

WOMEN RECREATING THEIR LIVES:
CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE IN MIDLIFE

by

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(ABSTRACT)

This research explores how midlife women found the strength and resilience that enabled them to rebound and grow as they negotiated significant life challenges in their marriage, and with their children, parents, careers, and health. Using a family resilience framework grounded in systems theory with a feminist perspective, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 18 diverse women between the ages of 40 and 60 years in different regions of the United States. The phenomenological method of inquiry allowed the researcher to gather the experiences of midlife women in order to understand the protective processes of resilience for overcoming adversity.

Three research questions guided this study: (1) How have women dealt with an adverse experience or challenging transition in their adult married life and where did the strength or resilience they needed to rise above it come from? (2) How did they use their resilience in challenging situations? (3) How did this challenging experience influence their marriage and how was the experience affected by their marriage?

Results suggest that the participants' core beliefs facilitated how they made meaning of their struggle and influenced their response to their challenges. The themes they discussed fell into beliefs that were organized as affiliative values, facilitative beliefs and transcendent spiritual beliefs. These belief systems described how they made sense of their challenges.

Themes related to the importance of connectedness and relationships also occurred frequently in the narratives of these midlife women as they developed resilience. As expected, marriage was important to the majority of the women as they discussed the

importance of emotional support, but their sense of well-being was also greatly influenced by other close relationships in their communities with friends, family, children, and role models. Work and education emerged as significant themes in the women's appraisal of their challenges, beliefs, and connectedness as they described their sense of resilience. Resilience was fostered when these women made connections between their past, present, and future and integrated their experiences, their beliefs, relationships, and resources.

In memory of my mother

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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Resilience, the ability to overcome life's challenges, is needed more than ever to strengthen individuals and families as they deal with the increasing demands and complexities of life. "The past four decades have yanked the rug out from under patterns of family [and] work, and caused genuine distress - both economic and emotional - in too many lives" (Stacey, 1996, p. 2). Of the many transformations that have taken place since the 1960s, one of the greatest is the change in women's lives. Women born during the 1930s and 1940s were part of a transitional group and were pivotal in establishing new multiple role patterns. These women were part of the generation raised with the traditional values of the 1950s. They entered adulthood in the mid 1960s at a time when expectations for women were undergoing significant change. They grew up expecting to play traditional roles as homemakers and volunteers (Elder, 1993; Giele, 1993). These women, who were raised to be culture bearers and supportive helpmates to men, had their roots in the "modern" 1950s (Stewart & Vandewater, 1993). They are characterized as being part of the *era of transition* and now at midlife have much to tell us about facing significant adult-life changes (Schuster, 1993).

Studies that followed women into midlife found that the majority of women have a strong sense of self and of their own competence, and a high level of satisfaction with their lives (Hulbert, 1993). Having juggled multiple roles, midlife women are physically and psychologically healthy (Baruch, Barnett & Rivers, 1983). However, while midlife may be a time of increased autonomy and power for many women, this autonomy may leave some women feeling vulnerable, resulting in fundamental negotiation and reorganization in the marital dyad (Gilligan, 1982; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1987).

A dramatic rise in divorce rates for couples married more than 20 years was reported by Carter (1988); by the mid 1970s "divorce had outstripped death as the key source of marital dissolutions" noted Stacey, (1996, p. 6) pointing out that as women gained greater access to education and employment, they also had a greater need for both as they became less dependent upon male earnings and were freer to leave relationships. Nevertheless, Stacey contends: "The vast majority of women, men and their children derive clear benefits from living in loving, harmonious, secure relationships" (p. 79).

The startling and often contradictory statistic leaves one not only confused about the reality of life for women, but also obscures the extraordinariness of ordinary women who have often endured much by midlife. Hulbert (1993) critiqued established theories of adult development for failing to acknowledge the *fluidity* of women's lives and the ways women have responded to complex demands and invented strategies for meaningful personal and professional growth. Women at midlife are responding to the challenge of postmodernity as described by Stacey (1996):

... "to learn to live with instability and flux as responsibly, ethically and humanely as possible. To do so we must cultivate individual resilience, flexibility, courage, and tolerance while we work collectively to provide the best forms of social and cultural supports we can devise to cushion the inevitable disruptions and disappointments, the hardships and heartaches, that all families and humans must inevitably confront" (p. 12).

Women's potential for adaptability and resilience was indicated by Hulbert's review of studies on the patterns of women's lives as they were challenged to juggle multiple roles in the face of rapid social change (1993). Resilience is not a fixed individual attribute, according to Rutter (1987) who looked at experiences that strengthened individuals in high-risk situations and found "it is protective to have a well established feeling of one's own worth as a person together with a confidence and conviction that one can cope successfully with life's challenges" (p. 327). Higgins found "there is little systemic knowledge about

resilient *adults* let alone the resilient capacity to *love*....When little is known about a phenomenon, it is important to explore it in a relatively open manner" (1994, p. xv).

In my 20 years of clinical practice I never cease to feel privileged to listen to the stories of people's lives as I try to understand their experiences. I have been especially interested in the lives of women during these years because of the many changes they have experienced in their own lives and those of their family members. Several common threads discussed by Franz and Stewart that weave through the literature have been of particular interest: "...women negotiating identities; enduring, resisting, and overcoming social forces, societal standards, and personal misfortune; and finding resources for personal resilience" (1994, p. 3). I have been particularly intrigued with the theme of resilience in women's stories over the years. Walsh defines resilience as "struggling well". It is:

..."the ability to rebound from adversity, strengthened and more resourceful.... resilient persons became more substantial *because* they were sorely tested, endured suffering, and emerged with strength they might not have otherwise developed. They acquired a depth of experience and purposeful pursuits" (Walsh, 1998a, p. 269).

Bateson certainly speaks for women of all ages and stages, but her words ring most clearly for the midlife women I have listened to, read about and reflected on during the past 15 years - from the vantage point of a therapist and woman at midlife. "Women today, trying to compose lives that will honor all their commitments and still express all their potentials with a certain unitary grace, do not have an easy task" noted Bateson (1989, p. 232) who also pointed out: "Composing a life involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present "(p. 29-30).

In addition to diversification of women's adult-life choices during the past century, "the 'rules' by which both women and men function in society have undergone considerable change" (Schuster, 1993, p. 3). The range of life options for women has been steadily widened by the social, economic and demographic changes (p. 3). Bateson (1989) observed: "It is no longer possible to follow the paths of previous generations" (p. 2).

There is no one "lifepoint" on which contemporary American women can rely (Baruch, Barnett, & Rivers, 1983).

Discussing this "tumultuous and fractious period of family history" Stacey (1996) concluded that "the... patriarchal bargain of the modern family system has collapsed" (p. 45):

The ideology of the modern family construes marital commitment as a product of the free will and passions of two equal individuals who are drawn to each other by romantic attraction and complementary emotional needs. However, the domestic division of labor of the modern family system, which made women economically dependent upon male earners, and the subordination of women...provided potent incentives for women to choose to enter and remain in marriages, quite apart from their individual desires. (Stacey, 1996, p.42).

Stacey argued: "Family *systems* appear to have been most stable when women and men have been economically interdependent...when individuals lacked alternative means of economic, sexual, and social life" (1996, p. 49). Yet, "our only social constant now is change. Social change is a permanent and endless feature of our world, and all we can know about the future of family life is that it too will continue to change" (Stacey, 1996, p. 44).

The fear of the unknown and the resulting anxiety regarding one's ability to meet new and ongoing challenges adds an ever increasing complexity to the lives of women at midlife for whom it is a time not only of challenging beginnings, but often also sad endings. This research is shaped by my fundamental commitment to presenting women's lives through their own words. There is a "growing awareness of the need to study women in their own right and through their own voices [and] a growing appreciation...for the voices of individuals and for the extraordinary variability in how people construct their lives" (Elder, 1993, pp. xix - xx). Hulbert (1993) stated: "Narrative material - derived from interviews...enables us to hear the women's own voices, to become more aware not only

of what choices women made and what they accomplished but also of how they explored the options they perceived, how they felt about themselves and their roles, and how they made sense of their lives and accomplishments" (p. 425). To gather this narrative material, I will use a phenomenological approach as recommended by Higgins (1994) who suggested: "We interpret our experiences as we chug through them" (p. 322). The opportunity to construct a life story enables us to give meaning to our lives, reorganize our perceptions of certain life points and bring a sense of coherence to our stories.

Context

This research is framed by my fundamental commitment to acknowledge the sociohistorical context in order to enhance understanding of the time in which the women's lives were lived and to present their lives through their own words. Because societal changes affect women's experiences of their multiple roles, Antonucci and Akiyama (1997) stressed the critical importance of maintaining a sociohistorical perspective on the experience of midlife. At midlife "individuals...are more likely to look at context than to age as a way of locating themselves" (Gilbert, 1993, p. 105-106). Systems theory, the conceptual framework that guided this study, has been critiqued for limiting the context to the immediate family and present time (Goldner, 1985), and not developing a historical knowledge or discussing families in terms of intimacy (Luepnitz 1988). The concepts of systems theory were expanded in this research to view individual adaptation as embedded in broader family and social systems. The value of drawing on historical knowledge and wisdom has been especially important to the research on resilience (Walsh, 1998a).

The word *context* means to weave together, to connect. The Personal Narratives Group defined context as "a dynamic process through which the individual simultaneously shapes and is shaped by her environment"(1989b, p. 19). They suggest that "interrelatedness creates the webs of meaning within which humans act. The individual is joined to the world through social groups, structural relations and identities" (p. 19). They

encouraged addressing context through understanding "the meaning of a life in its narrator's frame of reference" and provided several ways that context can be viewed:

First, the interpersonal context revealed in women's personal narratives suggests how women's lives are shaped through and evolve within relationships with others....It is in looking directly at women's lives that relationships come to assume contextual importance and interpretive power (p. 20).

Women's personal narratives also reveal the frameworks of meaning through which individuals locate themselves in the world and make sense of their lives. Hulbert and Schuster (1993) used a life-course approach to highlight the interplay between lives and times in an ever-changing society. By grouping women according to era they discovered that women of different ages... "had different experiences with the same event or change; that historical changes had different consequences and implications for women in different life stages" (Elder, 1993, p. xvi). Hulbert (1993) stated "women have composed their lives in response to the... demographic, social and economic changes of the twentieth century" and pointed out: "development and behavior occur within and in interaction with changing sociohistorical contexts" (p. 417). A *period effect* has been created during the past one hundred years because of the influence of ..."the right to vote, activism on behalf of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, the experiences of 'Rosie the Riveter,' the 'second wave' of feminism, and federal affirmative-action legislation" (Schuster, 1993, p. 6). Women's roles have been changed by the "complex interplay of historical, social, and individual conditions" according to Giele (1993, p. 32) who enumerated the "five major dimensions that have profoundly affected women's roles: technological advancement and greater longevity, the development of a service economy, the changing structure of the family, educational improvement, and the reemergence of feminism" (p. 36).

Stacey's research (1990) concluded that "women and men have been creatively remaking American family life during the past three decades of postindustrial upheaval" (p. 16). An overview assembled by Giele highlights significant changes of the last half century

from a time when childbearing and childrearing took up a good part of the middle years. "In 1940, about 90 percent of all households were made up of families...compared with only 73 percent in 1980" (Giele, 1993, p. 38). Increased life expectancy and reduced fertility since the 1960s made it possible for a great majority of women to finish high school; over one-third have some college education and nearly 60 percent are in the labor force. Giele noted that:

each succeeding age group confronted the new life patterns of women at a younger stage in the life course....Women born in the 1930s and 1940s were still in their twenties and thirties when they discovered women's changing roles. For women born after 1950, the new women's role was a reality by the time they left high school (p. 48).

However, changes in women's roles caused considerable strain. During this same time period "the removal of the family from its productive base made the family more vulnerable to splitting on the basis of emotional dissatisfaction" (p. 38). During the 1970s the divorce rate steadily rose until it was estimated approximately 40 percent of marriages were ending in divorce.

Giele (1993) contended "the primary values surrounding women's lives shifted along with ...changing work-family strategies" - there was diminished emphasis on the devoted meaningful relationships of family life and increased emphasis on achievement and equality between the sexes (p. 52). Stacey identified this transitional and contested period of family history as postmodern, "a period *after* the modern family order", and stated "the postmodern family is not a new model of family life, not the next stage in an orderly progression of family history, but the stage when the belief in a logical progression of stages breaks down" (1990, p. 18). She contended the "insecure and undemocratic character of postmodern family life fuels nostalgia for the fading modern family, now recast as the 'traditional' family" (p. 259).

The Personal Narratives Group emphasized: "Only by attending to the conditions which create...narratives, the forms that guide them, and the relationships that produce them are we able to understand what is communicated in a personal narrative" (1989a, p. 262). They pointed out that "when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths...of experiences"(p. 261). This is clarified by Chase and Bell's suggestion: "Once we understand that women often work to achieve control over their lives in social contexts that make their desire for control problematic, such contradictions within a woman's narrative come as no surprise" (1994, p. 69).

Study Rationale

The need for this study on women's experience of resilience in the context of marriage is in response to three goals drawn from my research and my clinical practice. My first goal is a redirection of research focus. According to Walsh, there is a need for "studies of well functioning families and what enables them to succeed, particularly in the face of adversity" (1998b, p. 22). Walsh recommended that our research shift the focus "from how families fail to how families succeed...we increase our clients' resilience as we attend to their life stories, understand their struggles, and affirm their strengths" (1998a, p. 269-270). Walsh suggested a "search for family resilience should identify key processes that can strengthen each family's ability to overcome the challenges they face in their particular life situation" (1998b, p. 22). Higgins contended that by studying individuals who have surmounted much "in order to love well, work well, struggle well, and expect well in the present....We might understand how most of us acquire our largely uncelebrated resilient strengths" (1994, p. 1). Higgins (1994) found "there is still a paucity of findings about relational competence in resilient adults" (p. 17). An intensified focus on the protective *processes* that promote growth over the life span is encouraged by Rutter (1997).

Thus, my first goal is to focus this research on a strength-based approach for women at midlife that enables women to acknowledge their abilities and potentials, to rebound and

grow, and to find the vital resources, both within and outside themselves, necessary to face future challenges with greater confidence.

My second goal is to respond to the "growing awareness of the need to study women in their own right and through their own voices" (Elder, 1993, p. xix) and to "recognize and celebrate women's agency in their lives as encouraged by feminist researchers Sollie and Leslie (1994) who found:

"Too often women are portrayed primarily as victims. Such a one-sided perspective clouds the reality that women are often active in constructing their lives. Further explorations of agency in women's lives will help us move beyond the view that women are responders to life, rather than active agents in creating their lives. We hope the lens of agency continues to gain status in research on women" (p. 280).

My third goal comes from family therapy. Many clinicians are increasingly working with more couples at midlife who are struggling to increase the quality of their relationships. With increased life expectancy enabling more long-lasting marriages, the high divorce rate may be due in part to the difficulty of one relationship attempting to meet the changing developmental needs of both partners over so many years (Walsh, 1998b, p. 34). Turner (1994) reported that "several biologists have argued that the human life span may soon be closer to 120 or 130 years...than to the 90 or 100 years previously estimated" (p. 16). This future increase in the life span with an equivalent increase in years of physical vigor makes midlife with its increasing expectations, opportunities and challenges a valuable life stage to examine.

Purpose of Study

This phenomenological research is designed to describe the special relevance of women's resilience and the value of their experiences in marriage. The aim of this research project is to learn more about midlife women's experiences of resilience and the meaning they ascribe to these experiences. In addition, this project seeks to better understand the influence of this sense of resilience on their marriage and vice-versa, the influence of

marriage on resilience. Bringing together the two realms of individual development and family relations was encouraged by Ryff and Seltzer (1994): "family life is antecedent to individual development, and individual development is antecedent to change in family life....family life is shaped by the characteristics and evolving challenges of the individuals who constitute the family unit" (pp. 95-96).

A purpose of this study is to help identify and foster adaptive strengths and hope for women in their lives and marriages. "We are all aware of the high rate of divorce - nearly 50% of marriages fail. But what can we learn from the 50% of marriages that succeed?" (Walsh, 1998b, p. v). This research project examines the challenges faced by women during the course of their marriage and how they have overcome them. In order to better understand the phenomena of resilience, I am interested in how women make meaning of their challenges. I am respectful of the ways resilient capacities are constructed, maintained and revised by women at midlife, and therefore have chosen to use the term "resilience" to capture the active *process* of self righting and growth described by Higgins (1994) that characterizes women who negotiate significant challenges and do more than merely get through difficult emotional experiences.

The family resilience approach which "aims to identify and fortify key interactional processes that enable families to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges" (Walsh, 1998b, p. 22) will be used in this research to learn how women at midlife developed the strength and resilience to rebound from difficult experiences and the impact of these experiences on their marriages. To accomplish this purpose I will investigate the phenomenon of resiliency for women at midlife and learn how these experiences of resilience influence or are influenced in their marriages. At this stage in the research, resiliency will be generally defined as the ability to overcome life's challenges, as "struggling well" (Walsh, 1998b) with the difficult turning points as women grow and change in life and in marriage. In this research I am interested in women's experiences as

they learn, shape and maximize their resilience and the meaning they make of these experiences in their marriages.

Role of Researcher

Resilient women in long term marriages are not a unique subspecies, but "fellow travelers, amplifying qualities, dynamics and potentials inherent in us all" (Higgins, 1994, p.66). As a woman at midlife in a long term marriage, and as a therapist long interested in helping individuals, couples, and families develop a sense of resiliency, I see my role in this research much as the traveler described by Kvale (1996) in the following metaphor:

The traveler metaphor understands the interviewer as a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The interviewer-traveler wanders through the landscape and enters into conversation with the people encountered. The traveler explores the many domains of the country, as unknown territory or with maps, roaming freely around the territory. The traveler may also deliberately seek specific sites or topics by following a method, with the original Greek meaning of "a route that leads to the goal." The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as "wandering together with." (p.4)

This research project addresses the question of how midlife women have experienced resilience and the impact of these experiences on their marriage. I explored this issue through a retrospective, qualitative study of the lives of 18 women. A central assumption guiding this research is that, in order to learn about resilience we must listen to women's personal accounts, and attempt to understand the ways in which they construct and experience themselves, their spouses, and the society in which they live.

Mary Catherine Bateson suggested:

When the choices and rhythms of lives change, as they have in our time, the study of lives becomes an increasing preoccupation. This is especially true now for women...the

need to make the invisible visible, the desire to provide role models and empower aspirations, the possibility that by setting a number of life histories side by side, we will be enabled to recognize common patterns of creativity that have not been acknowledged or fostered (Bateson, 1989, pp. 4-5).

My primary concern is with the subjective reality of the individual woman, and with what feels real to her, with how she perceives, interprets, constructs and experiences her world. Any analysis of the women's experiences must be embedded within cultural and interpersonal contexts. A woman will construct and experience her world in ways that will evolve over time, thus this research adopts a developmental perspective, in which individuals are understood to grow and change over time, both emotionally, and in their thinking about themselves, others, and society. Inherent within this perspective is the notion that psychological crises are fruitful occasions for such change and growth (Gilligan, 1982).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, the map for this journey into the unknown territory, is explained in this section. A conceptual framework "explains...the main things to be studied - the key factors, concepts... and the presumed relationships among them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18). The conceptual context of a study is "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs" the research. Conceptual context is a theory and the "function of this theory is to inform the rest of your design - to help you to assess your purposes, develop and select realistic and relevant research questions and methods" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 25).

The conceptual framework that guides this study is a family resilience framework that is grounded in systems theory. As a perspective for viewing the world, the conceptual framework of systems theory is overlaid with an ideological stance from a postmodern feminist socially constructed perspective. The tradition of inquiry is phenomenology. Moon, Dillon, and Sprenkle (1990) suggested qualitative research methods "may help to

answer the feminist call for a greater appreciation for contextual issues in systemic therapy" (p. 364). They contended the qualitative research paradigm is congruent with systems theory and pointed out that the field of family therapy grew from the phenomenological roots of anthropologist Gregory Bateson's early ethnographic research in New Guinea (p. 363). The old view of systemic therapy has been widened, as encouraged by Hoffman (1990) to include equity, connectedness, and subjective experience.

Systems Theory

Family-systems thinking both builds on and differentiates from individually oriented approaches and offers unique ways to understand marital relationships (Sporakowski, 1995, p. 60). Systems theory is based on the interconnections between the parts and wholes of any system. "Research on resilient individuals has increasingly pointed toward the importance of a systemic view" noted Walsh (1998b, p. 11), who suggested that as we broaden our perspective "we become aware that resilience is woven in a web of relationships and experiences over the course of the life cycle and across generations"(p. 12).

Systems theory offers concepts such as system, process, social context, multiple perspectives, complexity, individual differences, and holism (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990, p. 364); it "expands our view of individual adaptation as embedded in broader transactional processes in family and social systems, and attends to the mutuality of influences through transactional processes" (Walsh, 1998b, p. 12) that provide a complex interactional model necessary for a full understanding of resilience. We are encouraged by the Personal Narratives Group to pay attention to the "systems of relationships in which individuals are embedded and whose boundaries goes beyond the individual and her realm of vision" (1989b, p. 6).

I believe that as a systemic approach encourages interactional processes, it has the potential to foster resilience in midlife women, and enable women to integrate their experiences and move on with their lives. I am interested in how women's experience of

resilience has influenced their marriage, and how their marriage has influenced their resilience. A family resilience framework provides the tools to help me weave together the many contexts that make up the tapestry of women's lives at midlife as I learn about their experience of resilience in the context of their marriage.

