as the three already selected (placed above #11), and place them above #10. You may decide that an item placed above #10 is more important than one you placed above #11. You are free to switch items at any time.
7. Go back to the left and repeat the process, working toward the middle (#6), until all of the Q-statements are positioned from left to right. Review your statements and make adjustments as necessary.
8. Finally, write the statement numbers on the green Record Sheet in the boxes so that the arrangement of your Form Sheet is duplicated. Use the reverse of the Record Sheet for additional comments.
9. Place the completed lavender Demographic Data Form and the green Record Sheet in one of the stamped and addressed envelopes.
10. Complete the blue Request for Payment Form. Place this form and the blue Consent Form in the other stamped and addressed envelope.
11. Put the two envelopes in the mail by **Monday, November 20**.
12. Thank you very much!

CONSENT FORM

Thanks for agreeing to participate in this study! Your responses are very important and will help us understand the issues that are important to women in midlife.

You will be asked to report some demographic information about yourself, such as your age, educational level, and occupation as well as arrange and record statements concerning your experience of being 50. Your identity will not be revealed as all information is collected by number. (That's why two separate envelopes are provided to return materials.)

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to return any materials.

You may contact Pat Darlington at 405-377-8719 or Dr. Marie Miville at 405-744-9453 if you have questions about this study or if you wish to see a copy of the final results. You may also contact Sharon Bacher, Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board Secretary, 405-744-5700, 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK, 74078, if you have any questions or comments about the study. Refer to IRB #ED00277.

I have read and fully understand the consent form and am willing to participate in the study described above.

Signature

Date

Return this signed form with the blue Request for Payment Form in one of the stamped and addressed envelopes.

Thanks for returning as soon as possible.

Q-Statements

1. I have a sure sense of where I'm going with my life.
2. I don't feel any different than when I was younger; I just got to the point where I look grown-up.
3. I don't necessarily want to be in charge of my own life.
4. I don't like realizing that my children are growing up and they don't need me like when they were younger.
5. I used to worry a lot about always doing what other people expect of me.
6. Whatever is going to happen to me in a day is my own choosing.
7. I used to think of 50 as "one foot in the grave" but I'm thrilled it's not like that.
8. My parents saw me as grown-up when I got married.
9. My whole core of freedom is taking care of myself financially. You just don't have any choices if you can't take care of yourself.
10. I feel like I've always been a grown-up. I missed out on being a kid.
11. Empty nest is the best thing about being 50.
12. I spend more time on the important relationships in my life.
13. I've always considered my primary occupation as mother, and it's coming to an end and I need to be planning and thinking about how my role is changing.
14. I never felt like I was a kid because I didn't do the things other kids did.
15. I realized I was grown-up when I became a parent and realized I was responsible for someone other than myself.
16. I was in my forties when I first realized I had choices to make that were going to reflect on my life and the quality of my life and they weren't going to be choices I made to please someone else.
17. I don't feel like I'm grown-up. I feel like I'm playing grown-up.
18. I was scared to be grown-up.
19. I have never thought of my dad as a peer of my own.
20. I miss the social life that revolved around my children and their activities.
21. I like having the experience; it's not necessarily wisdom, but just the history.

22. If someone asks me my opinion I feel more confident than when I was younger giving an answer.
23. I like feeling I don't have to be perfect.
24. I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learning about who I am.
25. I wish I had taken more risks, tried out more things when I was younger.
26. I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages and I'm proud of who I am, but I'm still not done.
27. I've come to realize that God is not a people-pleaser and as a deity that's part of me I can rely on him. I'm willing to know there are some things out of my control, and just give those to God and try not to worry.
28. There aren't bad things and good things in life necessarily; it's just how I look at them.
29. I think that the best part of my life is over.
30. There came a time in my relationship with my husband that I realized I could survive without him. I have to be a whole complete person without him.
31. The only important thing that has ever happened to me is the birth of my children.
32. I feel like I have a balance in my life of the social, educational, and spiritual pieces.
33. When my parents were unavailable to me I realized I had to grow up--I was the oldest generation now.
34. Handling hard things in my life has given me a great sense of freedom--freedom to know I can handle something else because I know I've already handled this.
35. My greatest sense of failure is the loss of my marriage; I put so much time and energy into it.
36. I feel like my role with my parents has reversed and now I am the adult trying to help them make decisions.
37. I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes them feel good.
38. I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes me feel good.
39. As a woman I am not as responsible for supporting my family financially.
40. I feel that I'm somebody's wife and somebody's mom and that I don't really exist.