Family Resilience Framework

The increasing awareness that successful interventions with families depends on the resources of the family, encourages more "strength-oriented conceptual tools that guide intervention. The concept of family resilience offers such tools "(Walsh, 1998b, p. 23). The basic principles, grounded in systems theory, that provide the foundation for a family resilience approach are:

Individual hardiness is best understood and fostered in the context of the family and larger social world, as a mutual interaction of individual, family, and environmental processes.

Crisis events and persistent stresses affect the entire family and all its members, posing risks not only for individual dysfunction, but for relational conflict and family breakdown.

Family processes mediate the impact of stress on all members and their relationships. Family processes can influence the course of many crisis events (Walsh, 1998b, p. 24).

Walsh emphasized that it is "not family form, but rather family *processes*, that matter most for healthy functioning and resilience"(1998b, p. 16). She contends there is "no single thread", but many strands that are intertwined on multiple system dimensions that are mutually interactive, synergistic, fluid and flexible (p. 131-132). Three domains of family functioning that Walsh integrated into a resilience based framework are belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes (Walsh, 1998b).

The heart and soul of resilience are the belief systems that are at the core of all family functioning. According to Walsh we make meaning of our experience by "linking it to our

social world, to our cultural and religious beliefs, to our multigenerational past, and to our hopes and dreams for the future" (1998b, p. 45).

Beliefs are the lenses through which we view the world....Beliefs are at the very heart of who we are and how we understand and make sense of our experience....beliefs come to define our reality....Belief systems broadly encompass values, convictions, attitudes, biases, and assumptions, which coalesce to form a set of basic premises that trigger emotional responses, inform decisions, and guide actions."(Walsh, 1998, p. 45).

Socially constructed beliefs develop and evolve in a continuous process through transactions with the larger world and our significant others. Families construct shared beliefs that are developed, altered, and reaffirmed over the course of the life cycle. Couples make unspoken relationship rules that define mutual "expectations about roles, actions and consequences" and need to be reappraised and altered as needs and constraints change over the life course (Walsh, 1998b, pp. 46-47). Although couples influence each other's beliefs through living and being together, they may be unaware of their beliefs and the effect they have on their lives and the lives of others (Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996, p. 23). Belief systems are organized in narratives constructed "to make sense of our world." Adversity often prompts reorganization of one's beliefs and life story, thus narrative coherence is important to make sense of disruptive events. The essential elements in the process of change are beliefs and stories (Walsh, 1998b, p. 48-50).

Walsh (1998b) organized the key beliefs in family resilience into three areas: making meaning of adversity; a positive outlook affirming strengths and possibilities; and transcendent spiritual beliefs for values, purpose, solace and comfort. The first key belief, how one makes meaning of adversity, has to do with affiliative values, life cycle orientation, whether there is a shared construction of crisis experience, a sense of coherence, and one's appraisal of the stress event. The second key belief in family resilience involves a positive outlook in overcoming adversity. This involves perseverance,

courage and en-courage-ment, sustaining hope, and taking active initiative in acceptance of a situation. The third key belief is transcendence, spirituality, and transformation. These are "transcendent beliefs that provide purpose beyond ourselves, our families, and adversities" (p. 68); it includes value system and purpose, creative inspiration, role models, and transformation which involves learning and growth from adversity (pp. 45-78).

Organizational processes are the family shock absorbers that Walsh identified as flexibility, connectedness, and social and economic resources. Flexibility involves stability, capacity for change, and the ability to counterbalance stability and change. Connectedness is based on balancing unity and separateness, family subsystems and boundaries, and a shared leadership which includes nurturance, protection, and guidance. Social and economic resources considers extended kin and community resources, financial security, and the family-work balance (p.79-105). In combination with organizational processes, communication processes play an important part in facilitating family functioning: communication involves three crucial keys for family resilience: clarity, open emotional expression, and collaborative problem solving (p.107).

Walsh noted that helping professionals have become "increasingly aware that our views...are socially constructed" (p. 37). There are few absolutes today in the world as families confront tumultuous change and fragmentation; the need for an "intense multiplicity of vision, enhancing insight and creativity, is necessary" to strengthen families to meet uncertainty (1998b, p. 36). Because social construction emphasizes interpretation and meaning, it is a form of inquiry that weaves in very well with a systems approach in order to understand better women's experiences, transitions, the development of resilience, and the impact of these experiences on marriage.

A Postmodern Feminist Social Construction Perspective

A postmodern approach "focuses on interrelations in an interview, on the social construction of reality in an interview, on its linguistic and interactional aspects...and emphasizes the narratives constructed by the interview"(Kvale, 1996, p. 38). The focus of

the social construction of reality "is on the interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the social world"(p.41). Lather noted that "to write 'postmodern' is to write paradoxically aware of one's own complicity in that which one critiques" (1991, p. 10).

Social constructionism is a form of inquiry that is "concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world...in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Social constructionists "place...more emphasis on social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family, and culture" (Hoffman, 1990, p. 2). New understandings "do not appear spontaneously; nor are they discovered suddenly" in the social construction view. ...they "evolve from and within "socially negotiated forms of meaning" (Anderson, 1997, p. 14). Postmodernism and feminism embrace many of the same tenets and are characterized by a number of interrelated characteristics. Thus, feminist and social constructionist theories will be viewed as a "family of theories and perspectives that have something in common" rather than as individual theories. "The basic concept is that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations" (Creswell, 1998, p.79).

In a postmodern feminist approach "the moral and political have priority over scientific and epistemological theory" (Kvale, 1996, p. 73). Baber and Allen (1992) suggest that a "postmodern feminist approach allows us, as collaborators, to take a point of view...without claiming to speak for all women. Our knowledge claims are thus partial, fragmented, and incomplete" (p.12). Dorothy Smith (1987) in *The Everyday World as Problematic*, "conceptualizes the everyday world as problematic, that is, continually created, shaped and known by women within it" (Olesen, 1994, p. 163). She argued that "to understand the everyday world of women as it is known by the women who continually create and shape it within the materialist context, the researcher herself must not create it as an object for study...[but]....instead, be able to work...[with] a high degree of reflexivity" (Olesen, p. 163).

Olesen (1994) suggested that because "postmodern feminist researchers regard 'truth' as a destructive illusion...[they] view the world as endless stories or texts" with a focus on the narratives (p. 164). Feminist postmodernists draw from poststructuralism the view that meanings are "multiple, open to interpretation, and unstable....They interpret meaning in relation to the context in which language appears; discourses and people are situated, not neutral....emphasizing situated meanings that are socially constructed" (Turner, 1994, pp. 8-9). Lather (1991) emphasized:

the ongoing construction of postmodernism offers...the possibility for less fixed and determined ways of looking....ways to work within and yet challenge dominant discourses...opportunities to avoid dogmatism and the reductionism of single-cause analysis, to produce knowledge from which to act, and to diffuse power (p. 39).

The goal of a feminist approach is "to establish collaborative and nonexploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative" (Creswell, p. 83) that corrects "both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991, p. 71).

The Research Questions

The following research questions examined how women have risen above difficult experiences or transitions in their adult married life and how they found the strength, hardiness, or resilience they needed. I also examined the impact of this experience on their marriage.

1. How have women dealt with an adverse experience or challenging transition in their adult married life and where did the strength, hardiness or resilience they needed to rise above it come from?
2. How did they use their resilience in challenging situations?
3. How did this challenging experience influence their marriage and how was the experience affected by their marriage?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Relevant Literature

Themes

There are four topics that I as a traveler will explore before embarking on the journey that will lead to a tale to be told. The four components of this study, resilience, women at midlife, marriage, and the influence of resilience in marriage, are the core themes that will be presented in the literature review that follows. Manning and Cullum-Swan's view that "themes, principal metaphors... defining structures of stories (beginning, middle, and end) and conclusions are often.. quite context bound" (1994, p. 465) will be kept in mind as I move forward to examine the themes of this research. This literature review comes primarily from empirical, historical, and theoretical studies in the area of family therapy, family studies, psychology, sociology, and women's studies.

Resilience

The first site in which I, as a traveler, seek to learn more is in the domain of resilience. Resilience is defined by Walsh "as the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful. It is an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge" (1998b, p. 4). Walsh proposed: "the qualities of resilience enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and go on to live fully and love well (1998b, p. 4). "Studies found that resilient persons became more substantial *because* they were sorely tested, endured suffering, and emerged with strength they might not have otherwise developed. They acquired a depth of experience and purposeful pursuits" (Walsh (1998a, p. 269).

Most of the research in resilience has focused on children raised in aversive situations. Researchers in the 1970s and 1980s interested in prevention and early intervention in childhood disorders focused attention on vulnerability (Garmezy 1974; Murphy, 1987) and protective resources that promoted resilience (Cohler, 1987; Dugan & Coles, 1989; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1987). Resilience was demonstrated in a longitudinal study of 75

socially disadvantaged inner city high school males who Felsman and Vaillant (1987) found were not forever damned by destructive events in their lives. A large longitudinal study (Werner & Smith, 1982) followed 700 impoverished children raised in Kauai, Hawaii for 30 years and found that by 18 years one-third had developed the capacity to work, play, and love well and continued to achieve success in their work, marriages, and life challenges at 40 years of age.

From a family therapy perspective, Waters and Lawrence (1993) describe resilience as a component of competence, which they define as "*...the capacity to use everything you have, including the energy that drives symptoms and problems, to realize your deepest and best strivings*" (p. 31). When they brought their interest in competence and courage, which began with observing children in their clinical work, into their clinical work with adults, they found that it "sometimes harder to tap their genuine hopefulness than it is with children" (p.148). Wolin and Wolin (1993) described seven '*resiliencies*' used by healthy adults who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive or alcoholic families: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor and morality. They described resilience as the will to shape pain into 'something else'.

The longitudinal studies of maltreated women (Rutter, 1987), described women who although institutionalized in childhood, were later able to establish satisfactory marital relationships. Rutter stressed that attention should be on protective processes and suggested that protection resides "*...in the ways in which people deal with life changes and in what they do about their stressful or disadvantageous circumstances*" (p. 329). He encouraged researchers to pay attention to the key turning points in peoples lives. According to Rutter, the two experiences most influential to resilience were successful accomplishment of important tasks and secure harmonious love relationships (p. 327). He found that self-concepts are not set in childhood; they continue to be modified by the life experiences throughout life. Furthermore, he suggested good intimate relationships in adult life can do

much to bolster people's positive concepts about themselves and their worth in other people's eyes.

Higgins (1994) described resilience as a "developmental phenomenon" propelled by vision and stamina that evolves over time. Higgins chose 40 subjects who suffered early trauma, but as adults met her criteria for their ability to love well. In a qualitative study, Higgins found that *facilitating* resilience required "a firm refusal to join the ranks of the sour and dispirited....It insists that you hold a broad developmental view of growth and change, realizing that there are always untapped degrees of freedom for the motivated to mobilize" (1994, p. 319). Higgins found resilience to be "a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by both natural and nurturant factors" (p. xi). Observing the possibilities of building on relational experiences, Higgins discovered two overarching themes: "*faith in surmounting* and *faith in human relationships*" (1994, p. 171). Her research provided "evidence that the resilient have especially coherent 'master narratives'. Their narrative visions require deeply imaginative, integrative processes that remain integrally linked to our relationships with others" (1994, p.177-178). Higgins's work identified resilience that she contended is "inherent in *most* lives." Her subjects "overcame their trials by employing *human* capacities that lie dormant or unamplified in many of us" (1994, p. 318). To effectively discover potential for resilience, Higgins argued:

It is essential to focus on how human beings self-right, not on their floundering. Helpers need to know the whole history of their strugglers' surmounting; we need to catalog their capabilities with the exquisite concern we normally reserve for their weaknesses. How have their strengths emerged over time?....How did this person negotiate his or her troubles with coherence and competence?.... By overemphasizing ideal standards of where we *ought* to be, we often neglect what went right in a life" (1994, p. 320).

Higgins concluded from her study on resilience that in order to effectively "plumb resilient potential" we must "amplify the past and present strengths...clarif[y] adaptive

strategies.... acknowledge and celebrate how far they have come, and how well." She stressed: "We cannot help if we neglect the history of strengths guiding their lives, if we fail to honor ... decency, good judgment, self-protectiveness, and...skill that they developed against the odds" (1994, p. 322).

Walsh also pointed to a developmental view: "Resilience involves many interactive processes over time" (p. 21) and at each developmental stage "there is a shifting balance between stressful events that heighten vulnerability and protective mechanisms that enhance resilience" (Walsh, 1998b, p. 19). Walsh clarified: "Resilience does not mean invulnerability" (1998a, p. 270); it involves "struggling well," experiencing both suffering and courage, and effectively working through internal and interpersonal difficulties (Walsh, 1998b). She cautioned therapists not to blame "those who succumb to adversity for lacking 'the right stuff,' especially when they are struggling with overwhelming conditions beyond their control" (p. 5). In building resilience, Walsh stated: "We strive to integrate the fullness of a crisis experience into the fabric of our ...identity ...influencing how we go on to live our lives." She concluded "strength emerge[s]...because of experiences....resilience is forged through adversity, not despite it. Life crisis and hardship can bring out the best in us as we rise to the challenges" (1998b, p. 6). Walsh viewed individual resilience as encouraged by supportive relationships and stated: "Resilience is forged through openness to experiences and interdependence with others" (1998b, p. 270).

Resilience, according to Walsh (1998b), "is woven in a web of relationships and experiences over the course of the life cycle and across the generations" (p. 12). It "could be developed at any point over the course of the life cycle. Unexpected events and new relations could disrupt a negative chain and catalyze new growth.... With multiple pathways in resilience, a downward spiral could be turned around at any time in life" (p. 14). This is similar to "cross-domain buffering" (Lepore, 1992) in which positive experiences in one interpersonal domain reduce the psychological distress in another domain. Lepore concluded from her review of the cross-domain buffering effect that

"individuals who have diverse social support resources might be more resilient in the face of negative social interactions than individuals who must rely on few social support resources" (p. 859). Higgins's research on resilience provided insight that "growth *can* and often *does* occur throughout the life span. The more determined, propelled by insight, stamina, recruited love, can use the press of development to overcome even staggering odds (1994, p. 320).

Women at Midlife

The second site on the journey is the still relatively unknown territory of women at midlife. A special report on Americans at midlife by the Census Bureau in 1981 defined midlife as the ages of 45 to 64 years. Whereas in 1979, 44 million persons were in this midlife stage, in 2010 the number of persons between 45 and 64 will double to almost 75 million or what will be approximately 25% of the U.S. population. The majority of these middle-aged persons live with their spouses. A statistical portrait of women in the U.S. predicted that by 2000, the number of midlife women between the ages of 35 and 64 will have increased to slightly more than 50 million, approximately 42 percent of the entire female population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1978). These women at midlife, with good health, will have half of their adult years remaining. Their potential for achievement and contributions to family, friends, community, business, and social concerns is enormous. Yet, the midlife period of adulthood has received less emphasis when compared to other age periods.

Although the average ages Lachman and James (1997) reported for midlife are 35 to 65, they argued: "chronological age may not be the indicator of midlife" and suggested "it may be more useful to define midlife in terms of status or roles. Thus, midlife may be better understood if it is tied to specific events" (p. 3). Lachman and James' book (1997) responds to this overlooked period. It is the product of a collaborative program of research on middle adulthood co-sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Midlife Development (MIDMAC) which was established in 1989. Lachman and

James suggest midlife is "a time to look back and a time to look ahead, a time to ask how are things going and what is left to do" (p. 3). Midlife, in our culture, is "a time for reassessment, with possibilities for making changes" (p. 4) and "an opportunity for growth and development" (p. 5).

Midlife for women is also defined by Rubin (1979) as a time of endings and beginnings rather than a stage tied to chronological age. She described it is a point in the life cycle when women as separate, autonomous beings attend to their own development and needs after children are grown. Before the 1970s women who were autonomous at midlife were widely believed to be most vulnerable to depression or neurosis, perhaps prompting competent women to limit their horizons during these middle years, argued Schuster (1993), who noted that women's development was perceived in terms of significant "dysfunctional" phenomena such as the "empty nest" and menopause.

The past 50 years have been a time of tremendous change in "the relationship between women's traditional roles and the sense of autonomy" according to Giele who noted that whereas "earlier in this century women felt they could be in control in the role of homemaker and mother," now, it is being in the workplace that creates the greater sense of self-confidence and control (1993, p. 54). To set the context for the midlife journey, this literature review begins in the late 1940s and 1950s; a period described by Giele as "a time of home and family building....The feminist impulse that had brought suffrage to American women in 1920 was all but forgotten, and concerns with femininity, rather than feminism, reigned supreme"(1993, p. 41). Women of the postwar, prefeminist 1950s are called the "silent generation" by Schuster who referred to this period as the *era of limitations*: "Middle class girls received mixed messages about the value of higher education; going to college was considered highly desirable, but, for many, earning the 'Mrs.' degree was more important than acquiring marketable skills for the workplace" (1993, p. 18).

Schuster reported that studies undertaken with women who were young adults in the 1960s were based on the notion that "women would be most comfortable and effective in

family-centered functions [and those] who deviated from these conventional roles were described as prone to depression, neurosis, or alienation during adulthood" (1993, p. 21). However, research from 1981 reviewed by Labouvie-Vief (1993) suggested it may be easier for older women to reconcile unconventional strivings, complexity and creative urges. She noted: "Middle aged women who were unconventional had displayed a problematic picture of mental health earlier in their adulthood; but later...were flexible, complex and well-adjusted" (1993, pp. 163-164). Labouvie-Vief clarified that the literature pointed out later life creativity may be more of an ideal than the norm as "only some women may resolve this struggle, because there have been and continue to be pervasive cultural conditions that discourage women from reaching toward full development of their potentials" (1993, pp. 163-164).

The women born in the 1940s cohort were similar to those of the 1930s, but they were a transitional group and departed in greater numbers from the traditional expectations. In their middle years, this group of homemakers and volunteers who grew up expecting traditional role patterns established new, multiple-role patterns that combined marriage, motherhood, paid work, and sometimes continuing education (Giele, 1993, pp. 41-46). It is this challenge of integrating career and family without having to sacrifice one for the other that Mary Catherine Bateson discussed in *Composing a Life* (1989).

A dramatic shift occurred in expectations for girls who were raised in the 1950s and entered the work world in the mid to late 1960s after Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) indicted the postwar social environment and challenged middle and upper class white women to reevaluate their priorities (Schuster, 1993). This period is referred to as the *era of transition*. However, the majority of these women continued to seek the conventional life-style envisioned for them in the 1950s because the effects of the women's movement and civil rights were not yet widespread, there continued to be an absence of available role models for envisioning careers, and there was a lack of expectations for husbands to be supportive of working wives (Schuster, 1993). Giele discussed research

that examined how women would like to live their lives over again, their degree of satisfaction or depression, resentment or justification and concluded: "Many traditional women who had started out in synchrony with the prevailing culture later felt regret," while the "pioneers in multiple roles came into their own" (1993, p. 54).

Antonucci and Akiyama (1997) suggested "it may be that multiple roles, especially employment outside the home, offer external benefits from which men have benefited for many years - the benefits of a more diverse multioptioned path" (p. 153). Their analyses indicated that the employment role provided women an additional source of successful experience at midlife and although this additional role may create stress, it also offered a sense of competence and independence outside of family and a buffer for negative social interactions.

Reclaiming one's sense of being a creator was proposed as a predominant theme in women's later development (Labouvie-Vief, 1994); the change of identity from surrendering one's creativity in earlier development resulted from normative cognitive changes and a supportive cultural milieu in the move to middle adulthood. If adaptation in the past was "achieved by a woman molding herself to cultural narratives," those narratives are now being reexamined "to construct a new sense of self" (p. 160).

To generate constructions of experiences, researchers from the phenomenological mode often draw on three sources: the researcher's self-reflections, the participants in the study, and depictions of the experience from literature or art (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Several depictions of women at midlife are especially relevant to this thematic literature review.

One woman from history, Hildegard of Bingen, illustrates the theme of reclaiming oneself in later development (Labouvie-Vief, 1994). The 11th century abbess was 38 years old when she took over leadership of her small community after her teacher died. By the time she was 42 years of age she had an awakening that "profoundly altered her vocation and her creative life." Over the next 10 years she wrote her famed book, *Ways of Wisdom*, and "transformed her retiring life" as she went on to write many more books. Many writers

associate Hildegard's breakthrough as an example of a midlife crisis, noting "the before and after of this crisis were profoundly different" (p. 160-161). Hildegard:

described the before as a condition of passivity, of being without a voice, of being frustrated. Her powerful visions did not correspond to traditional teachings, and out of "humility" and "obedience" she refused to write. But, she reports, this creativity turned against the self caused her severe suffering and illness.... [when] she followed her inner voice, her suffering ended and she experienced a profound surge of creativity and spiritual growth (Labouvie-Vief, 1994, p. 161).

Disputing Jung's (1954) claim that later life for a woman brings a transformation of the inner image of the masculine, Labouvie-Vief argued, "The compensating movement is just the opposite sort: She needs to reclaim for herself the mental and creative gifts she has projected onto men" (p. 161). Labouvie-Vief suggested this conflict can be resolved when a woman reconciles her concept of authority with her womanhood instead of projecting it on masculine images.

According to Heilbrun, for women awakening to new possibilities in middle age, new attitudes and courage in the last third of life are required. She presented Virginia Woolf as an example of a woman who found a new and remarkable kind of courage when she was 50 and suggests that it is perhaps only past 50 that "women can stop being female impersonators, can grasp the opportunity to reverse their most cherished principles of 'femininity' (1988, pp. 124-126).

Pilate, in *The Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison (1977), was also provided by Heilbrun (1988) as an example in literature of a woman's assessment of her life at midlife:

When she realized what her situation in the world was and would probably always be she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero. First off, she cut her hair. That was one thing she didn't want to think about anymore. Then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her.

When am I happy and when am I sad and what is the difference? What do I need to know to stay alive? What is true in the world? (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 127).

The complexity of these challenges of midlife and women's relationships at midlife are described by Rubin as "a complex welter of change and stability - people in process; an age in transition" (1983, p. 208). Rubin argued that we must get past the social constraints that stand in the way of change before we can master the psychological constraints.

Franz (1997) anticipated three types of change in the transition to midlife: "universalistic (age-related/maturational), normative or typical change in response to predictable events...in one's social context, and idiosyncratic change" (p. 47). It is the idiosyncratic change that occurs at midlife that will be examined in this study. Franz defined this idiosyncratic change as that which occurs "in response to factors such as stress...life events, or low-probability events for a midlife transition group such as major health problems or the death of a spouse" (p. 49).

Both the physical and psychosocial health concerns of women at midlife are important to this study on resilience. Rodin and Ickovics (1990) proposed an explicit research agenda to address the "large gap in our knowledge concerning women's health" (p. 1018). In her study on the psychosocial correlates of women's health, Thomas (1997) found there was insufficient attention "given to the health consequences of women's experience in their daily roles" and called for research on the "psychosocial factors related to midlife health" (p. 257). Thomas argued that the psychosocial variables are...highly salient to health... and potentially modifiable by women themselves if they receive accurate information" (p. 257).

Summarizing the importance of research for women at midlife, Thomas (1997) argued that midlife:

is a period when the cumulative effects of stress and deleterious behaviors are beginning to accrue, but women have the opportunity and...time to make major...modifications [to] prolong...and enhance the quality of their remaining years.

As the life expectancy of American women continues to increase, the *quality* of the lengthened life span becomes increasingly important (p. 285).

Marriage

The third domain to be explored in this journey is marriage. There is much to learn from women who have been married many years. Sporakowski and Hughston (1978) remind us that couples in latter stages of the family life cycle provide "many insights into their marriages as well as marriage as experienced by their cohort" (p. 326). Noting that the increase in our life expectancy from 47 years in 1900 to presently over 75 years has enabled more long-lasting marital relations, Walsh pointed out: "Ironically, the current high divorce rate is due in part to the expectation that, unlike couples in the past, present-day couples have another 20-40 years to live after launching children. It is difficult for one relationship to meet the changing developmental needs of both partners over so many years" (1998b, p. 34). In this rapidly changing world Hulbert (1993) contended, "It may be unrealistic for adults of either gender to expect to 'have it all' or to achieve a balance that can be sustained over a period of years" (p. 439). She suggested: "Different roles and relationships may evolve and change, with differing degrees of commitment and salience at different times" during the adult span of 50 plus years (p. 439).

"What does a 'successful' marriage really look like?" asks Heilbrun (p. 27). She questions: "Is it possible to redefine marriage, or is that institution already so close to extinction that we need not try?" (p. 84) and wonders whether the legal transformation of marriage during the past 150 years is amazing, or whether it has been laggardly. These questions need to be answered because we have little evidence of the "story," the narrative, of marriage that makes possible the development of women and men as individuals and as a couple (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 27).

Although marital problems are "the most common problems people bring to therapy...we have very little knowledge of what actually goes on inside marriage. Current emphasis on self-fulfillment has meant less tolerance for unhappy marriages" (Hare-

Mustin, 1986, p. 18). Marital satisfaction, Troll (1994) succinctly stated is "contingent on expectations. People who expect less are more easily satisfied" (p. xviii). Rather, it seems more appropriate that "no one pattern of satisfaction is associated with age or phase in the family cycle and that several styles of relating satisfactorily are evident at each phase of marriage" (Huyck 1994, p. 183). Marriages in midlife "are influenced by the expectations and opportunities that characterize the middle years generally" reflecting personality or interpersonal style changes (pp. 183-184). Huyck also discourages a "quest for one formula for 'a happy marriage,' stating that we must be "more attuned to describing differential patterns of relationship" and attempt to "discover the patterns of relationship that sustain or stress individuals at various points in the life course by listening carefully to couples' own experiences and the meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 197).

A longitudinal study on interpersonal relationships by Paul (1997) highlighted "the fluidity of relationships over time" and the ability of midlife adults "to be flexible in drawing necessary psychological supports and benefits from their various relationships" (p. 196). Paul (1997) suggested that "rather than determining whether the marital relationship improves or deteriorates, we should examine the importance of the marital relationship for individual well-being and the change in this salience over time"(p. 172). She proposed that "the importance of the marital relationship waxes and wanes in terms of what it contributes to each partner's well-being," and suggested that "other relationships may sometimes act as the primary contributor to well-being during adulthood" (p. 172). Paul argued "that the psychological health of ...women is associated with their relationship experiences" and that multiple relationships are necessary to meet our various psychological needs at midlife (p. 193).

Clinicians have identified several issues middle-aged couples struggle with: "changes in the original implicit contract, particularly as to which partner was to be strong and which one was to be dependent... unfulfilled goals, sexual problems ...reconstituted family issues and physical disability" (Huyck, 1994, pp. 184-185). In his research on family transitions

and change, Gottman stressed the importance of a sense of "we-ness". He discovered in his research with couples that "some couples have a sense of 'we-ness' that comes from a variety of sources" that they refer to when resolving conflict. For couples lacking this sense of "we-ness", every conflict challenged their basic beliefs and resulted in a decrease of cohesion (1991, p. 261). Gottman suggested:

a family's fixed points, can be defined as all those things that can be referred to by family members to resolve conflict in such a way that family cohesion increases after the conflict. These points ... generally revolve around a sense of we-ness" (p. 261).

To measure this he examined: "the implicit marital contract, a shared religious or cultural viewpoint, an agreed-upon dominance hierarchy, the family's belief system, shared values, shared goals, shared memories, a shared viewpoint of reality...expectations...of their marriage...rules, rituals" (p. 261).

Antonucci and Akiyama (1997) reviewed data from several large national surveys which indicated that "men are happier with their marriage at midlife than women" (p. 156). The data "demonstrated it was very important to men and women to be married. But once married, women derived far less satisfaction from the marital state than did men" (p. 157). In a study comparing most healthy and least healthy women at midlife, Thomas (1997) found that "fewer of the women in the healthiest group (55.5%) were married, as compared to 66.2% in the least-healthy group. A greater percentage of the healthiest group fell into the high-prestige occupational category, while the percentage of homemakers married to men in medium-or low-prestige occupations was greater in the least-healthy group" (p. 276-277). She also found that women who reported sharing problems with their husbands were healthier, while those who were dissatisfied were more likely to be depressed. Although not tied with the issue of being married, Thomas found that women with baccalaureate or advanced degrees were healthier.

A study of 18 women in their 40s "living the traditional feminine role" - an intact marriage with children and only nominal if any participation in the labor force, found only

five of the women described their marriage as favorable at the time (Helson & McCabe, 1994, p. 79). The researchers concluded: "The traditional women in their study felt pressure to change their lifestyles in the new-traditional direction that had become normative for their age-group" and while the changes brought difficulties such as renegotiating the relationship with their partner, becoming independent, and proving themselves outside the domestic sphere, they "believed deeply in preserving the marriage" (p. 80). In 1990, Helson and Picano reported that full-time homemakers, who had married young and had children, exhibited lower psychological well-being and more chronic health problems at middle age.

More than half of the women in long-term marriages reported they wouldn't marry again, according to a study by Rubin (1983, p. 123). She found that among the women in the long term marriages, many more reported they would choose not to marry again than either women who had been married for less than ten years or women who had no children left in the home. Rubin concluded that marriage for a significant proportion of women "had at least as many costs as benefits....Women married a long time often begin to count the costs - feeling that the price for the marriage has been the loss of parts of themselves they now want to recover" (p. 123-124). "Marriage has suited the man, and appeared to suit the woman" noted Heilbrun because the woman was "satisfied with the rewards offered in place of her own self-determination"(1988, p. 76). Women who want to marry again suggested to Rubin "the terms of the new marriage would be quite different from the old" (p. 125).

Rubin argued that women's economic dependence has been mistaken for emotional dependence, while men's economic independence has been mistaken for emotional independence. Women provide emotional stability for men, but do not share the same benefits in marriage. She clarified that women are "economically and socially disadvantaged when compared to men" and in order to understand dependency in women we must pay attention to the ways women say their economic dependence creates a

heightened sense of their emotional dependence (p. 141-142). Rubin noted it is no surprise that women continue to give themselves to relationships so easily - they have been socialized to derive their status and generally "placed" in the world according to who their husbands are (p. 96).

Marks (1994) suggested: "Producing intimacy does seem to be part of the work that women do, part of the emotional service that women provide, and it needs to be recognized as significant work, rather than ignored as inconsequential" (p.158). Similarly, Hochschild (1983) pointed out that "women understand love as something which can, in its nature, be managed and indeed they seem to perform more feeling work upon it. By de-romanticizing love, women appear to professionalize it more" (p. 255). Hochschild suggested this is because men work on love less and "hold hegemony over the courtship process, while at the same time women, for economic reasons, need marriage more"(p.255).

However, Hare-Mustin (1986) argued that rather than exaggerating the differences between men and women (p. 23) and describing women as relational (p. 22), the focus should be "on who has the power in an interaction....Thus, women's concern with relationships can be understood as the need to please others when one lacks power" (p. 22). "It may be the expressiveness encouraged in women detracts from their perceived competence" (Hare-Mustin, 1986, p.24).

To help "elucidate the dilemmas of love and power between men and women living in a patriarchal society" (p. 30), Goldner (1988) encourages a focus on "issues that are of profound psychological importance" such as the dimensions of intimate life: power, privilege, fairness, and exploitation, issues that are of profound psychological importance" (p. 29). Goldner (1988) argued for the importance of discourse - stories, metaphors or questions. Power is defined by Heilbrun as "the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter. This is true...in marriage, in friendship, and in politics"(1988, p. 18). Walsh viewed power as being experienced through close, loving relationships noting that the greater the power imbalance,

with one partner maintaining a domineering stance over the other, the more dysfunctional and unsatisfying the relationship. She concluded that couples were more prone to power imbalances in traditional family structures that reflected the dominant-subordinate positions of men and women while dual-earner couples tended to have more symmetrical relationships and faced different challenges (1998, p. 94).

In long term relationships with men, particularly in marriage, Rich (1980) argued that a woman's position is considered low status and without means of gaining power. However, relationships with long-term commitments may be governed by different rules of reciprocity according to Walker and Thompson (1983), who suggested long-term intimate relationships may be based on long term needs, thus allowing equity to be achieved over many years. In addition, life span research on women's social relations found: "Women appear to be much more influenced by the reciprocity in the spousal exchanges than are men" (Antonucci, 1994, p. 262). Moreover, women "who felt their relationships were reciprocal had better health and well-being" (p. 249) although the women reported that they received "less of all six types of support, confiding, reassuring, respect, sick care, talk when upset, and talk about health from their husbands than men do from their wives" (1994, p. 257). Antonucci concluded women might be "giving much more than they are receiving on a personal level...that women are much more positively and negatively affected by the social relations with their spouses than men" (p. 264).

We are not surprised that this generation of midlife women grew up with the message "selflessness created a loving relationship" (Schwartz, 1994, p.17). Schwartz suggested it is "hard to change from a senior-junior partnership," calling it the "high cost of hierarchy" (p. 53). Schwartz noted it "is the nature of power that the advantaged is less aware of giving slights than the disadvantaged is aware of receiving them" (p.48) and stressed "becoming friends requires changing old habits and beliefs" (p. 55). Commenting on "the tough demands of long-term marriage," Schwartz stated "all spouses face problems" and that the problem is principles, not personalities. She argued "resetting a marriage according

to more equitable and egalitarian principles leads to mutual respect" and having friendship in place provides a basis "for all other aspects of fulfillment"(1994, p. 28). Schwartz noted "some couples will develop peer marriages only in the senior segment of their lives" and suggested that age "seems to tame men's preoccupation with work and control, and it gives women more courage, self-confidence, and direction" (p. 196).

The ability to put aside struggles for control and power allows the possibility for a deeper intimacy which is defined by Rubin as "reciprocal expression of feeling and thought...out of a wish to know another's inner life and to be able to share one's own (1983, p. 90). She stressed that intimacy is possible only between equals and requires both emotional development and verbal skills (p. 140). Over the long term, mutual trust, a continuous balancing of interests, and sharing of responsibilities helped couples achieve equal privileges (Beavers, 1986; Walsh, 1998b). This mutual accommodation and long reciprocity are crucial for the more egalitarian relationships.

Schwartz's research on egalitarian marriages demonstrated that couples who based their marriages on a mix of equity, equality and *intense companionship* created what she termed peer marriage. Peer marriage is a "marriage of equal companions, a collaboration of love and labor in order to produce profound intimacy and mutual respect" (1994, p. 2). Schwartz argued that traditional couples sacrifice goals that peer marriage better serves: "the elemental goals of intimacy, deep friendship, and...mutual respect" (p. 3). She believes the significant rewards that result from reshuffling traditional gender relations create: "a deep and true partnership based on equality, equity, and intimacy" (p. 3).

However, desirable these goals of intimacy, friendship and mutual respect, Rubin cautions that this is not an easy task:

There's turmoil ahead as we struggle with ourselves, with our loved ones, with the world outside, to bring into our relationships a better balance of those things that have only recently become so dear to us, *intimacy, companionship, sharing, communication, equality*. (1983, p. 215).

The rebirth of marriage in middle age was described by Heilbrun as reinventing marriage where couples learn to value each other, to educate themselves in equality; to “remarry” with less glamour, less fantasyland. She also warned that the happiest marriages may not always be the best behaved and recommended that we look beyond marriage from the outside, that uses only the indications that romance and patriarchy have taught us.

Heilbrun encourages us to look at marriage in middle age as remarriage:

Look for its conversations, for its qualities of friendship, above all, for its equality and the equality of the man’s and woman’s quests. The sign of a good marriage is that everything is debatable and challenged; nothing is turned into law or policy (1988, p. 95).

In summary, even with dramatically changing family structures that have influenced long term marriage today, Walsh contends:

People still view committed relationships as one of the most important sources of happiness, and 90% legally marry at least once by the age of 50. Most will marry more than once in their lives....People want to share their lives with someone and seek an intimate relationship that provides comfort, romantic and sexual gratification, and friendship with a life-long partner (1998b, p. 29).

For this reason, studies that examine "the *quality* of experience in major life roles" are encouraged by Thomas (1997) who states, "Marital quality assumes increased importance in view of the likelihood that contemporary women may spend more than 40 years married (although not necessarily to the same man)" (p. 283).

Influences of Resilience in Midlife Women on Marriage

The last topic to explore before heading out on the journey is the intersection of resilience and marriage for women in midlife. This intersection brings forth what Brubaker (1990) discussed as one of the unique characteristics of late-life families: "Older families may be experiencing new life events, but they have a large reservoir of experience. They have interacted with each other for many years and in different settings" (p. 16).

Walsh reviewed Higgins's (1994) research on resilience in which Higgins stated she was struck by resilient individuals' ability to "love well" in long-term relationships.

Higgins discovered that resilient individuals established and maintained:

... relationships marked by high degree of reciprocity and concern for others as well as themselves. They made consistent and generally successful attempts to recognize the needs of others and to differentiate them from their own. They developed and actively participated in relationships that could withstand conflict, disappointment, anger, and frustration when the needs of either partner were not met. Such difficulties were actively and successfully negotiated throughout the relationship over time (Walsh, 1998b, p. 119).

The protective processes found in resilience may be vital not only for women's long term relationships, but also for their long term health. In their research on transitions, stress and health by Dura and Kiecolt-Glaser found "evidence for greater health impairment in more distressed populations, individuals... whose interpersonal relationships are less satisfactory." They found that poor health is associated with poor marital quality:

..."unhappily married people reported poorer health than either divorced or happily married individuals of the same age, sex, and race....For women, poorer marital quality was significantly associated with greater depression and loneliness ...and with poorer responses on functional immunological measures" (1991, p.71).

Thus, if it is possible to help women at midlife develop resilience it may be vital not only for their long term relationships, but also their long term health.

A powerful force in resilience comes from our belief systems. "We cope with crisis and adversity by making meaning of our experience" according to Walsh (1998b, p. 45). She noted that Bertram Cohler's (1991) study on resilience:

... emphasized the importance of narrative coherence in making sense of disruptive events. We construct, organize, and synthesize our experiences. Adversity and the accompanying distress become tensions and organizing principles for a coherent life

story and belief system...adversity generates a crisis of meaning and a potential disruption of personal integration. This tension prompts the construction or reorganization of our life story and beliefs. Over time, we revise our stories of adversity and resilience to seek or maintain a sense of coherence and integrity (Walsh, 1998b, p. 49).

Walsh argued that the essential elements in the process of change are stories and beliefs. The key beliefs in resilience "involve the ability to make meaning of adversity; a positive outlook, affirming strengths and possibilities; and transcendent beliefs for values and purpose, as well as solace and comfort" (1998b, p. 50). Walsh pointed out the "concepts of the self and constructions of the world are fundamentally products of relationships, and it is through our interdependence that meaningful lives are best sustained" (p. 51). She concluded: "A relationship is strengthened when a crisis is viewed as a shared challenge, to be tackled together" and clarified that "Relationships are strengthened by actions toward trustworthiness, based on consideration of one another's welfare. Trust is essential for open communication, mutual understanding, and problem solving" (p. 52).

Family therapists and theorists have long observed the importance of accountability, loyalty, and mutual commitment in creating a foundation for relational permanence. During difficult circumstances, the confidence in a significant other's good will and the belief that he or she is "struggling well" encourages mutuality, trust, closeness, collaboration, and comfort in relating (Walsh, 1998b, p. 53). Baber and Allen (1992) discuss the "relational morality" that emerges out of the daily interactions of marital partners and is "accomplished through words, actions, thoughts and feeling...set within a sociohistorical context that shifts according to the hierarchies of age, race, gender, class...[and suggest that] "marital responsibility has four processes: attribution, disclosure, empathy, and cooperation" (p. 58).

A rhythm and flow describes well-functioning families with "an evolutionary sense of time and of becoming - a continual process of growth and change, progressing through the life cycle." These resilient families "are better able to accept the passage of time and the need for change with new developmental challenges. Life cycle transitions, while disruptive, are also seen as milestones that can be an impetus for re-evaluation of assumptions about the world and one's place in it. In this way, painful transitions can catalyze growth and transformation" (Walsh, 1998b, p. 53). Resilience involves "coming to terms with the past, and integrating that meaningful understanding into their current lives and their future hopes and dreams." How one makes "sense of a crisis situation and endow[s] it with meaning is most crucial for resilience." Transformation may result from the new vision and purpose for life that often comes with the ability to clarify and find new meaning (Walsh, 1998b, p. 54-55).

The acceptance of a new challenge in middle age marks the end of fantasy and of the dream of closure. Hochschild argued that women "are less interested in romantic fantasy and more likely to be pragmatic about gender relations" to begin with "because they are more personally affected by the organization of gender relations (1983, p. 255). Heilbrun noted "women have lived too much with closure...there always seems to loom the possibility of something being over, settled, sweeping clean the way for contentment." She noted this "is the delusion of the passive life," and contended when "the hope for closure is abandoned...adventure for women will begin" (p. 130). With the coming of age women may find "freedom from fulfilling the needs of others" and take more risks, be more vocal, courageous and unpopular (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 130). Perhaps at this intersection of resilience and midlife, women may continue to find a greater sense of individuation and personal authority in their marriages. Individuation "refers to the process of using rational thinking as the basis for personal decision-making....personal authority refers to the choice of one's own well-being over the subtle and direct mandates of significant others. In both

processes, the individual retains a sense of identity and sees the 'self' as able to make appropriate decisions and...state opinions" (Protinsky & Gilkey, 1996, p. 292).

There is need to integrate the views of women in marriage as "*they* mark off periods of stability and change as they move from the past, through the present, toward the future" encouraged Cowan (1991) who challenged family researchers to: "find more suitable ways of mapping the pathways traversed by the individuals and families as they pass through multiple transitions in the course of living out the triumphs and tragedies of their lives (p.25).

Summary

To summarize the themes of resilience, women at midlife, and marriage, I find it useful to think of Marianne Walter's concept of "collective consciousness" in which she believes "we can carry with us a consciousness of the collective experience of women" (1994, p. 18). I am frequently sobered by the experiences of women. This research is an attempt to bring women's stories together in order to explore their experience of resilience in the context of their marriage. I hope to weave a tapestry of the collective experiences of these women at midlife who have endured much, risen above their adversity, developed a sense of resilience, and have much to tell their sisters.

In constructing a phenomenological research project, the research question grows out of an intense interest in a particular topic that has both social meaning and personal significance (Moustakas, 1994). This study of resilience in midlife women in long term relationships beckons to me because of my interest in the competence, courage and hopefulness I have witnessed in the women in my clinical practice. I have learned to appreciate the importance of the detail in the language and stories of each person's life as a way of knowing and understanding. I have never lost the feeling that it is a privilege to listen to the stories of others' lives in my attempt to understand their experience. This interest in understanding their experiences and the meaning they make of their experience is

at the root of the in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing (Seidman 1991) methods that will be utilized in this study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research Design Theory

The method is the "route that leads to the goal....The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). "Qualitative researchers believe that approaching people with a goal of trying to understand their point of view, while not perfect, distorts the subject's experience the least" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 34-35). Creswell (1998) suggested qualitative research is appropriate to research questions that start with a *how* or *what*. Thus, for this research on how women perceive and describe their experience of resilience in marriage, qualitative phenomenological methods were chosen in order to examine the meaning resilience holds for women.

"Phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in the theoretical tradition of phenomenology....This theoretical orientation has two implications... that phenomenology can be referred to *either* as the subject matter of inquiry *or* as the methodology of the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 82). This approach involves "entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon; and looking for meaning of the participants' experiences" (Creswell, 1998, p. 31). The research method is a way of investigating certain kinds of questions and requires a "phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 2). "Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience" (p. 4) and is most aptly characterized by one word, "thoughtfulness" (p. 12).

A phenomenologically informed research design was selected because it provides "a rigorous approach to qualitative research using systemic procedures" (Creswell, 1998, p. 9) and examines "the *meaning of experiences* for individuals...based on the premise that human experience makes sense to those who live it" (p. 86). The transcendental phenomenological model described by Moustakas (1994) was utilized because it "offers a

way of interrelating subjective and objective factors and conditions, a way of utilizing description, reflection, and imagination in arriving at an understanding ...that...opens possibilities for awareness, knowledge and action" (p. 175).

My approach to study women's experience of resilience in the context of marriage was a psychological/transcendental phenomenology, which is a reflective discipline that has its roots in existential philosophy. The Danish founder of existential philosophy, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), believed "it was imperative that philosophy address itself to the concrete existence of the individual person and attempt to elucidate the fundamental themes with which human beings invariably struggle" (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 6).

Phenomenology is credited to a German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) whose aim was "the rigorous and unbiased study of things *as they appear* so that one might come to an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience. The development of specific methods for studying human experience is one of the primary contributions of phenomenology" (Valle et al., p. 6).

Phenomenological research "always begins in the lifeworld...the world of the natural attitude of everyday life" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7); "the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience" (p. 62). Phenomenology, which aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences, asks, "What is this or that kind of experience like?" according to Van Manen (p. 9) who argued: "A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience....Thus, phenomenological reflection is not *introspective* but *retrospective*. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through" (p. 10).

As a study of lived or existential meanings, phenomenology attempts to describe and interpret these meanings of our everyday existence or lifeworld to a certain degree of depth and richness (Van Manen, 1990, p. 11). "The aim of phenomenologically informed research," according to Polkinghorne (1989), "is to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience" (p. 44). Polkinghorne clarified that while

"phenomenological research is sometimes identified with other "descriptive" and "qualitative" approaches, it differs from them because its focus is on the subject's experienced meaning instead of on descriptions of their...behavior" (p. 44). The interest is in "investigating the presence of meaning in experience [where] events appear as meaningful....The purpose of phenomenological research is to produce clear, precise, and systematic descriptions of the meaning that constitutes the activity of consciousness" (p. 45). The research report should give "an accurate, clear, and articulate description of an experience. The reader of the report should come away with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (p. 46).

Preparing to Conduct the Study

Qualitative research from a transcendental phenomenological approach requires systematic and disciplined efforts on behalf of the researcher to launch a study as free as possible from preconceptions and beliefs of the phenomenon in order to be open and receptive as the participants describe their experience of the phenomenon. In carrying out this research, I was conscious of the implications of being an "insider" – as a midlife woman in a long term marriage, I was respectful of the challenges and transitions women face in their everyday lives. Daly (1992) suggests "insiders...are unique in the degree to which their taken-for-granted realities shape their expectations" (p. 109). I expect my personal experience shaped the kinds of things I said, and when and how I said them during the course of the interviews. I have great respect and interest in midlife women and believe this was an aid in establishing the "reciprocal social response." Daly (1992) argued: "Insiders are positioned to do this because of the broad base of experiences and resources on which they can draw to enhance the reciprocity of interview interactions" (p. 110). A possible drawback of being an insider is that objectivity may be threatened by being too close to the subject matter (Daly, 1992, p. 108).

In the phenomenological approach, the process of setting aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated is known as the Epoche process (Moustakas, 1994, p.

22). It is described as a "transcendental state of freshness and openness" wherein the researcher attempts to eliminate everything that represents prejudgments and presuppositions in order to not be "threatened by customs, beliefs and prejudices...habits...or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience" (p. 41). This process requires "effective listening and hearing, seeing things as they appear and as they are, not judging them, learning to describe experience rather than explain or analyze it, focusing on a core question and exploring in depth the everyday constituents of human experiences" (p. 175).

This weaves in with the collaborative approach to therapy that influences my therapeutic orientation. A cornerstone of this approach is the concept of *not-knowing*, which was described by Anderson (1997) as a "curiosity about and fascination with clients' described experiences" and a realization that "*knowing* interfered with the telling of their stories and the accessing of their resources"(p. 133). She explained: "If we always see and hear things as we are accustomed to, then we will miss...that which is different and unique"(p. 134).

Polkinghorne (1989) discussed the use of self-reflection in preparation to conduct phenomenological research in order to approach "the topic afresh without preconceived notions about what one will find in the investigation" (p. 47). Prior to gathering data from research subjects, I jotted down "reflections for reference during data analysis" in order to locate my own "presuppositions and biases" (p. 46). I used these self reflections to increase my awareness and bracket out the presuppositions and assumptions I brought to the investigation in addition to providing me some protections against my expectations (p. 47).

Terms of the Research Questions

A phenomenological study needs "reports of the experience as it actually appears in a person's consciousness" according to Polkinghorne who clarified that the way the questions are framed helps subjects report their experiences instead of giving worldly depictions. He suggested researchers ask, "What did you experience?" instead of, "What

happened?" (1989, p. 46). Seidman (1991) recommends open-ended questions such as, "What was that like for you?" noting that when interviewers ask participants what something was like, they are giving them "the chance to reconstruct their experience according to their own sense of what was important, unguided by the interviewer" (p. 62). Van Manen emphasized: "*Phenomenology questions are meaning questions*. They ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena. Meaning questions cannot be 'solved' ...Meaning questions can be...more deeply understood" (p. 23).

My primary research question in this phenomenological study was: How do women at midlife who have had adverse experiences, challenges, or difficult transitions in their adult married life perceive and describe these experiences and how did they develop the strength, hardiness, or resilience they needed to rise above? The major components of this question are how, perceive, describe, experience, and resilience. How did this experience affect their marriage and vice versa. Use of the word how indicates my openness to whatever emerges about resilience in marriage during my interview with the participants. The word perceive acknowledges the relativity of resilience. Resilience will be perceived differently by different people, and by the same person in different situations. The word describe refers to what resilience is and means for participants. The word experience serves to indicate that I was seeking comprehensive stories from the participants regarding their perceptions and descriptions of resilience in the everyday lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi explained that phenomenological analyses "begin by turning to concrete experiences because they do not want to be impositional with respect to experience and because they want to be faithful to the way experiences are lived" (1989, p. 101).

Selection Process and Description of Participants

The general considerations for participants include women who define themselves as midlife and having been married at least 10 years. Essential criteria for research participants were that they had experienced adult challenges or adversity and have developed strength or the phenomenon of resilience to rise above their challenges. Participants needed to be

willing to participate in a long interview and a follow-up interview, be interested in understanding the nature and meaning of their resilience, and grant me the right to tape-record and publish the data in a dissertation and possible other publications (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107).

In order to locate participants for this study, I distributed a description statement (Appendix A) describing the nature and purpose of the study and a poster (Appendix B). The description statement of the study and poster were placed in newsletters, physician's offices, churches, beauty shops, health clinics for low income families, government office buildings, and women's groups. In addition a professor at a local university put the interview advertisement in their newsletter.

The following table lists the response rate to the various recruitment techniques. The numbers in the following table represent participants.

Table 1
Response to Recruitment Techniques

Advertisement Techniques	Inquiries	Participants
Advertisements		
Physician's offices	5	2
Beauty shops	3	3
Health clinic for low income families	4	4
County offices	2	1
Newsletters		
Graduate school newsletter	2	2
Church newsletters	1	1
NOW regional newsletter	4	0
Referrals	8	5
Total	29	18

An important goal of these recruitment techniques was to reach a diverse population of women so that voices of a variety of women could be heard. The 18 women interviewed for this study were diverse socio-economically, educationally, professionally, culturally and ethnically. Ages of the participants ranged from 40 to 60 years. All had been married at least one time for ten years. Tables 2 and 3 display the break down of these demographics.

Table 2
Years Married

10 to 20 years	12
21 to 30 years	4
31 to 40 years	2
Total	18

Table 3
Times Married

First marriage	13
Second marriage/relationship	4
Third marriage	1
Total	18

The sampling was a purposeful criterion sampling in that all participants met the criteria of being women who identified themselves as being midlife, had been married at least 10 years, and who would like to tell of their experience of rising above difficult adult challenges and transitions. Each woman who replied was contacted by me for at least a 10 minute pre-interview telephone conversation. From this telephone pre-interview regarding the nature and purpose of the study, the volunteer and I both determined if this was an appropriate investigation for her. This also gave each person an opportunity to think in advance about the issues of adversity and resilience. Interviews were then arranged at a mutually convenient place and time. The interviews took place in participants' homes, offices, or my office.

The first contact with participants was this telephone screening conversation in which I collected the basic information: name, telephone, age, length of marriage. Twenty nine volunteers, who responded to the advertisements or were referred by participants or colleagues aware of the study, were screened over the phone from August to November 1999. I explained the nature of my research interest in learning about women's challenges and transitions, and how women at midlife have overcome them. I also explained that this involved an in-depth interview of approximately two hours in which I only had three open ended questions that ask about their challenges or transitions, where they got the strength to deal with them, and how these experiences influenced or were influenced by their marriage.

I then asked if they had a sense of the challenge they were thinking about when they learned about my study. This was to enable me in the screening process. What I found, however, was that if the woman was comfortable with the open-ended questions and in-depth interview, I arranged the interview. Thus the only ones who were screened out were those who preferred a questionnaire and did not think they were interested in the in-depth interview, or those who responded to the recruitment techniques after I already had completed enough interviews and reached a theoretical saturation for this study. I took their names and told them that I had all the volunteers needed for now but I would call them back if I decided to expand the study at a later date.

I interviewed 18 women, until I had confidence in my findings and a good diversity in participants' ethnicity, socio-economic, cultural and educational levels. I strove for theoretical saturation which is defined by Glaser and Stauss (1967) as the point when no new information is discovered. However, I did not expect that I would not reach an "absolute" theoretical saturation, but would instead "consider my findings forever tentative, open to modification through the findings of other researchers or my own subsequent research" (Gilgun, 1992, p. 35). Tables 4 displays the professional identification of the participants.

Table 4
Primary Occupations

Beautician	2
Consultant	2
Graduate student	2
Homemaker	2
Lawyer	1
Manicurist	1
Medical assistant	3
Physician's assistant	1
Publisher	1
Social worker	1
Teacher	2
Total	18

Tables 5 and 6 display the cultural/ethnic diversity and the educational background.

Table 5
Racial diversity

Vietnamese	1
African-American	3
Hispanic	4
Caucasian	10
Total	18

Table 6
Educational Background of Subjects

9 to 11 years	1
High school graduate	2
GED	2
Beauty School	3
Art School	1
LPN	1
College Graduate	5
Master's Degree	3
Law Degree	1
Ph.D.	2
Total	21

The total in Table 6 exceeds 18 because the participants with no high school, high school or GED education also had multiple kinds of educational experience such as beauty school, art school or LPN training.

In my preliminary instructions to participants on the telephone, I informed them that I would remove all identifying data, including name, and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. I also informed them that this research project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university and that there is an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) that they needed to sign at the beginning of the first interview and that information that was deemed private or possibly damaging was removed or disguised to protect the identity of the research participant. When a mutual agreement was reached, a permission form was signed. I also informed them that I would share with them the specific material from their interview that I would use and that we would review and discuss it in a second interview or telephone conversation.

Collecting the Data

An interview of approximately two hours was the method through which data were collected in this phenomenological research. At the beginning of this first interview the participants were asked to read and sign the consent form (Appendix C) after I repeated the discussion from our telephone interview about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. Both copies were signed and one copy was given to the participant and one was kept with my records. I requested that they choose a pseudonym that would be used throughout the dissertation and any possible publication or presentation of this material in order to protect their privacy. Most were happy to choose their pseudonym and often selected a special person in their life or from literature. I selected a few of the pseudonyms for a few who preferred for me to select an anonymous name for them or for those we forgot to do at the interview

I tried to establish an interview situation that created "a safe context for women to reflect on and interpret their experiences, rather than simply report them" (Chase & Bell, 1994, p. 66). The interviews were conversational and open-ended, disclosures were accepted and supported, and clarifications were made as we went along. The importance of self-reports was emphasized so that the research participant understood that her contributions provide an illumination of meanings and are valued as new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994, p. 108). The phenomenological interview involved an informal, interactive process. I was cognizant of Allen's caution of "not...pushing respondents to tell more or probe in ways that are not exquisitely close to their own words. Caution and respect for another's reticence about self-disclosure are paramount to the trust we develop in conducting research" (1994, p. 107).

The interview began with a social conversation to create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere followed by some opening comments. The purpose of these comments was to provide a standard way to begin the interview and to present opening remarks geared to encourage the participant to initiate her own search and to convey again the overall purpose

and intent of the interview. (See Interview Protocol, Appendix D). In order to utilize open-ended comments and questions, I developed a series of broad questions (Interview Protocol, Appendix D) aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the woman's experience of resilience.

Questions were varied, altered, and often not used at all when the co-researcher shared the story of her experience of resilience. As the interviews progressed I found that I was able to obtain rich, vital, substantive descriptions as the participant told her story by getting out of the way and just listening carefully and not interrupting or interjecting questions. I preferred to jot down notes to refer back to at the end of the interview. Based on my experience and interviewing style in therapeutic interviews, and the recommendation of Allen (1994, p. 107) that "listening well is only part of the process," I followed Allen's suggestion to "be a more active participant in an interview," but it was usually at the end of the interview that I explored contradictions and asked about feelings. According to Allen, Leslie and Sollie state "researchers can silence respondents by not taking proactive approaches in asking about subjects that may be touchy" (1994, p. 271). My notes, in addition to helping me concentrate on what the participant was saying, provided a valuable context for later analysis of the transcripts.

A second interview to discuss a summary of my understandings was offered in order for the research participant to review and confirm or alter the research data to correspond to her perception of the experience.

Organizing, Analyzing and Synthesizing the Data

I did not see the process of analysis as a distinct stage of research, but rather as Coffey and Atkinson suggested, a reflexive activity that informed data collection and writing. "The research process, of which analysis is one aspect, is a cyclical one" (1996, p. 6). I transcribed all the interviews verbatim within 48 hours after conducting the interview as I believe this increased the accuracy of the transcribing, generated ideas for coding and analyzing, and helped me become more familiar with the data. This intense involvement

with each interview enabled me to understand each interview more deeply and get a more detailed across-case context for the entire data set. This was a most important part of my analysis as I wrote most of my memos and a good portion of my analysis by dwelling on the transcripts (Maxwell, 1996). Everything was coded so that I could find it when I needed it.

The analysis was guided by the study's conceptual framework (family resilience framework grounded in systems theory and a postmodern feminist socially constructed perspective), the research questions, a phenomenological method of inquiry to see how the participants lived and made meaning of their experiences, and my own understanding and life experiences. This management of these qualitative data was a synthesis of various procedures recommended by Allen (1989) and Moustakas (1994).

Transcripts of each woman were read the first time to gain an overall impression of their content. During the second reading, I looked for themes pertaining to the research questions and the challenges the participants experienced, how they made meaning of their challenges, and how they rose above and developed a sense of strength or resilience. As I read the third time I sought all possible frames of reference about resilience and the meaning the participants made of their experience. I then listed the themes that seemed most significant and tried to get an overall description of their meaning and the essence of resilience for each woman. I compiled the lists of all participants and compared responses across participants and began coding similar units together on hard copy.

The computer program NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing, Richards & Richards, 1994) was used to store transcripts, organize files and memos, create a template and assist with analysis and report. I put the compiled codes from the hard copy into NUD*IST (here after referred to as N4) and applied these codes to the transcripts in the fourth reading. During this reading of searching for themes and crossing themes, codes were condensed, refined, connected and eliminated.

After coding what had emerged from the data on hard copy and in N4 primarily as free nodes, I then went back to the conceptual framework that guided this research, the family resilience framework, to see what the “fit” was between the data coded from narratives of the 18 participants and the resilience framework. I then integrated them together as they “fit”. A template evolved from the themes coded from the transcripts and the conceptual framework that I then put into the index tree of N4 to assist with the structure of the findings. Refinement of the codes and the index tree continued throughout the analysis and writing process. There were always about 100 codes that emerged from the data that were grouped into ten larger groups, no matter how many times I coded and recoded the themes that were continuously emerging with rereading. The major categories that emerged are displayed in a hierarchical index tree (see Appendixes H, I and J). A great deal of reorganization and recoding of the themes continued during the writing process when I would go back to the original data to pull out excerpts and then see something I had not seen before or now saw differently. Because I knew the data very well, I found I went back to the original data frequently with questions or ideas to check out. I continued to do this even after I thought I had finally “decided” on my coding structure. I found N4 very user friendly and easy to use once I got the hang of it. I made good use of memoing in N4 during the entire process and many of these memos later turned into codes. I think this could have gone on and on as the data set is very rich. I finally needed to stop coding and have confidence that I had coded the participants’ themes into a tapestry that was coherent and as faithful as possible to their meaning – for now.

Throughout the analysis of this research I kept in mind Van Manen's (1990) discussion of lived experience in which he emphasized: "Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence" (p. 36). To conduct a phenomenological research and writing project, Van Manen recommended that standards of objectivity and subjectivity be re-conceived. "Objectivity" means that the researcher remains true to the

object by describing and interpreting it while recognizing that one is easily misled. "Subjectivity" means that the researcher "needs to be...perceptive, insightful, and discerning...to show the object...in its greatest depth" (1990, p. 20).

Quality Assurance

An active attempt was made to recognize the participant as a co-researcher. "In interpretive research, validity, in the positivist sense of the word, is not at issue" argued Addison (1989) who stated: "Instead, appeals are made to the account's comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, intelligibility, credibility, meaningfulness, significance, and fruitfulness for opening up new possibilities" (p. 55). "Truth is seen as an ongoing and unfolding process, where each successive interpretation has the possibility of uncovering...new possibilities" (p. 56). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) substitute that notion of "trustworthiness" for that of validity. They argue that qualitative researchers must inform what they do by concepts of "credibility," "transferability," "dependability," and "confirmability" (pp. 289-332).

Wolcott discussed validity, stating "we have no esoteric term now" and an appropriate equivalent for validity is needed in qualitative research. He suggested that "*understanding* seems to encapsulate the idea as well as any other everyday term" and defined understanding as "the power to make experience intelligible by applying concepts and categories" (1994, p. 367). Lather used the term "catalytic validity" to refer to "the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (1986, p. 272).

I followed Parker and Addison's (1989) recommendation of criteria to evaluate postmodern interpretive research. First, the interpretive account must be coherent and plausible. The second method of evaluation was external evidence. This involved what has been referred to as "member checking"; going back to the participants with the preliminary interpretations and themes from their first interview for correction or further elaboration and to give them a fuller participatory role. The third method is consensus which means that an

interpretation "should be communicable to others, should make sense to them and enable them to interpret new material in its light" (p. 285).

The process of going back to the participants was most valuable in this project. I sent each woman a thank you letter (Appendix F) with a copy of a their condensed transcript that included the narrative most pertinent to my research questions. I also sent them copies of the themes I thought were the essence of their resilience in the narratives. Because one of the things I learned from many of the participants was the importance of writing in a journal to make sense of their thoughts for themselves, I sent each of the women a journal as a thank you gift for her participation. I enclosed their transcripts and themes in this gift wrapped package with thank you card to add to the confidentiality. Before sending them, I also called the women to let them know the transcripts were coming and to check on what address they preferred as their mailing address. Fifteen of the eighteen have called back, several have written and I continue to be in touch with them. I also sent copies of Chapter 4 to the fourteen who were interested. Several are interested in the entire dissertation. Only a few changes were requested for confidentiality purposes. Others added clarity. Their comments were included in the coding and also in the summary at the end of Chapter 4.

I found journaling and memoing to be an important part of this process for myself also. I set aside at least 10 minutes in order to reflect and write in my own journal on what had been learned from the interview, including the interpersonal interactions, as soon as possible after each interview. I found memos invaluable in my analysis. I initially had memos in several different places before I created a node in N4 in which no data was coded for the memos where I could track what I was thinking and what I had done. In addition to writing them with every coding session, I also put my questions to myself in the memos, and jotted down what I was thinking about the data and any thoughts that had been spurred by the data. The memos helped me keep track of mundane stuff and not lose site of the forest for the trees when I got buried in the data.

I used these memos to try to make sense of my data. I established a set of categories by selecting small meaningful chunks of narrative and asking myself what concept it implied. As I created categories and subcategories, I continuously linked back to the original transcript data. I again went through line by line again after I had established categories and subcategories. My categories were continuously shifting. It was most helpful to use brief phrases to label the emerging categories so that I could keep changing them as my thinking changed. I also continuously wrote definitions for the categories. I kept track of all of this in my dated memos.

In addition to working with the participants as co-researchers and memoing, a third very important aspect of seeking confirmability and triangulation was my continuous ongoing consultation with additional experts, professional colleagues, and scholars in the field including my committee chair and the other five members of my committee both prior to and after my defense.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

On this journey I met women from all walks of life who shared their stories of adversity and transition and described how they developed the strength, hardiness and resilience they needed to rise above the challenges of their lives. They discussed how their marriages were affected by these experiences and how the experiences influenced their marriage.