41. In the big picture I feel like I'm in control of my life but I've always put myself last. I'm happy in that role.
42. I don't have to worry about periods anymore but now I worry about hormone replacement therapy and osteoporosis.
43. I think it's amazing how young I still feel at 50.
44. My body feels old but my mind is still young.
45. I am enjoying thinking about my spirituality
46. If I had known at 30 what I know now, I would have had a lot more fun at 30.
47. I have a hard time relating to the idea of changing roles at this time in my life.
I have not ever changed roles and I don't anticipate doing it.
48. I feel like at 50 I'm starting my life over, redefining myself.
49. I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a difference to anybody.
50. I'm not sure what to do with the quiet that I have in my life now.
51. I wish I had not been so career-oriented when I was younger, to the detriment of relationships.
52. I feel like my life has been on hold.
53. I think my faith now is different than my religion.
54. I am excited about the possibilities coming up in the next half of my life.
55. I am the same person at 50 that I have always been.
56. At 50, I have a new sense of understanding for or maybe just peace with the things in my life that seem like contradictions.
57. I feel grown-up in all of my relationships.
58. I've been looking for myself for 50 years.
59. When I graduated from high school, my career choices were (generally) nurse, teacher, librarian--but those were just 'til my real career started--wife and mother.
60. I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best suited to do in this life.

Demographic Data Form

1. What is your age? _____

2. Relationship status
 - a. _____ Single -- never married
 - b. _____ Married
 What was your age when you first married? _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____
 - c. _____ Divorced
 What was your age when you first divorced? _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____
 - d. _____ Widowed
 What was your age when you were first widowed? _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____
 - e. _____ Partnered/Committed relationship
 What was your age when you first entered this relationship? _____ 2nd _____

3. Ethnicity
 - a. _____ Asian
 - b. _____ Black
 - c. _____ Hispanic/Latina
 - d. _____ Native American
 - e. _____ White
 - f. _____ Other (Please specify _____)

4. Sexual orientation
 - a. _____ Bisexual
 - b. _____ Heterosexual
 - c. _____ Lesbian

5. Children

What was **your age** when your children were born or adopted?

_____ 1st Child ___ Check if living in your home/financially dependent

_____ 2nd Child ___ Check if living in your home/financially dependent

_____ 3rd Child ___ Check if living in your home/financially dependent

_____ 4th Child ___ Check if living in your home/financially dependent

_____ 5th Child ___ Check if living in your home/financially dependent
 (Use back of page for additional children)

6. Other persons living in your home (parents, stepchildren, grandparents, other relative, other)

Age	Relationship	Age	Relationship
Age	Relationship	Age	Relationship

7. Your Parents

If your parents/parent are living,
 how many approximate miles do you live from them? _____

If your parents/parent are deceased,
What was **your age** when your mother died? _____

What was **your age** when your father died? _____

8. Educational level--please check highest level of education attained.

a. _____ High school diploma/GED

b. _____ Less than 2 years of college

c. _____ Associate degree
Area _____

d. _____ Bachelor's degree
Area _____

e. _____ Master's degree
Area _____

f. _____ Doctoral/Professional degree
Area _____

g. _____ Other
Please specify _____

9. What was your age when you finished school or received your last degree? _____

10. When asked your occupation, what do you reply?

11. How many years have you worked at this (#10) occupation?

Years Full-time _____ Years Part-time _____

Were these years salaried _____ or volunteer (unpaid) _____?

12. Net worth, including your primary residence--do not give figures.

a. _____ I could tell you my personal net worth within 10%.

b. _____ I could not tell you my personal net worth within 10%.