I interviewed 18 women between the ages of 40 and 60 years during the summer and fall of 1999 in the mid-Atlantic and western regions of the United States. They were eager to talk about the challenges and transitions of their lives. While life for many of the women was a challenge from the very beginning, others' challenges did not begin until they turned 40 or 50.

Because the participants began their stories of challenge and resilience at different points in the life cycle, I chose a developmental perspective to present their stories, starting with those whose challenges began in their early years. I have grouped the critical life incidents they discussed into four categories: early life experiences, leaving home, marriage and children, and midlife and multiple roles.

Because the goal of this research was to listen to the voices of midlife women, in the findings presented here, their voices will prevail over my voice. Displaying women's difficult challenges and how they developed resilience was the central purpose of this research. As encouraged by Sandelowski (1998), this re-presentation is weighted toward the data. In order to do this, verbatim excerpts from the participants are used as much as possible. My aim is that the main focus of this qualitative research be on the data itself, to allow the data to "be the star" (Chenail, 1995) from this point forward.

Life Cycle Orientation

I chose to use a life cycle perspective as a template to present the data for two reasons. First, a life cycle perspective provides a structure and coherence for listening to the challenges that occurred in the lives of the women that they now identify as significant in developing resilience. A life cycle perspective facilitates use of time as a primary organizing principle (Sandelowski, 1998) to present my findings by the types of challenges the women described across the life cycle.

Second, a life cycle perspective provides a flexible structure to re-present the participants' accounts of their challenges and how they developed the strength and resilience they needed to move on. Two tenets of the changing family life cycle that are useful for a life cycle structure for my data are: women in our culture do not go through the "normal" phases at the "normal" times, and transitional crisis are not permanent traumas (McGoldrick, Heiman, & Carter, 1993).

The life cycle provides the retrospective orientation that is necessary for a phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenological reflection is inherently "retrospective...not introspective" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). As Van Manen observed, "a person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience" (1990, p. 10). In order to understand their experience, the event needs to be seen as over or as having an end (Sandelowski, 1999). The life cycle perspective presented here emerged from the participants' stories and where they chose to situate themselves in the lifecycle as they related their challenges. Four stages that incorporate the critical experiences of their lives will be presented. These are: early life experiences which includes growing up and educational experiences; leaving home which includes changing cultures, educational and work challenges; marriage and children which includes experiences in intimate relationships, raising children and divorce; and the midlife years which includes participants' health issues, family of origin challenges, launching children, caring for parents and the challenges of loss.

The eighteen women who participated in this project join the journey according to where in the life cycle their challenges began. Hardship in their family of origin challenged five women early in life, while another four faced their first significant challenge during the years they were leaving home. Then during the years of early marriage and raising children, four more women struggled with their strongest challenges. The last four joined the journey in a stage I call midlife and multiple roles.

Introduction to the Participants

In this section I will introduce the participants in order to provide a context for better understanding them individually, their experience, how they made meaning of their challenge and the resources they had to deal with it. I will locate the participants and their descriptions of their significant challenges in one of the four life cycle stages in which their challenging experiences predominated.

Early life.

The stories of five of the women start in early life. Although my research question asked about the hardships they faced in their adult lives, the challenges these women struggled with in their adult life were strongly influenced by the physical abuse, alcoholism, abandonment, isolation, poverty and lack of education that started them on what one participant described as “a lifetime of struggle.”

Pilar is 51 years old and has been married two times. She married the first time when she was 18 years old after graduating from high school. That marriage was physically abusive and lasted nine years. She has been in her second marriage for 11 years to a man who is now 33 years old. She has five children who range in age from nine to thirty years. She completed beautician school in her late 20s, works as a medical assistant, and will finish her Licensed Practical Nurse degree this year and continue working towards her Registered Nurse degree. She describes her childhood as rough.

I had a rough childhood. Really really hard. Parents are really strict. My mother and dad believe in beating, you know. So you got beat for everything and you got hurt for everything and so eventually you get beat every day of your life. And you just say, you know what, it just isn't even worth it to cry anymore. Because you get used to it after

you get beat. And this is before the child abuse time, you know, where you help parents out. This is what you do. And in an Hispanic family this is life. Got beat every day for anything. Didn't do our room, got beat. You didn't eat all you food, you got beat. It doesn't matter. My mother was nervous, you got beat. But that's understandable because my dad drank a lot and he went out a lot.

Maya also describes a childhood of abuse and alcohol. She is 40 years old and has been married for 11 years. She has three children who range in age from three to nine years. After completing her master's degree she was an FBI agent until she had children and became a fulltime homemaker.

I grew up in rural Mississippi in a very segregated upbringing. Looking back it was a very ignorant and sheltered upbringing. I don't mean ignorant in a negative sense, but just underexposed. My parents were consumed by their own lives. My father, and I didn't know this when I was growing up, was an alcoholic and drank on the weekends. And so every weekend we had the Saturday night brawls at my house where he physically abused my mother. And I saw it all. There was no stop, don't talk like this, our children are here. It was just say whatever, do whatever. Let it all hang out without any restraints. It was shameful. Everyone in our town knew.

Jean is 60 years old. She has been in her third marriage for 14 years. She married the first time when she was 15 years old because she was pregnant. She did not get to graduate from high school. She has three grown children and grandchildren. She has owned her own business for 29 years. She describes growing up abandoned and isolated.

I was probably the last child to be born there in an old gold mining town of 90 people. My mother was, I don't know, not very responsible, let's say. She didn't know how to raise children, and we just kind of raised ourselves. I was the youngest. I have a sister who was very strange and very powerful and very pretty, and I was not. And as it turns out she was schizophrenic, but no one paid much attention to her so they didn't know that. She had a schizophrenic split when she was about 25.

Karen also describes her childhood as isolated. She is 51 years old and has been married 18 years and has two children. She attended art school and is an artist and homemaker.

I come from a dysfunctional family. I grew up with my parents and my sister. My mother comes from a long line of mental illness and alcoholism. My father was distant and very critical. Both parents were very critical. We lived in a neighborhood that was very isolating. We lived in a ghetto in the city. My parents were political lefties so we were isolated in our environment. My mother stayed at home, but she basically ignored us.

Lillian's early life was rough because of the poverty of her family's life in El Salvador. She is 41 years old and has been in the United States for 20 years. She completed high

school, her BA and BS in the U.S. and works as a physician's assistant. She married 10 years ago and does not have children.

As a little girl. I had kind of like a rough life, meaning my parents were very poor. We didn't have a lot. El Salvador sits right in the middle of central America so we get a lot of earthquakes. So I remember distinctly losing a couple of houses, to the ground. Houses literally collapse while we were trying to get out. Those memories were really hard for me. When I was a teenager I was doing my own thing. And then we have another earthquake. It was kind of mild and the house didn't collapse this time, but there were cracks and things like that. So then they needed to fix the house, but where were they going to get the money? So I stopped going to school. I didn't go to high school. I was already doing like first year and then I had to stop to work to help my parents. My sister did the same thing.

Lillian's personal challenges carried on into stage of leaving home, when she left El Salvador to come to the U.S. without a high school education or knowing the language.

Leaving home.

Leaving home is a new concept in the life cycle of women. Historically women went from their parent's home to their husband's home. As would be expected of this cohort of midlife women, many followed that tradition and left home, perhaps via college, for marriage. Some left for personal goals and career. Four more join the journey and begin facing their life challenges as they were leaving home. The hardships they struggled with in this stage include immigration because of poverty and communism, the legacy of suicide, family break up due to divorce, multiple losses due to death, loss of a significant love relationship, and educational challenges. Two women described the enormity of the changes in their lives when they left their communities, their countries, the life they had known without language skills or financial and emotional resources.

Lillian described immigrating as her greatest challenge:

To have come to America. The language, cultural differences. Very different culture. And another thing just being Central American rather than Mexican. That's also a barrier because when I came to California is was basically Mexican. It was really hard for me to adjust to that too. But in any case it was doable. I did it. I didn't speak English, but I worked from 7 PM to 7AM at an all night restaurant in East L.A. and made \$150 per week. If anybody knows what L.A. is all about, East L. A. is a place you don't want to be. But I didn't know that then. I couldn't figure out why there were so many people out all night and all dressed up. I worked all night and went to school during the day to get my high school degree in the U.S. My goal was to send money home.

Leaving home to immigrate to the United States was a major challenge for Lien also. She is 42 years old and has been married for 17 years. She was able to go to college for one year before she had to quit in order to work to earn money for her escape from Vietnam when she was 22 years old. She has been married for 17 years to a man, also from Vietnam, that she met shortly after arriving in the U.S. She has three children, a teenager and two five-year old twins. She is employed full time as a manicurist. She describes her escape from Saigon.

I came here almost 20 years ago because I don't like communists. I was 22 at that time and I was working and planning to try escape. The first time is not success. So I try the second time, me and my brother. He was 18. I was very much scared. I heard it's dangerous. I knew if I get caught there is really no future. I have to risk it, my life. And what if I get caught? Then I'll deal with it. So it takes about three days to Thailand. But during the trip we met a pirate Thailand and they took everything from us. They have a big boat and dress with a thong and a long knife. They separate men and women. I think with the girls, I was dirty and not attractive them. I was dressed up in very old cloak and I don't make myself look attractive. I don't. And I think I am the only girl who did not get raped on that boat. Yeah, I think that is the scariest. Because you don't know what they will do with you. They didn't kill anybody. For over a month my mom didn't know I'm alive. Because I am completely isolated in the jungle and don't have money at that time.

Because the suicide of Sadie's father occurred when she was only 18 months old, she didn't think it directly affected her childhood. Sadie is 48 years old, a teacher and writer. She divorced her husband of 22 years and prefers the committed relationship she is in to being married at this stage of her life. She has two children of college age and an adopted nephew. Sadie discussed the legacy of loss that repeated itself during the years she and her siblings were leaving home.

My family been both my demise and my salvation. Both my immediate family and my family of origin really sustain me. And we're a family that's had a lot of tragedies. My father killed himself when I was just 18 months old. So my mom was left with three kids under the age of five. And remarried soon after that. Then my mom got divorced when I was a teenager, a young teen. That was another turning point for me. It just blew the family apart. And she remarried right away that time also, another rebound. And they moved to [state]. That was a really difficult time because it felt as though my roots had just been pulled out from under me. And that was the early 60's and that was time of turmoil anyway. My older brother at that time was starting to get into trouble and drugs. I think he was finally diagnosed as schizophrenic and became paranoid schizophrenic. And he killed himself when I was visiting him in California when I was 17 and he was 20.

Loss was also a theme for Josephine and precipitated a series of changes in her life plans during the time she was leaving home. She is in her 40s and has been married 25 years, has three children and is employed. She described this turning point:

Right after turning 17, I experienced a series of losses within my life. Within a very short period of time several close family members and then a year later my best friend died. I then went into a period of what I now recognize as having depression and dropped out college. I subsequently met....and married....someone I felt would...take care of me....The marriage was probably never really easy in the sense that he was more controlling than I was comfortable with as I began to grow.

Loss of a significant love relationship was also a turning point for Natalie and brought her back home where she completed law school and became a lawyer despite early failure in school. She is 42 years old, has been married 11 years and has two small children.

I was a reporter and stayed in the Midwest for three years where I had a bad romance. I decided I needed to come back to home where I have my life long girl friends, where I have supports and where I would just have a more comfortable life. Because I lost the man that I was very attached to I found myself only with my job there as a reporter as the thing giving me stability.

This prompted Natalie to change her life and go back to school.

School was a problem for me. Actually I wasn't a good student. When I was in elementary school I had a lot of problems. In fact I was held back. I went to third grade and was held back. I've had lots of nightmares about school over the years. I managed to get to college and I managed to get to law school. But I was never a great student.

Marriage and children.

The third stage is used to define the years up to 40 years of age by which time all of the women had married. Four more women who began experiencing their life challenges in this stage of the life cycle join the journey. Struggles in this stage had to do with poverty, unemployment, multiple family moves to find work, lack of education, pregnancies, serious health problems with children, marital affairs, isolation and loneliness, physical abuse and divorce.

Graziella, 41 years old, married while she was in high school 24 years ago. She completed her GED and began working outside the home after her third child started school.

I met my husband when I was 15. We dated for about 2 years and then we decided to go ahead and get married. That was the beginning of my senior year of high school. He

always said, yes you're going to finish your school, yes you're going to finish your school. Halfway through my school year he said, no I don't want you to go to school anymore. So I was just so much in love, that I thought okay I'll stay home with you. I'll be the wife that you want me to be. So I did that. I quit my high school when I was in the middle of my senior year. That was 1975. I didn't go back to try for my GED until 1980... and I missed it by one point. So I kind of got frustrated and I didn't go back. I didn't really feel that I needed an education or that I even needed the GED. It was just my husband was working and I was home with the girls. We bought our first home in 1978 and in 1983 my husband had gotten laid off and we were having a hard time. He was on unemployment so we decided to move. We sold our home and moved to El Paso, Texas. We had nobody there. My husband's from Mexico. At that time I was seven months pregnant with my third daughter, so we just went ahead and stayed there till I had the baby. My husband still hadn't found a job by then, which was three months later. He's still on unemployment, so when we went to Juarez.

Maria's husband also did not want her to work. She is 57 years old and has been married 23 years. She was 45 and her husband was 50 when they adopted a ten year old boy who had been a foster child in her parents' house since his mother was killed when he was an infant. She feels lucky that she graduated from high school and became a licensed practical nurse because her mother only finished 8th grade and her dad, who struggles with black lung disease, had to quit when he was in 11th grade.

Being married has been a challenge. His family had never seen a Mexican girl before. My husband didn't want me working, but I need people and will always work at least part time. I'm responsible for me.

Work has also been important to Donna, 44, who has been married the second time for 13 years. She completed her GED, beauty school, and works in a beauty shop. She has two grown children and a 12 years old autistic son that she describes as the greatest challenge of her life and marriage.

He has autism. I knew from dealing with my other two boys that something was not right with that third child. It has been a trying time for my husband and I both because it got to a point with my husband that he really did not want to deal with this situation. And I resented him because I figured we should be in this together and he has to deal with it the same way that I have to deal with it. But he didn't want to deal with it. So I just put it in my mind that I have to do what I have to do, whether he deals with it or not. I have to do. And I did a lot of praying. Up until about a year ago, I felt like I had full responsibility. That's where it came to a point where I wanted to leave the marriage.

Lisa, 52 years old, has two grown children from her first marriage and has been in her second marriage for 11 years. She has had two full careers and is in graduate school

working on her third career. The dissolution of her first marriage after 15 years has been the most significant challenge of her life, Lisa described the early years of her marriage.

Divorce is certainly not the only challenge in my life, but it feels the strongest or where I learned most about myself. When we separated my sons were four and nine. Did I see it coming? No. I was married for life. It wasn't even on the agenda. I got married when I was 20. I got married in January and graduated the following June and we moved from Brooklyn to the South. I had barely ever left Brooklyn and I moved to the South while he was in graduate school and very busy. I knew no one and I was so isolated. And probably depressed. So I went into the marriage that way and then was very isolated, cut off from the family, living in a place where no one understood how I spoke and I didn't understand them. Couldn't, didn't make friends. Didn't know how to get around by car. And so that was very big isolation. And I think after about a year I pulled out of that to try to at least form a life.

Midlife and multiple roles.

In the fourth stage the last five women discussed the significant struggles of their lives as career transitions, health concerns for themselves and their significant others, marriage, and family of origin needs.

Carol is 50 years old, has been married 20 years and does not have children. She has had significant health problems but describes her first two career transitions as her most significant challenges. She is in graduate school as she makes her third career transition.

There are two challenges that come to my mind that I dealt with in my adult life that will always stand out for me. And that was the decision I made when I was 28 years old to leave the convent. I had been a sister for seven and a half years. That was a difficult decision. That was the first one. The second one was my decision 20 years later to leave the military when I was right at the apex and I had the possibility of going on for higher promotion. And it looked like I would be able to achieve that but I had to go through the difficult process of making that decision and deciding to move in a new direction. I was diagnosed with breast cancer during this decision process and had a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. And that's what was physically done. Emotionally what happened to me was I began to struggle with my identity as a woman. And this was going on at the same time I was struggling with what do I do about my career.

A career transition also provided a significant struggle for Beth, 44 years old, who has been married 17 years and has three children at home. Beth has worked her entire married life, and has been in school over half of it. Immediately after completion her Ph.D. she had major surgery. She describes the challenges of handling multiple roles.

I guess the most difficult experience I had was in the last couple years. I think it kind of began in 1996. I was in school and I had three kids and I felt like my professional career was falling apart. I just felt like a loser and in a no win position. So I felt like

there was no where to go. I mean my whole professional life was crashing. And I felt I was going to have a reputation as a loser for the rest of my professional career. Also that very same year, my parents who are elderly, moved here to live because my dad had had a series of health setbacks. And being a nurse and being only one of two children, I kind of had to manage my parents. And the tension in our marriage was really high that whole year 97 to 98. It started before I even quit my job in late 96. My husband seemed more concerned about our financial status than he did about my mental health status. So our marriage got really tense, really really tense. I felt completely abandoned. I was very depressed.

Cancer provided the biggest challenge to Julie, 53 years old, who has been married 17 years, has two children at home, and health issues with her parents. Julie has a Ph.D. and has always worked outside the home. She describes the impact of cancer on her life and that of family.

Things were always good. And it's funny that when I hit 50 all of a sudden shit happened, really. I was diagnosed with cancer, and that was a really rough experience for me. My cancer was found on Christmas of 1996. About the same time one of my kids hit adolescence and that's probably a miserable experience for everybody. We had been very very close, family. I was very very close to my father, extremely close to my father. And about that time he became sick. He eventually died. He died on Valentine's Day of this year. But he was sick for about two and a half years. And at the same time, as he was getting sick, my mother was crazy. And has proceeded to get crazier and crazier. My children went to school, mostly because of my sickness. My husband had home schooled them. When I got sick, my husband had a very difficult time with the sickness. My cancer really did upset him. I was also dealing with his depression while I was trying to recuperate from the cancer. He just imploded. He took a real nose dive and stopped schooling my kids. And so at one point, I said look perhaps it's time for the children to go to school. And they did.

Jolene is 52 years old and has worked most of her adult life in a variety of jobs while she lived in Australia, Germany, Denmark and Canada before coming back to the U.S. with her husband of 36 years. She is in graduate school now despite growing up being told she wasn't smart. She describes the challenges of dealing with children and family of origin at the same time:

Our daughter went off and married a man as old as my husband without telling us. The second daughter declared herself gay at this same time. All this happened when my sister had breast cancer and my mom died of ovarian cancer and my husband's father died.

Health problems, loss, and the demands of multiple roles also hit Meg, 60, soon after she launched her children. Her life, future dreams and plans changed dramatically when her husband of 38 years developed early Alzheimer's disease nine years ago. She had

completed her master's degree and began teaching when her two now grown children started school. Because his symptoms developed early and fast, Meg went from being a supporting wage earner to the sole wage earner very quickly. At the same time her husband was being diagnosed her father became ill and died and she had to take charge of finding different living arrangements and care of her mother. This was followed by her own heart surgery. She describes the impact of these losses.

When my husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's it was kind of like the two men that I could trust in the world, and probably the two people that I felt were strong enough to kind of be there for me or take care of me. One had disappeared and one was disappearing. 1992 is when it was diagnosed. He had some symptoms the summer my Dad died. So the issues started to be there and I was starting to have to be more helpful to him and worry about him at that point. So that's been nine years now.

These were the life cycle stages in which the participants located their most significant challenges. In the next section the women begin to discuss their beliefs and the meaning they made of their adversity by how they faced their individual challenges.

Appraisal of their Challenges

How the women appraised the challenges they faced influenced their responses. Walsh (1998b) suggested that how a problem is defined and framed influences how one attempts to deal with it. "Our appraisal of the stress event and of our resources to deal with the challenge strongly influences our response....Stressful life events are most distressing when we feel little control over them or when they pose a major threat to our present understanding of ourselves and the meaning of life" (pp. 56-57). The women whose challenges started early in their family homes such as Pilar, Jean, and Maya began seeking control and making choices in their lives early on. Pilar married early to escape.

In high school I started thinking what do I want. I dreamed about getting married and living in a white house with a picket fence and having kids and loving my children and raising my children and having a husband that loved me so much that he would just do anything for me. I mean this was a dream! [laughs] I thought. I'm going to get married, I'm going to get married, I'm going to get out of this hell hole. I'm going to get out and do anything. I'm going to go do something...there were a lot of threats and stuff. If you say anything we're gonna beat the hell out of you and you're gonna be even worse. And that point when you think about it, you think you know what, these parents can kill me. You really think that they can... Now I know they never would have killed me. I think. They never would have, intentionally killed me. But at that time you think, they will. You think that something could really bad happen so you try to be

the best that you can because you get tired of all the beatings. I said, you know what, things have to change in my life. So, that's when I tried to change back to better. So I tried to be the best that I could. I thought about that I needed to go to school, I needed to graduate, I wanted to do something with my life. But I also wanted to get married... I fell madly in love with this guy. We decided to get married in December. Which was a mistake, a terrible terrible mistake from the very very beginning. But I guess I just wanted to get out so bad. I knew I had made a mistake and I knew I really shouldn't have married him.

Jean spent most of her time alone growing up. She didn't choose to marry to get out, but because she got pregnant when she was 14 years old.

I always went home to a empty house after school I was going home and cooking things at seven years old...And I liked being home alone because I could do anything I wanted to. I resented having people come home. I functioned very well by myself. I still do, Very well. I learned how to survive. We moved quite often. My step-father was an alcoholic...And I was never disciplined. There were no rules....I wasn't quite 15. And I was pregnant. And I thought how did this happen because I didn't know. And of course everyone was looking at me like I was the worst person in the world....So, I got married. Didn't finish high school. I couldn't even say that to anyone for years, years, years. If people looked at me and saw my children and knew how old I was they would think that there was something wrong with me that I wasn't smart enough. I didn't want anyone to know that I'd had a baby at 15. And then I had another one at 17. I said I can't live like this. There's something really really wrong. I felt like I was a person without a face.

Maya talks about the struggle to build a better life than she knew growing up:

And I just always had to struggle ... I always had to make up my own rules. Or then get into the game and then figure out the rules. That's my theme in life. Get into the game and then figure the rules out later. And that's tough.... It's been the thing that I've had to deal with in every aspect of my life. Getting married, having children, everything. It could have been easier, but it wasn't. I was always looking back and watching what other people were doing.

The struggles of their family propelled Lillian and Lien into the decision to leave their family and country in search of a better life for themselves and financially help their family. After quitting high school in order to work to help her family financially and then realizing she could not make enough money and would not get to go to college, Lillian realized she had to go somewhere else to change.

I was going to be somebody. I didn't know who....I wanted to help my parents. That was like my number one priority in life. I was going to help my parents get out from underneath. I finished my high school...by working during the day. I went to night school from 6 to 10 P.M. every single day... I couldn't leave the place I was working because my parents needed the money. So at that time I decided that maybe it would be best for me to come to the United States to pick the money from the trees and sweep the money off the ground because that's the way that I thought it was supposed to be. Because all the people who would come to the United States would go back to El

Salvador to visit with cars, with money, with fur coats....so I wanted to come to the United States because I thought, okay, I'm going to work two years. I going to make so much money and I'm going to come back to El Salvador to help my parents....That was 20 years ago...when I was 21.

Lien also quit school and faced the challenge of escape to help her widowed mother and eight siblings live with the changes Communism created for her family.

Yeah, it was the hardest for me the day I left because I don't know what I do. The day I left my house in Saigon. I don't know what I have to do. Because I have good life in Saigon. And suddenly you leave everybody and go to the place, no money, no relatives, no nothing. Because I don't like communism. So that get me the courage to get out. To live with them for five years and I was thinking about my future. What if I marry and I have kids. That is no future. I was thinking a little bit ahead at that time for my future.

Leaving their marriages were challenges for Lisa and Sadie. Lisa was committed to her marriage and expected that she would only be married once.

It wasn't my choice for that marriage to end. Although with hindsight it's probably the best thing that ever happened to me. One of the best. It turned out well. Did I make it turn out well? I don't know. Probably, but to think I could still be in that marriage is very stifling and scary to me. But it was not my choice and I had two small children. And it was very scary....Divorce is a monumental trauma.... It is so difficult because there's the emotional divorce, the physical, legal, the financial. It's a wrenching experience and it doesn't quite heal over completely.

Sadie also talked about being scared, but for her it was her decision to divorce at a time she also had many other challenges..

Scared. Yeah. Scared of the enormity of the decision I was about to make to divorce this very powerful man. And disrupt my children's lives. About ten years ago I think I noticed a change and a restlessness with me. I was not happy with my marriage, I was not happy with myself. The children were 16 and 13. And about that same time my younger sister called to tell me that she had AIDS and would I take her boy if and when she died....We were really close. That was another devastating blow. And added to the angst and all that was going on with me.. As you can imagine that was a really tough time in everyone's lives. I was unhappy in my marriage....But when I needed to change and find work outside the home, he found everything I wanted to do threatening. I just realized we didn't have a whole lot in common. There was just too much fear and control there that I couldn't get away from....I'm realizing now that he really doesn't have much power, but my perceived power, well the power he did hold over me, or I allowed him to....I couldn't deal with him. I couldn't change things, so I left.

Donna and Josephine faced the challenges of their marriage at the same time they were also dealing with serious problems with their children. Donna described dealing with her autistic child and husband at the same time.

To deal with that is very hard, very hard. For me. Dealing with a child who didn't talk or didn't know how to do things for himself....And teaching him how to do things for himself. It was very hard, especially with a child that didn't know how to verbalize their likes or dislike. So that was very hard. So everything was hard. He's been in Special Ed ever since he was three. He has no language at all. He will say things that no one will understand, but it's like a jibber. But he's understanding a lot more now....I didn't say anything to [my husband] other than you need to spend some time with this child, you need to get more in tune with what he's doing. And then all of a sudden I got to the point where I got tired of saying that. It's like you're dealing with one child, and like you're dealing with a grown child, too. [laughs] That was a problem.

Josephine described the lingering sense that things were not okay in her marriage and discovering clear evidence of infidelity.

At that time he revealed to me that not only was there a pattern of affairs and sort of chance encounters, but also encounters with prostitutes. He was identified as having a sex addiction and went into individual therapy and a 12 step program, and at my request moved out of the house immediately on the condition that there be an extended period of recovery. We remained separated again for about eight months....During that time my oldest child began to show the signs of real stress which I related to the separation....He has subsequently been diagnosed as having...a mixed bipolar manic depressive disorder with underlying severe depression. Which is another challenge in and of itself.

Karen's challenge in dealing with side effects of her daughter's chronic illness was complicated by a message she carried from her family of origin.

My father was very critical and his view of me was that since I didn't do the three things that he felt were important in life, which was read, know a language and play an instrument, that basically I was lucky I had looks. Because that's what I had. So for me looks are important in a kind of anxiety producing kind of way.

Jolene was also dealing with challenges from her family of origin and her "launched" daughters while trying to handle the demands of her own work and graduate education.

We found out that mother had ovarian cancer, then my sister showed up with breast cancer. This is my younger sister [who] was in Japan when she found out that she had breast cancer. We told her to get on a flight and get back here and we took her up to Hopkins....She lived with us ... with her five year old adopted daughter, a little Romanian girl.... I had to work in taking care of this child, along with my sister and mom. So we're commuting up to Hopkins and going 11 hours up to New Hampshire on the weekends to see mom. I'm still working too and still taking classes believe it or not. And I'm taking [the child] with me. I got permission [so] I could take her with me to work and I took her to school with me. No one else would keep her because she was just off the wall uncontrollable at that stage. They stayed with us almost a year. That was a trial. I'm not sure how I really lived through that. And at the same time our oldest daughter told us she married a man as old as my husband just a week after meeting him. My other daughter, at the same time declared herself gay.... So we didn't get any support from them for all that was going on. They added extra to it. We don't

know what was going through their minds during that time. And [my husband's] mom was not doing well so he kept heading to Texas.

The illness thread continued to be a challenge for the participants. In Meg's life, it is an ongoing challenge to continually deal with her husband's early Alzheimer's.

At times I'm scared just wondering if I'll have the strength to go through it. You know, some of the battles we've been through with driving. There are those ahead I think. I came home yesterday and he was getting supper. The corn had boiled dry and he was upstairs somewhere. I'm more and more aware of the things I'm going to have to find a way to limit. And at this point it seems like my life is so busy now and I think trying to find people to come in if he needs someone there. He's been pretty resistant to it.

The loving, complementary structure of Julie's marriage and family also changed due to illness. For Julie it was her diagnosis of breast cancer.

When I got sick, my husband had a very difficult time with the sickness. I think a lot of times when you're a coach it's more difficult to participate in the game than the athletes because you're not really directly responsible for the outcome. Well, I think it was much like that for my husband. My cancer really did upset him....I was not prepared for this...Part of my problem was for 50 years I had been so very very lucky....As soon as they found it I said, I want whoever is available to do this. Because it's not rocket science, the actual mastectomy. It's real easy and I didn't want to muck around, frankly. I got wanted to get it out of me. I wanted it out of me. The worst part for me, in terms of managing the problem, was you had your surgeon, you had your oncologist, pharmacologist, the physical exercise aspect and the nutritional pharmacologist. You almost have to become your own general contractor.

The illness thread was also a part of Carol's life when she was diagnosed at midlife with breast cancer. But it was in her decision to leave the convent when she was 28 that she found the inner strength to deal with that and future life challenges.

About the third year I was with the sisters, I began to have doubts about the life. And I thought those doubts were like temptations, and it was just trying to call me away from my calling. And I needed to stay true to my calling. And the doubts had to do with some of the doctrines of my faith and with some of the position of women in the church and the priesthood. I started to grow in conviction that women should be able to be priests and I started having some difficulty with that.....A conviction grew in me that I was meant to leave. And when that conviction grew so that I could recognize that and recognize that it could be possible that God had led me in and could be leading me out. Then it became possible for me to leave and to leave with some degree of inner peace about it.....That's really how I was thinking about it. And I guess my life had been all neat and settled and I liked that. I didn't like to have it just thrown into turmoil again and not knowing what the purpose was. I liked stability and that was gone. But I came to that conviction and I knew that was right. I felt that I could not confide in any others.... So that was when I had to keep to myself. It was a very solitary experience struggling with that decision.

In addition to the financial concerns from her husband, when Beth made the decision to leave “a really big job”, she also had to deal with the lack of understanding from colleagues.

So I was able to get a pretty good buy out. But a lot of people in the organization thought that I had been laid off. That there was something wrong with me. And when I first left the organization people looked at me like why would you ever leave such a wonderful organization. Why would you ever do that? And it felt like my world was filled with cruelty. And other people had left before me and all of a sudden at night and on weekends I had three or four pagers to cover other departments. I was just burned out. I almost couldn't think at all. And I knew that I just couldn't function there anymore. So I left and it was so interesting that people there saw that as almost losing, as almost being like not tough enough to stick it out. And what was wrong with you?

Possibility for Change

To open ourselves to change, we often have to go past what is familiar and enter a place that is unknown. This means becoming vulnerable and perhaps acknowledging past hurts and betrayals. Opening up the possibility for change, in addition to increased vulnerability, also creates a sense of hope. Change also involves the participants' ability to cope with external challenges. Three factors that were woven together and seemed to help the participants cope with possibilities for changing were a sense of self efficacy, adaptability and flexibility. Many of the participants portrayed a strong sense of efficacy, of wanting something so badly and having the power to produce an effect. Rutter (1987) linked a sense of self efficacy to the successful accomplishment of important tasks and how difficult turning points were handled. Adaptability was a theme many of the participants discussed as they talked of the changes they made to rise above their circumstances. This ability to adapt to changing circumstances was discussed by Rutter as one of the protective processes that increases resilience. Walsh (1998b) suggested that flexibility counterbalanced stability and change in response to crisis. Efficacy, adaptability, and flexibility were all part of the following vignettes in which the participants described their possibilities for change.

Lien and Lillian's stories of wanting to be in the United States so badly were vivid narratives of efficacy, adaptability and flexibility. All three factors emerged for me as Lien related her journey from Saigon via living in a jungle in Thailand.

We live in a jungle for one month when we got to Thailand. And a month after we stay in a refugee camp. So three more months in the refugee camp in Thailand. But during that time we don't have much help, so we have to really survive by ourselves. And I think another boat same time with us. So we kind of gather around and try to help each other. And men go to the beach and catch fish. During the day we go to the village and try to help, try to work to make little money. For three months before we move into the camp.

Lillian told about her decision to leave her family in El Salvador in order to get an education and make money to help her family rebuild their home.

A goal has been money. It was the way to freedom and food, clothes and choices. I think it may have been the fact that I wanted to change so badly and I wanted to come out of the bunch. I just didn't want to be down in a country where I couldn't go any further, that I couldn't really better myself. And I knew that being here I was going to accomplish something. And that may be why I became strong. It's like inner strength. That's the only thing I can think of. I knew I was going to make it happen.

Although not leaving her native country, Jean also had to leave to make the changes necessary for getting out from under her oppressive circumstances. She had to leave the ranch behind and temporarily her children as well.

I needed to do something for me. And I decided that I needed to be able to have a profession. And I thought that maybe getting the high school diploma was not going to do it. I had to be able to get more education. I had always been very good with hair I had cut people's hair when I was 12 years old. I thought if I can get into hairdressing and it only took a year and a half, I would be able to give myself an education. So I discussed it with my mother and asked her if she could take the kids during the week for that year and a half and I would visit them frequently. And she did. And I went and spent a year in [city] and got my hairdressing certification. And of course I was still married. The kids were about 75 miles. And it was a very hard time. It was a very, very hard time for me. But I knew that if I didn't do something. So I worked at night and went to school during the day. And I got through faster than most people. I worked as a cocktail waitress which I wasn't old enough to do but I lied about my age....And I made enough money to support myself and send money to my mother and felt guilty the whole time about not having my kids and leaving them with her.

Jean described later changes in her life and her decision to get out of her second marriage when she became scared of the physical abuse after her husband refused help for his manic depression.

I had my shop then. I'd had it about a year and I was doing very well with it. And I decided that I would be reasonable about this. We were very much in debt because he was a credit card abuser. And I spent the next year saving money, putting it away, buying bank stocks with every bit of money that I had extra and paying off all the credit cards and tearing them up so that when I said this is it, neither one of us would have any monetary obligations to creditors. And I did that very quietly and worked very hard in my business. And then when a year was up and I'd cleaned everything up, I said, this is it. You haven't changed, nothing's any different and I want a divorce.

Sadie, who had been a full time mother, volunteer and teacher had never taken care of the “business” end of things. She also discussed the need for change in her marriage and some of the subsequent changes she needed to make after her divorce.

We had been in marriage counseling. That was very helpful to me because that's where I realized it wasn't going to change. Hopefully, as all hard times are, you know the curses do come with the blessings. That's just one thing that's helped me get through some of these things. I think what happened was he was really good at what he did and I was really good at what I did and we made a really good balance of skills and strengths. But we didn't share them. Exactly that. We didn't share them. I didn't share my nurturing, creative skills and he didn't share his logical business skills. It's too bad. I was the mom and he was the breadwinner and I think what happened is that we just kind of grew apart. We were happy in our work and when I was no longer happy in my work, I realized I really didn't enjoy his company that much. But in some ways we made perfect partners.

It was hard. I'd never even bought insurance, never been the head of a household. So what was really empowering was learning how simple those things are compared to being a mom and teaching school! It's nothing really. It's business. And it's not much fun and I have to take care of it and I'm probably overly conscientious about it, because I still don't trust that I do know it. But it's really just business and it's not really what concerns me most of my waking hours.

Pilar described re-evaluating her life and marriage and the changes she needed to make when her husband continued running around on her.

One of the questions I asked, what's wrong with my life? Why can't make this man happy? Something's wrong with me. What is wrong with my life? I'm good. I don't go out. I work. What else could I do to make my life better so I could be happy with this man and this man could be happy with only me? Because this is all I wanted all my life. I go, what could I do? I mean, I'm nobody. I'm no good. I'm a waitress. What can I do, what can I do to change my life? And I thought I was weak at that point.....At that point, I do a lot of thinking about my life then because he was hardly around, so I had a lot of time to think about what's he doing? What are we doing? What am I doing wrong? How can I keep him here? What can I do?

Jolene stated “adaptability plays a huge part in being able to survive” as she discussed that the toughest challenges she and her husband have faced have come from both of their families of origin.

I'd say most of the times we've had major disagreements, it's been relatives. Both of our families. That's been about the only outside influences that we've had problems with. Parents have been the biggest problem for both of us. See my mom has this attitude. Well when she died with \$75,000 worth of credit card debts. That was her attitude. Spend the money. That's my mom for you. Things like that just used to drive [husband] up the wall. Then she would have no money. Of course she'd be destitute again. Then she's call for us for money. There's nobody else. So we were always bailing her out. At first that was a disagreement between us, but then finally we said count it as a gift. Because you hate it to see her totally destitute. And that for [husband]

was really hard. He's a very responsible type person. He was the one who usually said, well, let's send her money.

Stories such as this, the many family illnesses and years of having family live with them, in addition to their foreign moves, forced Jolene and her husband to continually adapt and change. Their capacity for change was often stretched, as was evident in the narratives of all the participants. How these women made sense of the challenges they were facing in their lives was influenced significantly by their belief systems which includes the sense of affiliation, and both their facilitative and spiritual beliefs.

Participants' Belief Systems

As the participants told their stories of what their challenges were and how they developed their strength and resilience, what they described in these narratives "fits" with the belief systems discussed by Walsh (1998b), and Wright, Watson and Bell (1996). These are core beliefs that all individuals have and use to facilitate their ability to make meaning of their lives and challenges. As I looked at the themes from each woman's story, and then looked at the patterns across all of the narratives, I found that many of the themes they discussed fell into values and beliefs that can be organized as affiliative values, facilitative beliefs, and transcendent spiritual beliefs. The affiliative values were expressed in a sense of home and community and in the comfort of family identity. The facilitative and spiritual beliefs affirmed their strengths and possibilities and provided them a sense of coherence to their struggles.

Affiliative Beliefs

Beliefs associated with affiliation became the first branch of the participants' belief system in this project and are at the heart of resilience. Affiliation is defined by Merriam-Webster (1993) as a close connection or association as a member. I understood the significance of affiliation as the participants described the importance of membership in their homes, their family legacy, and their communities. The importance of affiliation and interpersonal relationships to resilience was stressed by Walsh: "...strength is best forged

through collaboration...In joining together, we strengthen our ability to overcome adversity” (p. 51, 1998b).

A sense of home.

The participants spoke frequently of their homes, both the homes they had grown up in and the homes that were important to them now. Because I had the privilege of visiting many of the women in their homes, this sense of home became very obvious to me.

Listening to the women and remembering their homes and offices, it was clear that a sense of home was very significant and sustaining for many of the participants. “Home” provided the place for affiliation, for gathering family and friends, for celebrating rituals, for nurturing and sustaining oneself and others. Quoting poet Maya Angelo, “The ache for home lives in all of us,” Walsh (p. 51, 1998b) asked, what is the meaning of “home” in turbulent times? Most all of the participants discussed or showed me the affiliative value of their home.

Sadie suggested that we do the interview at her home so I could see her life and some of what sustains her. As she met me in the front yard with an elderly dog and took me through an inviting kitchen, she pointed out an array of beautiful hand blown glass on the dining room table made by her adopted nephew who has lived with her since his mother died of AIDS. The room of her own, a garage in its first life, has been turned into a cozy office filled with art, all of her journals, books, music, an area to write her poetry and do massage. Family pictures fill the walls and shelves. On one wall are large pictures of her three children; the one in the middle is her nephew right there in the middle of her two natural children, just where he fits in this new family constellation.

Carol was also clear that she wanted to do the interview in her home. She took me first to the garden deck trellised with intertwining vines and showed me the yard she landscaped from a square design to a wonderful curved garden with a variety of shrubs and plants she had transplanted to suit her sense of home. Carol herself had been transplanted many times, growing up in a military family, and now was searching for a career and a for a place to

bloom in a more congruent way. We sat in a living room filled with interesting artifacts she collected from around the world during her own military career, while she talked about her journey to follow her inner star and find a sense of stability.

Meg's house is warm and inviting. She responds to her husband with warmth, patience and humor when because of his early Alzheimer's he seems confused about the whereabouts of the puppy she got to keep him company while she is at work. A grand piano she recently treated herself to dominates the living room. Now that they don't go out socially as much, she finds peace and pleasure playing the piano after her husband has gone to bed - earlier now than he did before the Alzheimer's changed their lives. I am struck by the changing fabric of life in this house. The artifacts, furnishings, fabrics, and pictures of their lives working in the Peace Corps and Indian reservations invites me to speculate on very different days. I reflect on the framed verse on her wall that encourages parents to give their children roots to grow and wings to fly as I hear her talk about how important it is to her that their children go on with the adventure of their young lives, as she once had done, and not feel obligated to stay in the area to help her care for her husband.

The essence of three active children, the two youngest being twins, was obvious in Lien's townhouse filled with toys and games and crayon drawings on the walls and refrigerator. She showed me photos, of her family in Vietnam and the home she left in Saigon, taken on her last visit when she took her oldest daughter for the first time to visit her family in Vietnam. She sent me home with a baggie full of the tea we'd been drinking that she had brought back from her Vietnam visit.

Another busy working mom with three children, two of whom are also twins, Beth, took three hours out of her busy schedule to invite me to her home early one morning before work. As we sat around her dining room table in what struck me as a wonderfully efficient, well ordered house and Beth described the chaos of her life, I couldn't help but ask how she did it all. It was here she discussed the really hard work ethic she grew up with, working since she was 12 years old, doing the laundry at her own house and baby

sitting every afternoon across the street. “You did business. Especially if you were a woman. Your real contribution was working.”

Another house filled with the life of children was Maya’s suburban house on a tree lined street where I went for two interviews. As we sat in the light filled room painted in a warm red color and I listened to Maya discuss her life growing up “underexposed” without books or library in rural segregated Mississippi, I was struck by the bookcases and coffee table filled with books and family pictures. When her three-year old came up to meet me, her pride in describing her efforts to “escape poverty” and live “better so my children can live better” was evident.

Jolene’s house, even without the bustle right now of taking care of her sister with cancer or her Dad when he needed constant care, had the essence of an active house that could casually and easily incorporate many people. One could quickly see their active life style of sports, full time career people and graduate students and picture all of them cooking at one time in the well-stocked kitchen and eating together at the dining room table where we sat for our interview.

Many talked of the importance of home. This sense of home was more of a sense I got from our conversations when they were conducted in their offices or mine. I have a strong sense of the value of affiliation in Julie’s old Victorian home where she described “a room of her own” in the uppermost level. This home is always full of her family. Her husband was there full time home schooling their boys until the crisis changed their lives and the boys had to go to school.