13. How would you describe your economic status?

a. _____ Poor

b. _____ Lower middle class

c. _____ Middle class

d. _____ Upper middle class

e. _____ Wealthy

14. Please check your approximate gross annual income.

	Personal	Combined Family
a. Under \$20,000	_____	_____
b. \$21,000-40,000	_____	_____
c. \$41,000-65,000	_____	_____
d. \$66,000-80,000	_____	_____
e. \$81,000-125,000	_____	_____
f. \$126,000-200,000	_____	_____
g. Over \$200,000	_____	_____

15. If you participate on a regular basis in an organized religious group, please check.

- a. _____ Mainline Protestant
- b. _____ Fundamental/Bible
- c. _____ Catholic
- d. _____ Jewish
- e. _____ Muslim
- f. _____ Other -- Please specify _____

16. Residence

_____ State of primary residence Years of residence _____

- a. _____ Urban community
- b. _____ Suburban
- c. _____ Rural
- d. _____ Other

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

REQUEST FOR PAYMENT FORM

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for participating in this research project. Your responses are very valuable and will provide important information concerning women's experience of being 50 in the year 2000. As a token of my appreciation for your contribution, I will either send you \$10 or send \$10 to a charity of your choice. Just complete the following information and return this form, with your signed Consent Form, in one of the stamped and addressed envelopes.

Sincerely,

Pat O'Brien Darlington, M. S.
Ursuline Alum - Class of '69

I have signed the Consent Form, filled out the Demographic Data Form, completed the Q-sort process, and recorded my answers. I would like my \$10.00 payment sent to my address:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

I would like my \$10.00 donated to the following charity:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

**If you would like to have this gift acknowledged please provide your name and address, too.

Thank you for returning everything by **Monday, November 20.**

Post-Sort Interview Questions

Interviews that may be conducted by phone following receipt of sorted statements and permission to phone.

Script:

Hello. My name is Pat Darlington and I'm conducting research on women of 50. Is there someone at this number who may have just filled out a questionnaire about being a woman of 50 years?

Thank you for providing your phone number and allowing this conversation. Although I know it is awkward in conversation, please do not give me your name so as to maintain your confidentiality.

I have just a few questions...

1. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience of being a woman of 50?
2. A number of women arranged their statements in _____ way, how does that reflect your experience? Does that arrangement have special meaning for you?
3. What are your thoughts or reactions to the actual process of filling out the forms and sorting the statements?

Thank you very much for your initial participation and this follow-up interview.

APPENDIX D
DATA TABLES

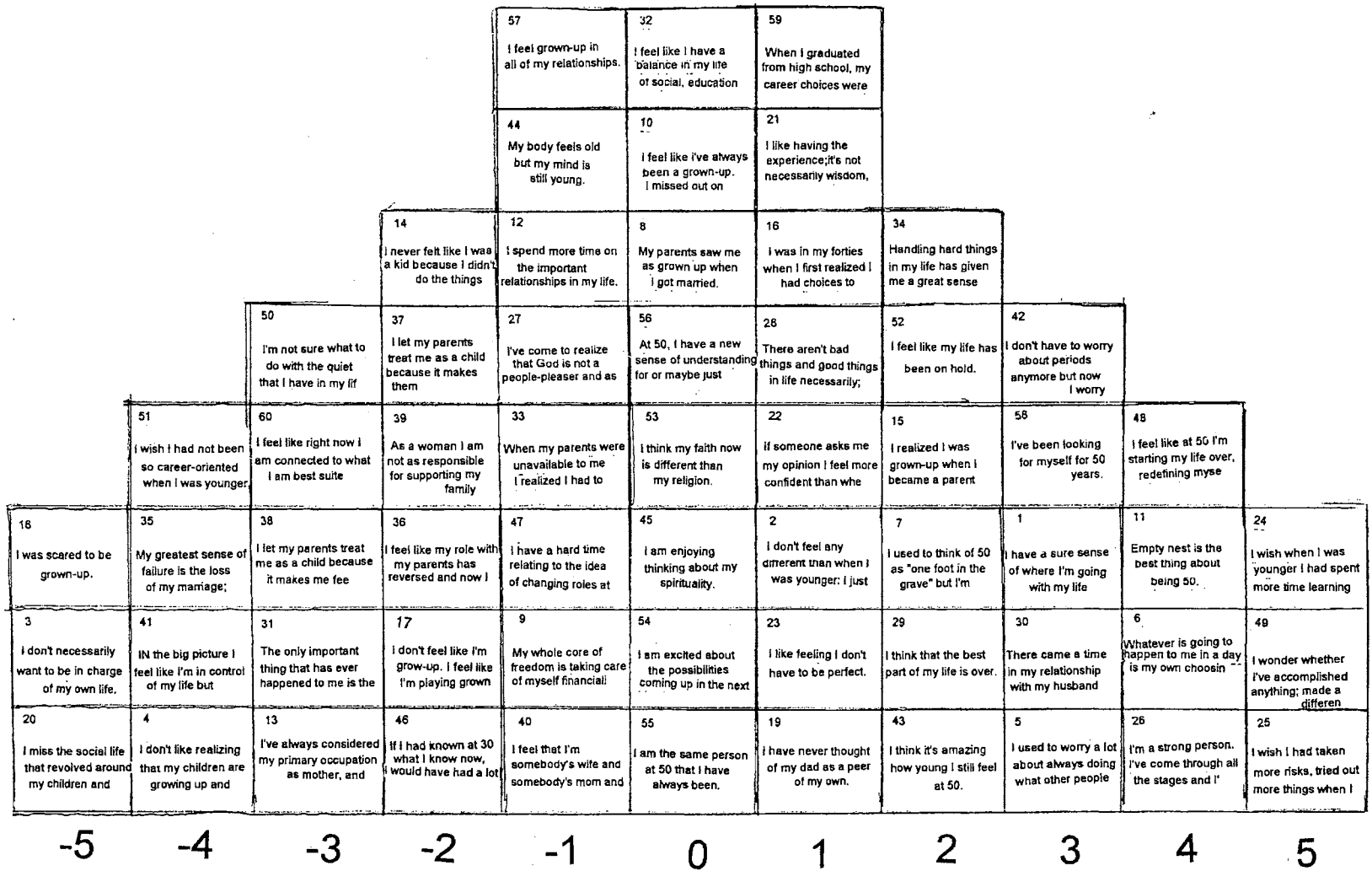
Figure 2
STATEMENT FREQUENCY AND ARRAY

Statement Frequency	3	4	5	6	8	8	8	6	5	4	3
Statistical Value	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
Array Position	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