We had all been very very close, all of us as a family. I mean we would all go to the grocery store together, we would all go to the gym together, we would all go on vacations...we would go cross country...[in a] van and we’d camp and we were very tight.

Natalie talked of the preciousness of home where her husband is a wonderful support with their two small children. She chose not to go into a private law practice in order to protect her sense of home:

...that solid base...helps me when I leave this very stressful job. I have a little fantasy that I become another person. And I do use another name for my home life. I don't use my maiden name at home and I don't use my married name at work. So my clients can't find me at home and I don't deal with my clients at home except in an emergency situation. It's almost a fantasy that I become another person. I go home and I'm a mother and I deal with my children. And I'm very demanding about myself as a mother. I try to keep my house nice and I try to be a different persona when I'm at home than I am in court.

Pilar discussed the homes she bought and lost due to financial struggles and the pride she now has in owning this one herself. Graziella talked of the many homes they lived in as they moved around for her husband to find work. One of her favorites was when they were able to put their trailer in the middle of an acre of land in the country and grow vegetables and have animals for the kids like her husband had growing up in Mexico. Julie talked about the importance of "a room of her own" in the "attic level" of her house.

Josephine described her home as nurturing and:

rough and tumble and loud with dogs and kids and their friends who are always welcome. We may have seven kids for dinner. The house has a sense of disorder, people come and go. As long as they're there, the disorder doesn't matter...The activity level in my house has been nurturing to me.

In discussing a sense of home, many of the participants talked about a larger landscape, a context for strength and enduring, that came from their family history. They had an evolutionary sense of time, growth and change that progressed from previous generations through their family life cycle.

A sense of the family legacy.

The family legacy provides a large tapestry for the women to seek possibilities for affiliation. Many participants described family legacies and told multigenerational stories as they related their sources of strength. Walsh suggested that positive multigenerational stories "can inspire hope and courageous action in the face of adversity" (p. 54, 1998b).

Natalie began her interview with a story of a family legacy that has been a source of strength to her when she faced the loss of a relationship, overcame academic challenges, and three miscarriages:

My family is a family of very resilient people down through history. Tremendous adversity. My mother grew up in France. She was 18 during World War II. She was in the French Underground. She did all kinds of things that were very dangerous and exciting. My father was a conscientious objector during World War II and actually went to jail as a conscientious objector, got a presidential pardon and came over Omaha Beach as a medic. He was given a pardon on the condition that he be a medic and he was willing to do that. He just didn't want to carry a gun. And that's how he met my mother. So the adversity of World War II for them. My mother actually escaped the Nazis. She wore a yellow star because her mother had Jewish blood. And they were taken to a train that was bound for Auschwitz and they talked the guard out of putting them on the train. And they got away and everyone on the train was gassed to death. So adversity is part of my family history and overcoming it is just part of our way of life.

Discussing the challenge of a divorce that was not her choice when she had two small children, Lisa also found strength in the heritage of her family:

But when I look at the history of my people and I do feel strongly as a Jew, we survive a lot. And there is something within our culture that has you survive. We often do it with humor, we often do it by yelling and screaming. But there is a survival in our culture. And that may be a piece of it. I guess I was surrounded and grew up with survivors. Not directly in the holocaust necessarily. But I grew in a very Jewish area, Jewish schools. And we survived. We make water out of the desert. We just do it.

Josephine, drew on the strength of her family legacy as she struggled with the acknowledgement of her husband's infidelities:

I learned strength from my family. It is modeling and the history of African American women. There is an underlying assumption, like the underground railroad. You go where you need to go when you come to an obstacle. I embraced my own weaknesses. I allowed myself to grieve. To grieve aspects of the marriage that have been lost. I don't feel unsafe anymore. I acknowledge now and don't put on the blinders now as I did before.

Beth was struggling with a decision to leave an important job and dealing with the fear that her professional career and reputation was crashing. She acknowledged that her values of "if things get rough, you find a way to survive" might not be congruent with the goals of the organization. She described the work ethic she grew up with:

I have to say I grew up with a very strong work ethic...my mother is from a family, a clan that were Germans, but they lived in Russia. that group of people have an extremely high work ethic to the point that that's your value to the community... how hard you work and what you contribute in work. Not necessarily scholarly work, but work, work. And so because of that, I think from her, the gift I have perhaps is just a really hard work ethic.

A sense of community.

In addition to the affiliation the women found in a sense of their own home and that of their family legacy, many discussed the importance of affiliation in their community. Community was used by Blieszner and Adams to refer “to a group of people who are connected to one another...by a web of interpersonal relationships” (p.117, 1992). Community was a source of strength in the spiritual resilience of older women in the research of Ramsey and Blieszner. They described community at its most basic level as the daily environment that provides companionship, friendship and resources such as spiritual and practical assistance, role models and teachers (1999, p. 90).

Carol’s search for community started as a teenager. Having gone to 12 different schools and lived in seven different states and overseas with her military family, Carol remembers always having to make and lose friends. She recalls starting her search for stability and roots as early as 14 years when she decided to become Catholic and dedicate her life to God.

I had a real clear idea of what I was looking for in sisters. I wanted sisters who had come from a community that had existed for at least several hundred years so they would be stable. A stable sense of identity. They needed to be traditional and have the long habit because it reflected certain values that I agreed with. And I was a very conservative Catholic. I was very practical. The third thing was that they should be warm and loving.

Graziella left the state and community she had grown up in and where all of her family lived after her husband lost his job and was on unemployment. I thought of the importance of community as Graziella described the relationships they forged in her husband’s home country of Mexico where they moved in search of work and less expensive housing while she was expecting their third child.

We lived in Mexico for eight years which was probably one of the happiest times of my life. We had no family but we had lots of neighbors that were more than family to us. My home was the home that everybody came to for advice. Who knows why, but I was like the hen with all these little chickens around...But for some reason they all enjoyed coming to my home. All the kids would get together and they'd have lots of fun outside my home. It was just a fun fun time in my life. It was just a great experience.

Also because of moves with her husband's work, Jolene found it necessary to build a sense of community in several countries.

From Australia we went to Germany, then we moved to Denmark, then to Canada. We had lots of experiences, we really have. Some good, some bad. Most of them good, I can truthfully say. Some of the posts were kind of hard because they were anti-American. Most of the friends were those we found out in the community. I became pretty active in a lot of the communities so that I could pull both sides together for the kids' sake as well as ours. We were gone a total of about 15 years. Most of those times weren't really that difficult, sometimes you felt the isolation because you weren't near family when you'd come back. You're totally isolated and don't know what's going on and people don't think to write and tell you either.

Julie described several different communities and the increased appreciation she found for a sense of community during her struggle with cancer.

I'm in a number of different communities. I'm in the neighborhood community, I'm in a work community. There are other communities. I went to the health club for over 20 years and there was a community of women there that were just tremendously supportive and caring. My work organization has about a thousand employees. I got over 600 get well cards. It was a flooding and it was wonderful. I got messages from people that I didn't even know that well who said things that were very comforting. On my street, I don't think that I cooked a meal from that December until around March. The neighbors just sort of on their own developed a circuit of preparing dinner. So much so that my kids really didn't want them to know that I was getting to the point where I could cook again. [laughs] Because every night it was sort of a surprise and it was wonderful. So that sense. A lot of people would come to me when I recovering from the cancer and starting the chemo and they would say, "Oh it's really bad". And I thought, yes it is. Certainly I'm not going to try and see it through rose colored glasses, but there were so many pluses. That stronger sense of community and appreciating more where I lived, where I worked, who I knew, because of this. It was just wonderful in that respect. So I think that community, companionship that I got from everybody. That's important.

Karen wanted a community for herself and her children when she sought religion for her children.

My father was an atheist and my mother was an agnostic and we lived in this ghetto and I wanted my children to have a community. I wanted them to be raised [with religion] for the community....So I was the one to take them to services....My husband is pleased that I do that, but he stays away.

Facilitative Beliefs

The second branch of belief systems that are at the heart of resilience involves one's core facilitative or positive beliefs. Core beliefs are the "beliefs that matter" within the significant events in our lives according to Wright, Watson and Bell (1996, p. 43) and are made up of both facilitative beliefs and constraining beliefs. They defined constraining

beliefs as those that “decrease solution options to problems; facilitative beliefs increase solutions options” (1996, pp.42-43). All of the participants described beliefs that were both helpful and facilitating, and also those that were constraining and often perpetuated their problems or restrained their options. For this research I listened for the facilitative beliefs, those that facilitated resilience. The facilitative beliefs and outlooks that the participants discussed include a sense of inner trust, initiative and perseverance, hope, optimism and a sense of humor, a sense of choice and independence, and creativity and generativity. These beliefs proved vital for the resilience participants needed to withstand and rebound from adversity (Walsh, 1998b). A sense of inner trust, or a belief in themselves, was discussed by many of the participants as basic to help them make sense of their beliefs and the adversity they struggled to overcome.

A sense of inner trust.

This sense of inner trust is a belief that the ability to influence one’s own life resides inside oneself was expressed by many women. This internal locus of control was discussed by Dr. Herbert J. Lefcourt in Wolin and Wolin (1993) as the belief “that the ability to influence your life resides inside you [and]...can defeat the forces outside that threaten to bring you down” (p. 139).

Carol described an “inner star” that guided her first major life challenge:

I think when I look back on my experience as a sister, what drew me to be a sister was my inner conviction that I was called. That this was meant to be and this was the way that I was supposed to go in life. It’s been an amazing thing that I have had that inner trust. Just as I was talking about this I realized that this was true. It’s like I had my own inner star to guide me.

Maya, thinking over the lack of resources and encouragement in her early life, also discussed a strength that has to come from oneself:

I truly believe that there are things within us that help us achieve. That you achieve on your own. No parent, no sibling, no friend can do that. That there's just something that's in you that you are born with, that gives you the ability to transcend whatever your surroundings are.

Sadie described her fear about the decision to leave her marriage as “heart thumping scary” and found that she was helped by believing in herself:

Believing in myself, listening to that inner voice that told me the things that made sense to me. So just trusting myself more and more. Finding my own strengths. I think I do have a really strong resilience and inner strength. I think that comes from, in some part, self confidence. And why I got that I don't know. I think my mom must have in large part loved me and believed in me.

Sadie did not think she had always trusted herself as much as she does now and suggested:

If I had trusted myself, I would have had a healthier relationship with my husband. I would have been able to speak up. I think that in many ways I did speak up for myself, but whenever it was a big family decision or an economic decision, it was always his.

Josephine discussed the trust she now has in herself:

I'll know what I need to do. I'll trust what I need to do when I need to do it. I just do it.

Lillian sees herself as forward moving and thinks her inner strength helped her make the transition from El Salvador. Lillian's inner strength, combined in large part with initiative, helped her when she left home alone to come to the United States and persevered through many obstacles to make it.

I look forward. I never look back. It was a leap of faith. I have an inner strength. I wanted to be here so badly.

When Julie looked back on her experience she concluded:

So in a way what I got out of the last three years has been, you're on your own and it is your life. And you can't depend, I mean, I've had wonderful friends, and my husband truly loves me. That made me realize, well, one's strength has to come from oneself to a large degree....But it's hard for me to divorce that inner strength from all the other things.

Some of the "other things" Julie and the other participants described were additional facilitative beliefs, spiritual beliefs, relationships, and resources. In addition to the sense of inner trust, the other facilitative beliefs the participants discussed included initiative and perseverance, optimism and humor, a sense of choice and independence, and creativity and generativity.

Initiative and perseverance.

Initiative is the term used by Wolin and Wolin (1993) for assertiveness, taking charge of one's problems, exerting control and stretching oneself in demanding tasks. Initiative

seemed to go hand in hand in this study with perseverance. Perseverance is defined by Walsh (1998) as a sense of tenacity that often appears to be stubbornness, struggling well, bouncing back from failure, and finding pride in one's endurance. The participants discussed a sense of being goal oriented and the value of a focus to keep on going.

Josephine described her perseverance in handling the losses when she was leaving home.

I think it was doggedness, it was stubbornness, it was pride. It was just sort of an automatic one foot in front of the other. There weren't choices other than to alternately succeed and to prove that I was okay. I didn't give myself much room to consider any other options at that point.

Lisa recalled her perseverance during the loss of her marriage.

What got me through? The first reaction that comes to me is that I get stubborn. And a piece of me just says if you think I won't make it, I'll show you. But I don't live that day to day. And I think when my first husband sort of indicated that I probably wouldn't survive without him or he thought I wouldn't, is when that kicked in and I'll show you. It wasn't my choice for that marriage to end.

Since Natalie did not see herself as a good student, she thought it was her sense of endurance that got her through law school and the bar exam.

I just did it. I just endured. I endured. It wasn't easy. And I wasn't a good student in law school. I was an older woman. I was 28 when I started and most of the kids were right out of college and very good students. And I'd been sort of marginal and... I didn't do well in exams, but I persevered and I got through and I passed the bar exam....Endure was one of the words they used when they were helping us prepare for the bar exam. The bar exam, for me and I think for a lot of people, was an overwhelming kind of thing to think that if you don't pass this test, you don't get to be a lawyer. And you get a few more times to do it, and if you still can't pass it, you have to wait years before you're allowed to try again. And I was absolutely petrified with the thought that I'm not smart enough and I'm not going to be able to pass the test. But what they said was just endure. Just do it. Just do it. And that's all I did. You just do it and don't think about how overwhelming it is. Because if you think too much about how overwhelming it all is then I think you lose the ability to cope.

Maya describes the essence of initiative and perseverance when she discusses always having to come from behind, taking the initiative to be one of few, and the sense of pride she gets from staying in the game.

You just have to do it to survive. You just have to do it. I applied for and ended up going to the FBI Academy. So I did that and here again I'm in a situation, one of few. That was such a ... culture shock. There were two...black female agents out of the class of 40. You got the good old boys. It was a male dominated organization. And here I am this little hokey girl from Mississippi in with these people. I did it. You know

you've got physical fitness, you've got firearms to do. I'd never held a gun. I think I'm smart, I think I'm fast. I went through a lot of shame because I was always the slowest runner. I stuck it out. You know I always had to overcome being behind. I kept myself in that type of situation. Always one or the only one of a few. I made it through that. But that was a really tough three months. The toughest three months of my life. I did okay. And I just always had to struggle. I always had to make up my own rules. Or then get into the game and then figure out the rules. That's my theme in life. Get into the game and then figure the rules out later. And that's tough....Maybe there's a little ego in it. You know that, I'm just as good as anybody else, so why can't I do this? I guess I like the challenge, too. I guess I like the challenge and I really want to feel a part of the bigger world. And you can't feel that way if you stay in your house and you stay closed off from the world. You have to take risks and maybe I like taking risks, even though I never looked at myself as that type of person. But maybe that's what I'm doing.

Pilar also provided a vivid description of initiative and perseverance as she described saving money to pay for having her baby and getting out of her abusive marriage.

I got real stubborn. I'm a real stubborn person anyway. I paid the baby ahead of time, too. I don't know how I did it. I paid the baby ahead of time so I could have it.... I started making plans. I said I'm going to finish my school. Get a job and at that point you do what you have to do. So I finished school.... He still continued to do his thing. I didn't tell him that I was getting ready to leave. Cause I had already starting putting some money aside for another apartment for me and the kids. And this beauty shop where I was working. I didn't make very much money. I got everything ready to move and I told him, I'm leaving. He thought I was going to let him come with me. I didn't. And that was it. Beauty school took ten months, I had a job and I got my own apartment. The kids were with me and so I lived there and I worked in the beauty shop. But I couldn't make it at that point, cause my husband wouldn't help me with support. I wasn't making very much at the beauty shop. I just paid my rent and that was it... I kept my payments up, and I did whatever I had to do. There were times that ... all I had money for was to buy potatoes and cereal. And flour to make tortillas. We lived on potato burritos and cereal for breakfast. And for me, just potato burritos. For a long time. Because we didn't have enough money to buy groceries because I was so busy paying the bills and existing and living. So I got a job [at night] working at the bar. First time ever. I never even go to the bars.

Finding pride in her endurance, Pilar exclaimed:

I have lots of pride. Definitely lots of pride.[laughs]...Sometimes it's an advantage and sometimes it's not...It makes me do well. Yeah. That's right. I came out of it thinking, you know, I can do better. I can do better. And I continue to think that way. I continue to think, you know what, there's always better. Yeah, I'm still here.

Hope, optimism, and humor.

Sustaining hope, optimism and a sense of humor were essential to the women as they rose above their challenges. They talked about the importance of future oriented beliefs, a positive, optimistic orientation, and a sense of humor. Wright, Watson, and Bell quoted Norman Cousins, "What we believe is the most powerful option of all" (1996, p. 5) and

discussed the tremendous effect optimism and hope have on individual's experiences. They defined hope as the ability to focus on the future in the face of a crisis. As the participants told stories of hope and optimism in the middle of challenge, their sense of humor was obvious. This sense of humor or what Wolin and Wolin (1993) described as finding the comic in the tragic seemed to make hope and optimism more possible for many of the participants.

Graziella described how important a positive belief system was for her when her husband was out of work, and they had to sell their house and move when she was expecting their third small child.

You just need to think positive. And just hope for the best.... You don't think backward. You need to think forward. I think so, I think so. My mother has always been real positive also. I don't think she's negative at all. You know if she hears that someone's having problems, like my sisters or myself, she doesn't tell us leave him, leave the bum. She does the same thing I did when my daughter called me. You just need to be calm and patient, sit down and work things out. I always look forward.

Sadie's optimism sustained her during the worst time of her life when her children moved out to be with their dad because they were so angry with her for separating from him. As he was encouraging them to stay with him to "have the perfect family [because] your mother's crazy" she describes her friends' reaction:

My friends went nuts, they were saying you can't let this happen. You have to do something. Go fight for them. And I said, I don't have to. I know who I am and I know who they are. And I just kept in touch with them on a daily basis. And if they didn't respond, I just would write them letters, I would call and leave messages on the phone. I kept in constant touch when they were at their dad's. After about four to six months gradually they started coming back more and more. And fortunately by the time we divorced everybody was in agreement that the kids should be spending equal time with both of us.

Meg's optimism got her through the day-to-day challenges of dealing with her husband's early Alzheimer's.

I think one of the things that's hard with this thing with [husband] is will I have a time after that. I've thought some about what I might do, but I don't know. He's had it much slower than most people do. I mean will the next 20 years be tied up with it? Am I going to be 80 and still dealing with it? Will there be times in my life that I can be freer of it again? So I think that's hard. But recently I've started thinking about if he went to a nursing home, where do I want to live, and thinking about what would be fun, kind of where would I want to live. So there are at least some thoughts of moving beyond this.

Meg finds a sense of humor helps both of them even as she acknowledges her 60 year old husband's increasing disability. She related a story of a recent incident when she took him shopping at a popular home furnishing store in their community.

I lost him in the store and went to find him. He was by the front door, standing in front of a mirror and seemed to be talking to himself. At first I was embarrassed and looked around to see if anybody we knew was there. I ask him if he'd been talking to someone. When he pointed to the man in the mirror, I said, that's you in the mirror. He seemed embarrassed and I said, I can understand why you would talk to yourself. You're a very interesting person and you have a lot of interesting things to tell yourself.

Thinking about the challenges of her marriage and her son's bipolar disease, Josephine put it succinctly: "Humor is so important! When I lose my sense of humor its all over."

Others talked about the importance of humor. Natalie, discussing the trauma of being fired after taking time off during her mother's heart surgery, related:

In fact the first day of my next job was really strange. I actually threw up [laughs]. I couldn't even make it to the bathroom. I threw up in the trash can. Fortunately it was lined with plastic and I just closed it up and took it to the bathroom and threw it away. Nobody even knew. But I actually was physically ill and so upset about getting another job and having it not work out. And my friends from law school teased me about "Natalie can't keep a job" and now they look back and say I've had this job for eight years. This is stability for me.

Natalie also talked about the importance of humor to handle disagreements and money issues in her marriage:

Yeah, we talk. We communicate and we disagree and we have our little themes and issues. One of our issues is he always wants to know how much money I'm spending. He always thinks I'm spending too much. So if it's a big deal that he doesn't like it, he wants to know what did you spend for it? And I'll tell him, I spent ten million dollars because a long time ago we had a bet for ten million dollars that I won. [laughs]. So he owes me ten million. [laughs] There's humor. Yeah, there's humor. There's more humor than there used to be. We're better at that.

Sadie also had recommendations for humor in a relationship as she reflected on making the same mistakes her 78-year-old mother did in marriage and getting a divorce at the same age:

I think that if you start honoring each other and laughing with each other, then you can start making more of a connection. I think we just get behind our little shield and take ourselves too seriously, take each other too seriously.

Julie's sense of humor was obvious in a story of a time she and her husband were walking into town when he became so depressed because of her cancer.

Oh, yeah. I remember [laughs] thinking shit, I hope no one I know is walking down the street right now because we were walking down [street] and he was so depressed and I couldn't say I had a headache...He was so obsessed with this, so obsessed with this.... every time something came up or he read an article, it would just floor him. So we were walking down [street] and something was said and he went into this "I'm going to lose you." And I said, "Look this is my life you're talking about. I'm sick of this. Get a life yourself." And we had this explosion. Well it was mostly me exploding. He was so upset with my reaction, but I think it sort of brought him out of it and gradually he is dealing with it better and better. And now with humor again, he's back in control again.

Julie's sense of humor was also vital to her decisions how on to deal with the physical effects of breast cancer:

A sense of humor helps. There were a lot of things. I used to be a D cup, a 34D cup. I was big...I had the other breast removed because I didn't want to look like a Cyclops.[laughs] And also I had a number of friends who had the one and then had the other, even though it's not related. So there a lot of jokes about that and people bought me tops that were for more of a twiggy type....And I think that helped, the sense of humor.