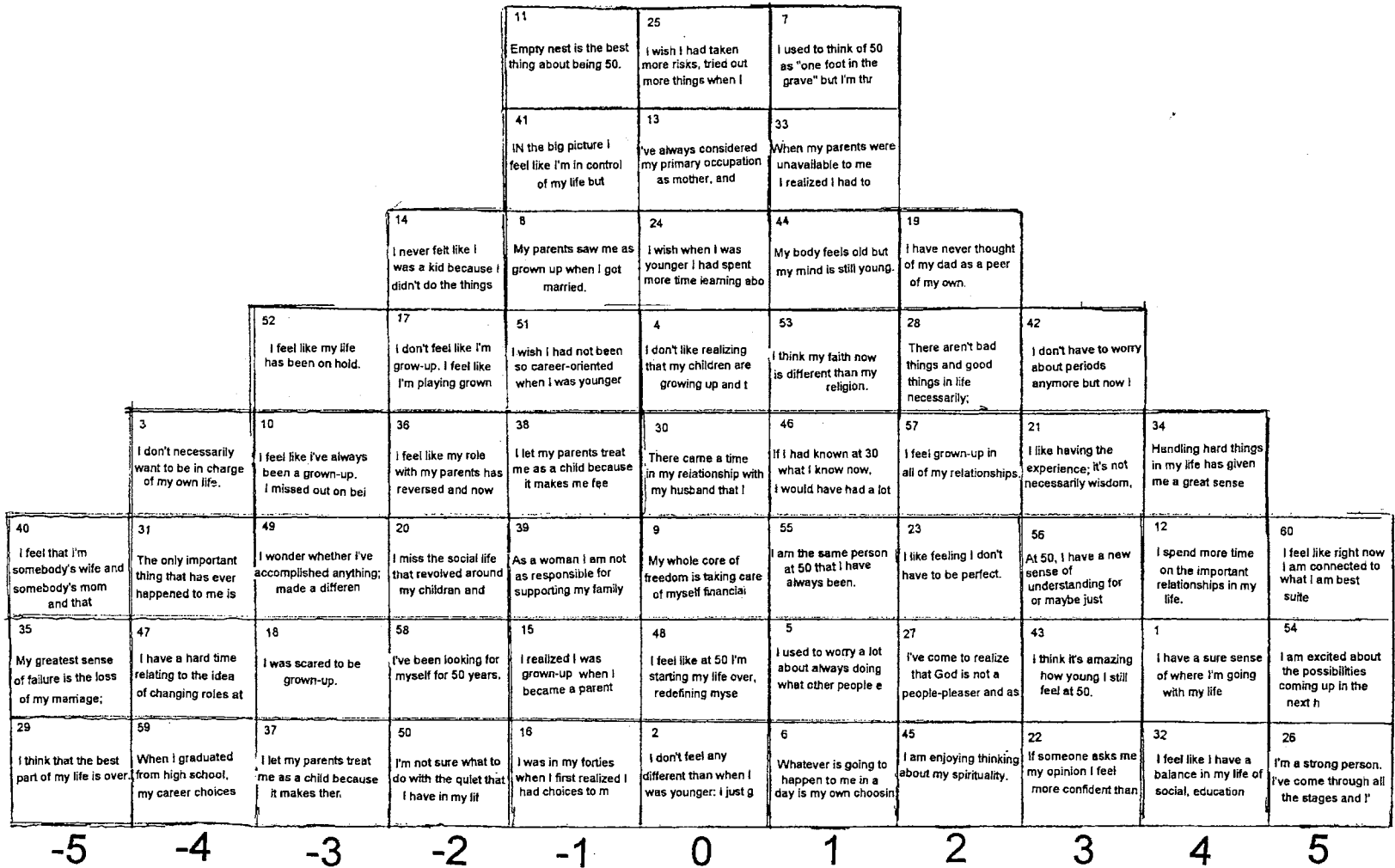
Factor Arrays

No.	Statement	No.	1	2	3
1	I have a sure sense of where I'm going with my life	1	-1	3	4
2	I don't feel any different than when I was younger: I just g	2	0	1	0
3	I don't necessarily want to be in charge of my own life.	3	-2	-5	-4
4	I don't like realizing that my children are growing up and t	4	-1	-4	0
5	I used to worry a lot about always doing what other people e	5	1	3	1
6	Whatever is going to happen to me in a day is my own choosin	6	2	4	1
7	I used to think of 50 as "one foot in the grave" but I'm thr	7	0	2	1
8	My parents saw me as grown up when I got married.	8	0	0	-1
9	My whole core of freedom is taking care of myself financiall	9	2	-1	0
10	I feel like i've always been a grown-up. I missed out on bei	10	-3	0	-3
11	Empty nest is the best thing about being 50.	11	-2	4	-1
12	I spend more time on the important relationships in my life.	12	3	-1	4
13	I've always considered my primary occupation as mother, and	13	1	-3	0
14	I never felt like I was a kid because I didn't do the things	14	-3	-2	-2
15	I realized I was grown-up when I became a parent and realize	15	2	2	-1
16	I was in my forties when I first realized I had choices to m	16	1	1	-1
17	I don't feel like I'm grow-up. I feel like I'm playing grown	17	-3	-2	-2
18	I was scared to be grown-up.	18	-4	-5	-3
19	I have never thought of my dad as a peer of my own.	19	0	1	2
20	I miss the social life that revolved around my children and	20	0	-5	-2
21	I like having the experience;it's not necessarily wisdom, bu	21	0	1	3
22	If someone asks me my opinion I feel more confident than whe	22	4	1	3
23	I like feeling I don't have to be perfect.	23	3	1	2
24	I wish when I was younger I had spent more time learning abo	24	2	4	0
25	I wish I had taken more risks, tried out more things when I	25	3	5	0
26	I'm a strong person. I've come through all the stages and I'	26	5	4	5
27	I've come to realize that God is not a people-pleaser and as	27	3	-1	2
28	There aren't bad things and good things in life necessarily;	28	3	1	2
29	I think that the best part of my life is over.	29	-5	2	-5
30	There came a time in my relationship with my husband that I	30	4	3	0
31	The only important thing that has ever happened to me is the	31	-2	-3	-4
32	I feel like I have a balance in my life of social, education	32	1	0	4
33	When my parents were unavailable to me I realized I had to g	33	-1	-1	1
34	Handling hard things in my life has given me a great sense o	34	5	2	4
35	My greatest sense of failure is the loss of my marriage; I p	35	1	-4	-5
36	I feel like my role with my parents has reversed and now I a	36	0	-2	-2
37	I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes them f	37	-4	-2	-3
38	I let my parents treat me as a child because it makes me fee	38	-2	-3	-1
39	As a woman I am not as responsible for supporting my family	39	-5	-2	-1
40	I feel that I'm somebody's wife and somebody's mom and that	40	-4	-1	-5
41	IN the big picture I feel like I'm in control of my life but	41	-1	-4	-1
42	I don't have to worry about periods anymore but now I worry	42	-1	2	3
43	I think it's amazing how young I still feel at 50.	43	4	2	3
44	My body feels old but my mind is still young.	44	-3	-1	1
45	I am enjoying thinking about my spirituality.	45	0	0	2
46	If I had known at 30 what I know now, I would have had a lot	46	1	-2	1
47	I have a hard time relating to the idea of changing roles at	47	-2	-1	-4
48	I feel like at 50 I'm starting my life over, redefining myse	48	2	4	0
49	I wonder whether I've accomplished anything; made a differen	49	-4	5	-3
50	I'm not sure what to do with the quiet that I have in my lif	50	-1	-3	-2
51	I wish I had not been so career-oriented when I was younger,	51	-2	-4	-1
52	I feel like my life has been on hold.	52	-1	2	-3
53	I think my faith now is different than my religion.	53	2	0	1
54	I am excited about the possibilities coming up in the next h	54	5	0	5
55	I am the same person at 50 that I have always been.	55	-3	0	1
56	At 50, I have a new sense of understanding for or maybe just	56	4	0	3
57	I feel grown-up in all of my relationships.	57	1	-1	2
58	I've been looking for myself for 50 years.	58	-5	3	-2
59	When I graduated from high school, my career choices were nu	59	-1	1	-4
60	I feel like right now I am connected to what I am best suite	60	1	-3	5

Factor 2



Factor 3



VITA

Patricia E. Darlington ²

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: JUBILEE WOMEN: IDENTITY AT 50 A Q-STUDY OF WHITE AMERICAN WOMEN

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Denver, Colorado, on June 20, 1951, the daughter of S. Vincent and Claire O'Brien. Married Rick Darlington in 1976; deceased 1994. Mother of four children Amy, Kelly, Todd, and Erin.

Education: Graduated from Ursuline Academy, St. Louis, Missouri in June 1969; received Bachelor of Science degree in Dental Hygiene from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, Missouri in May 1973. Received Master of Religious Education from Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana in December 1991 and Master of Science in Applied Behavioral Studies and Educational Psychology from Oklahoma State University, August 1998. Will complete the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University in December, 2002.

Experience: Primary profession as mother and homemaker from 1976 to present. Also employed as dental hygienist from 1973 to 1994; director of religious education, 1990 to 1994; and student, 1995 to present.

Professional Memberships: American Psychological Association, APA Division 35 (Psychology of Women), APA Division 17 (Counseling Psychology) Oklahoma Psychological Association