When she needed her dad's help for her son, after her mother went in the nursing home, Donna's sense of humor helped her deal with her father as he learned to help with child care for her autistic son.

So, that's a lot of responsibility. I'm not making excuses. It's just that men sometimes are a little slower [laughs] than women, I think. [laughing] Well, it's like a brick wall and you have to keep chiseling, like that guy is doing out there {brick work is being done on the building across the street from my office}. Just keep chiseling and maybe they will get it, the responsibility. But he, like right now, today, he takes pride and joy in his grandchildren and his great grands.

A sense of choice and independence.

A sense of having choice and independence involves what Stewart (1994) described as women's personal efficacy or control, or a sense of agency (p. 21). Many of the participants discussed the choices they made, accepting what they could not or did not choose to change, and mastering what they could change. Walsh (1998b) discussed mastery in terms of process wherein although one "may not be able to control the outcome of events...they can makes choices and find meaningful ways to participate actively in the *process* of unfolding events" (p. 68). Choice often involved being able to speak without

hesitation or free oneself from a restrictive structure. Other participants described learning to be independent, resourceful, organized, and self-sufficient through the choices they made which often included education and hard work. Estes suggested independence is “often best served and supported in good measure by deliberate interdependence with a community of other souls....based on blood ties, sometimes dictated by choice, sometimes by necessity” (1993, p. 28).

Julie talked about the decision she made, without wavering, to have both breasts removed and six months later a hysterectomy.

The reason losing a breast or breasts was not as problematic for me as maybe it is for other women. For one thing I really wanted to live. And I still really want to live! I would do anything to make it to 100! I would do anything to make it to 100. I really want to live! So anything that, cosmetic or physical appearance, or whatever that would threaten that ability to live. That's to me, I guess a basic identifier for me. I really enjoy life! I really really enjoy life! I wake up every morning looking forward to it. And I realize that, you know, at some point we're all going to die. But I really enjoy life. And I think that is what helped me make decisions like that. What is it that might constrain my enjoying life? Well obviously getting sick and dying. So anything that I could do to prevent that, I would do. That was a major problem for me. When I hit 50 and got this cancer.

Julie's husband who was both afraid and supportive said, “You don't need boobs. You've already breast fed the kids.” Julie doesn't wear any padding and likes that she doesn't have to wear a bra now. Although she was “on all fours” for a few days after getting “zapped with that horrible cocktail,” Julie states that has “felt great since then. Really really great.”

While Julie has a sense of having licked her cancer, Meg's challenge with her husband's illness goes on and on. She has to continually appraise her husband's Alzheimer's, knowing she will have to make increasingly hard choices that will affect their individual independence and relationship.

I'm thinking about my fears....And I think I certainly have gone through periods with [husband] of feeling like I'm old before my time. There's an, “I can't do things,” thwarted. And still when I look ahead I have recognized some resilience and hardiness. When I look ahead to the next step in what it's going to mean in his life and my life as he gets worse and the idea of having to round up somebody to come and stay and moving toward him really being incapacitated. It's like there's a part of me that thinks I don't know if I can. Part of me says I'll find a way through it so I'm not about to kill myself over it. But there's also an unease or a not wanting to go through it, I think,

which I think is pretty normal....I think at this point that's what worries me the most. Every time I get a glimpse of that...when I call home or go home and he's not really functioning. I get that sense of fear, of not wanting to face what's ahead, not wanting to go through that. With my Dad's death there was a permanent loss....One of the things that's hard with [husband] is that it's a permanent loss, but it goes on and on and on. It doesn't have a finite end or where you kind of finish with it, grieve it, and then go on with your life. You just kind of keep dragging it along.

Josephine has worked to put her husband's sexual addiction behind her as much as possible and move on, although like Meg, there is much that she also has to drag along with her. She thinks it may have been easier to become independent of her husband, but made the choice to stay in the marriage for the sake of their children and the family life they built together over the last 25 years.

I was in a group for co-dependents of sex addictsI am one of the few who have stayed married..... I took AIDS tests every three or four months.... We are not sexual. I am celibate now and do not monitor his behavior. It's a bummer to be 45 and celibate, but what's important in my life now is that we're better friends. We used to talk about how he was doing, but we don't now. I think of him as a kind, good man with a problem. We are putting more into the children. We have both decided to do good things for ourselves, even if we didn't come together. We both wanted to be healthier and less co-dependent now in the relationship aspects of life. I say It's not about you. This is about me.

A sense of choice in how the participants responded to their challenges was apparent as they discussed changing what they could and accepting what they could not. This was obvious in the "title" Josephine chose for her narrative:

If I had to title this, it would be grace under fire. Or choices. A lot of circumstances have been imposed upon me, but I can still choose how I behave and how I respond. I would like to think that even if I didn't have the financial or educational resources, I would respond the same way. If I got hit by a truck today, I would have lived a life, not just survived.

Lien talked about her choices and the pain of giving up, at least temporarily, the dreams that had motivated her to make the dangerous escape from Saigon:

I was 24 when I got pregnant. I was so disappointed, so disappointed. I didn't want to be pregnant. I was crying. Because I haven't finished school. And my husband almost finished school. He didn't come home often, so I was pretty much alone at that time. During pregnancy he was in [university city] for two years after we married. So I only saw him some weekends.

I'm not really regret now that that I didn't finish school. Because my dream is I want to open my own business. A beauty salon, I need some money to do that. But I've been thinking. My kids are still small and my mom's still at home. She getting old. That's why I give up to open my own business right now, I'm okay.

When Natalie was fired from her job and struggling with past pain, she made a choice to help others deal with their pain.

I had a job with an attorney that did not go well because I just didn't get along with her. And it was sort of a repeat of all my anxieties from my school years of feeling that I wasn't very smart. Because she was always telling me that I wasn't very smart, and I missed this and I missed that and it was all my fault. She made me feel very bad. I wasn't going to quit, but she fired me. My mother had a heart attack. My employer said to me she couldn't understand why I didn't go straight to my mother, leave right then, and yet she also gave me all this work to do. So that I couldn't leave right then. It was so cruel of her to attack me on both ends that way....It was right when I came back from going to help my mother...she fired me.

Natalie now works with less fortunate families and teaches them what she learned about mastering what they can change and accepting what they can't change.

The work I do now represent parents who are having their children taken awayI'm an attorney who helps parents dealing with issues of custody. I try to help parents through that most horrible experience of losing their children to the government because, they say they're not good parents I tell them to just do one day at a time and not get overwhelmed by all the facts and all the circumstances, but just do your best everyday to get through it. And then you can at least say, well, I did my best. I tried. And don't get overwhelmed with all the pain of it. And that's what I tell my clients. And I see with my clients that the ones who get caught in the "How did this happen?" How did it happen that they took my children, how could they have done that? But once you get too caught up in that, they can't muster the energy to move on and do what they need to move ahead.

Although Graziella's own sense of choice and independence continues to be limited by her lack of education, she works hard to keep the young women she works with in school. She completed her GED after her third daughter started school and is planning to go back to school for LPN training when her children are raised.

One thing that I do with these girls that come in at such a young age when they tell me that they're not in school, I really do push the school. I tell them, you don't know what you're missing. You're going to do it for you family. You're not doing it for yourself. You're doing it for your family. Now that you're going to have this baby, do it for your baby. And so a lot of them do go back to school, to finish high school.

The participants' narratives told of mastering what they could in their challenges and accepting what they could not. They talked of their choices and the meaningful ways they participated in their challenges. They incorporated their challenges into their lives, as another thread they included in the pattern of their life tapestry.

Creativity and generativity.

A sense of creativity was apparent as the participants discussed their choices as they made meaning of their challenges and integrated them into the patterns of their lives. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) defined creativity as a central source of meaning in our lives that happens in the interaction between one's thoughts and their sociocultural context. Generativity was discussed by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) in the Eriksonian sense as a defining task of the middle years. Generativity, in addition to leaving children, refers to "leaving one's ideas, values, knowledge and skills to the next generation. It is much easier to come to terms with one's mortality when one knows that parts of oneself will continue to live on" (p. 199). This allows us to bring together a meaningful story of our past and present and provides "a sense of connection, of continuity that keeps despair at bay" (p. 225). The participants' generativity was strong as they discussed surviving and doing well for their children. Walsh (1998b) suggested that our imagination has the potential to move us beyond our adversity and often open up our creative selves. Many of the participants described finding creative new paths and possibilities out of their adversity. They used their creativity to impose order, beauty and purpose in their lives. In the language of solution oriented therapy, these women creatively reframed past experiences, family myths and stories in order to move on.

Sadie's creative inspiration came out ten years ago in response to a change and restlessness she noticed within herself, the unhappiness with her marriage and her sister's impending death to AIDS.

When I really started awakening, I think there were parts of me that were very alive and very alert. But there were once definitely dormant parts. And when those dormant parts started awakening, that's when I had to start writing....I'm a poet. It sustains me because it's creative, and it sustains me because it's how I process information, both the beauty and the drudge. Not until around 1989 did I start really writing. And then with no other purpose than to express myself to myself. Or to others, other loved ones. But it still continues to sustain me and it's exciting for me because I did not choose poetry. It chose me. It's easier for me to speak in slices, I guess. Or to capture a moment or a time. I have all those journals up there. And I teach writing in middle school. So that's how I'm also sustained. Because I'm passing on what I love. Literature, writing it, reading it.

This are other things I do with my journal. It is like a scrapbook of my life. I go through one about every six months or so. I keep money in case the kids have a bake sale at school. Letters. I always decorate it with postcards, favorite quotations. Pictures of my family.. it could be anything, I write almost on a daily basis. A lot of it is not very monumental or has much import, but it's a log and I can use this stuff and go back to it [looking through journal]. Wrote about family, children, my work and my art which are both the same. I also love to quilt. I love to cook and garden.

Sadie's creativity in her poetry was obvious to me, but as I started thinking about how it might reside in and help others who did not discuss artistic inclinations, I saw the participants creativity come out in how they re-envisioned themselves. Discussing creativity, Walsh suggested that "our imaginations can transport us beyond our crisis situation and can enable us to envision new possibilities and illuminate pathways out of our dilemmas" (1998, p. 73). I saw Carol's discussion of her three year struggle regarding whether she should she stay or leave the convent as creatively reframing her challenge.

When I was 27 I went on a retreat. During that retreat a new idea came into my mind that this might not be a temptation, but it might actually be God leading me. And maybe I was meant to leave, that there were other things I needed to learn in life. That I needed to grow more and that this was just not the right time or place for me to be a sister. And that I was meant to leave, that there were things I had needed to learn from the sisters and had learned. I had learned a great deal of inner discipline, dedication, prayer life....A conviction grew in me that I was meant to leave. And when that conviction grew so that I could recognize that and recognize that it could be possible that God had led me in and could be leading me out. Then it became possible for me to leave and to leave with some degree of inner peace about it.

It also seemed to me that Beth used creativity to reframe and envision new possibilities as she made sense of her choice to leave the organization that caused her so much angst.

I felt better as I could see that it was kind of like time was like in God's hands. You know? [crying] And if I had opportunities before, I probably wouldn't have been successful. I just wasn't ready. For someone who lived somewhat of a frenetic life, being ready is not something, you know I kind of really pay attention to. Although I should a lot more, I know. For me that's a lesson learned....In hind sight you could kind of see how kind of your time is in God's hands and it's kind of when He's ready. When He knows you're ready....But I've always thought God really likes me and I just kind of feel takes care of me. And sometimes protects me from myself....Sometimes God protects us from ourselves. And sometimes I think that that's what happens for me. He kind of protects me from me. [laughs] Sounds kind of silly but I think that's kind of what happens. As I got some confidence back. I said well you know it's not necessarily you that was having a difficult time in the organization. Maybe that system wasn't a good match for me, maybe it was just too discordant. Maybe I had too much cognitive dissonance.

Discussing creative inspiration, Walsh (1998b), found that resilient persons make the best of situations by seeing new possibilities. Jolene grew up being told she was unable to learn.

I basically came from a family where my Mom thought only one of us girls ever had the brains to do anything and she only encouraged the youngest one. I was the middle child. So she always encouraged my sister to be the one to go to college. I was left handed and her idea was left handed people can't learn. I proved her wrong. [laughs]

Jolene's story of learning German and Danish while living in those countries so she could speak fluently and be part of the community and then with a friend establishing university classes so she could go to college stuck me as a wonderful example of creative inspiration and generativity.

We set up University of Maryland classes. She had a master's degree so she could teach. So I went down to Germany and got the University of Maryland to put a branch in Denmark. And she was the teacher. But we had to insure that we had fifteen students for each class. So all the marines that were at the American Embassy I got to take the classes as well as anybody on the economy. So I found the fifteen people so I could take classes while I was there. And that lasted about three years before we got transferred then to Canada. So I got three years of classes.

Transcendent and Spiritual Beliefs

The third branch of belief systems that are at the heart of resilience are one's spiritual beliefs. Transcendent and spiritual beliefs provide meaning and purpose beyond ourselves and our adversities. Wright, Watson, and Bell suggest it is important "to make a distinction between religion, which is extrinsic, and spirituality, which is intrinsic. *Spirituality* generally refers to a personal belief in...a supreme being...within or outside formal religious structures....*Religion* includes shared, usually institutionalized values and beliefs about God and implies involvement in a religious community" (1996, p.30). It is a system of values and beliefs that transcends the limits of our knowledge and experience and allows for hope as we try to make sense of our challenges. This greater meaning is often met through our spiritual faith (Walsh, 1998b).

Many of the participants were active in an organized religious faith; others spoke of personal and transcendent beliefs and practices. For most of the participants, spirituality

was a significant theme in their narratives of healing and rising above their challenges, but for Carol and Beth, their spirituality was also a part of the challenge.

Carol was seeking self-identity, life stability and a purpose for her life when she entered the convent at age 17.

I became a seeker. I was looking for roots, interior roots. Because I could not find my roots by place, it had to be like inside myself. The way I found inner stability was through religious connection. My connection to God and to those convictions I had come to. And so those convictions have been a guide to me through out my life. That experience was a foundation for me.

So the decision to leave when she was 28 was a huge loss of identity and many of the significant threads Carol had searched for ten years earlier.

The hardest part for me was taking off my habit and putting on civilian clothes. That told me it was really over. I'd lost an important part of who I was. I'd lost my identity. I didn't know who I was and what I was supposed to be doing with my life. I only knew I had to leave and that was extremely difficult. [crying]. And what truly drove me out of the convent I think was that inner conviction. It wasn't like I knew. I had not like thought things through, but I was responding from my emotion. It was my emotional self that was driving me out of there even though I had left knowing that was what I should do. To me it felt like I was walking out in darkness. I just didn't know what I was supposed to be doing with my life.

Beth had also been a very religious person and gone to church throughout her life. Religion had always been an important part of her life. But she found when she was going through the "political mess" in her career, she was also in the middle of an "organizational discordance" at her church where she was an active board member. So at the time, instead of being able to fall back on her religion for strength, it was an additional challenge in her life and she ended up changing churches in the middle of it all the chaos of her personal and professional life.

I didn't have a relationship with a minister at that point. It was kind of self study kind of thing....I like to study and I like to study the Bible and I like to look at it in different aspects and I like to be stimulated. But I didn't have time for that. Always, even since I was an adolescent I always did like a daily devotion. But during that year when I leaving the [organization], it kind of ended. And I just felt like I lost faith, like God didn't hear me [crying]. I kind of lost that spirituality.

Donna provides a vivid description of her already strong faith that she really pulled in to raise her autistic son and get her marriage working better for her son's sake, particularly after the loss of her mother's support because of the Alzheimer's.

My strength comes from the spiritual. I learn more by going to church. Understanding certain things. Understanding the word. And listening. I pray for strength and guidance every day. I managed with the other two kids. And then dealing with the child with autism, I had to really pull in my faith.

Up until about a year ago, I felt like I had full responsibility. That's where it came to a point where I wanted to leave the marriage. I didn't say anything, but I did a lot of praying....And I know that things work out if you put your faith in the right place.... that's where God spoke to me and told me to keep still, let him work. So that's what I did and it's working out fine....Then Christ came into my husband's life. Because I kept going to church and I kept praying.

I did a lot of praying and I asked God, if this marriage is right for me, let me know, because I don't want to step out and do anything that was not right. I would feel guilty about it, so far as my son was concerned...And then right after Christ came into his life, he's spending more time with him. And now it's working out where he takes time with him and now he understands very much on what the feelings I'm going through. The faith was always there because I listened. I do a lot of listening to my inner self. The times I want to throw my hands up and say I can't take this no more. And my inner spirit says be still, it's okay, it's okay. You're going to be fine. It's alright. I'm going to be with you, I'm going to walk with you through this. And He has. He has walked through a lot and he's still walking with me today. At times I get overwhelmed, but I feel that it's okay.

Pilar discussed her Catholic faith and the importance of prayer throughout the challenges of her life.

I'm a Catholic. I'm probably not the best Catholic, but I am a Catholic and I pray every day. Every day I live my life and I thank God for it. Cause He's the one who gives me the strength. Cause I know that tomorrow He's the one that's helped me. And I've always said this. I pray and I say, okay I know I don't know what I'm doing, but I know tomorrow you'll open my eyes and I'll see something different. And I will see what You want from me, what my purpose in life is. And the next day I say thank You God for making me wake up and I will go on with my life and continue. That's always been there. I go in the car and say thank You I'm still alive.

Natalie sought to find a structured religion for herself and her children, despite not growing up with it and her spouse's lack of interest, because she was impressed with the strength the families she worked with received from their religion:

I was raised by atheists....I think I've always been somewhat spiritual even though I was raised without religion. I think religion just suits me. I don't know, maybe it's a personality thing. I picked it, I chose it. Working with children and parents I saw how much the church could help the families and I wanted to have that for my children. And I felt that loss as a kid. Everybody else went to Sunday School and I stayed home and watched cartoons. And I felt sort of bad about that. And I wanted my kids to be able to go to church and so my minister father-in-law found me a church that's where I go. And my husband doesn't go. There's no issue. He's not going to go.

Lisa told a powerful narrative of the importance of her Jewish faith as she was struggling to find the strength to provide “a firm foundation” for her children.

It's very strong for me. That sense of commitment and I don't know what's that's all about. And I don't know how much of it is spiritual. That's a part of my exploration now....Part of it is a commitment to my children. It sounds hokey to me, but I have a commitment to life. And I used the words to you before which I never usually think of. I gave my kids life. And I have a commitment to that and that sounds more Biblical than I mean it to, but maybe it is that deep and spiritual. There is that "I've shown you life and I've shown you death. Choose life." You choose life. And I slept walked my way through my young years and I refuse to sleep walk through now. So I learned to live. Gosh, this sounds hokey. This doesn't sound like me at all. But it's there. I never have to verbalize it because it's just in me, you know.

Julie, Josephine, Meg and Sadie also talked about the importance of a sense of spirituality although they are not religious in an organized sense. Julie stated that she had struggled with a sense of religion all her life. She and her husband were both raised Catholic and both turned off by it. She left the church as soon as she was old enough and for a while pursued other established religions and churches, but finds that:

My feeling of the relationship of man and God cannot fit into an institutional formula.... And since then we haven't gone to any church. But I find myself talking to God all the time. I go to bed talking to God. It's not really a prayer, but it is this sense of some supreme being that's benevolent. And that's a comforting thing. I have to say, much of the sense of comfort comes from that.

We walked to the river this morning and back and on the way back, I asked my husband, "What do you think about God"? He said, "I believe in a God or something like a God." Really echoed my own thoughts. We've been together since '69. What is that, 30 years. I guess it's understandable that we think alike about a lot of things. Married about 28 years. But I definitely felt a need as well as a greater rapprochement with some supreme being. That I talk to all the time, and I sort of talk myself out of it. Not out of it, but at the time I remember I walked all the time. My husband walked with me a lot. At the very beginning I would just walk into the woods, you know. Believe it or not there are woods around our neighborhood. I found a bunch of them. There's a wonderful little wooded area and I would go in there and just cry. And I cried and I cried.

As soon as I could I started working out, I started walking. And when I walked, I talked to God. Talked to myself, talked to God. Tried to heal. And it helped. Being outside. The exercise was real important.

I found myself reading the Bible....The kingdom of heaven kind of thing is inside of you. Somewhere in the New Testament it says that. And I think that's true. The kingdom of heaven is inside of you as is whatever hell you may experience.

Sadie, described a strong sense of spirituality in which she was sustained by caring for and with others.

I have such a strong belief that isn't particularly rooted to any denomination or faith, but I think draws from many of them. I believe that we are all God, that we are divine. I believe that every person is divine. I do believe that when we die, when our bodies die, that that's the end of us. Somehow we, the energy, either comes back in another body or, I'm not sure exactly what. Obviously if you've known anyone or loved anyone in your life you're a part of that person. So many ways to look at that. I definitely believe that birth and death are always together and that it is so sad in our society how we separate birth from life and death from life. And everything has to happen in the hospital or a nursing home, you know, put away. My children give me such faith because they give me such faith in the future. I look at their potential and their energy and their direction and I'm so encouraged and so excited, for them and for the world.

Even though Meg's father was a minister and she grew up playing the piano and singing in the church choir, she finds that:

Religion has probably taken a different form than what I was raised with. Although I can't define the old spirituality, I think there's still an aspect of that that makes it more safe or something.

Spirituality was important to Josephine. After learning about her husband's infidelities, she found a therapist with a spiritual perspective and took weekends alone in the country.

She describes:

In my "why me" mode I went to see ministers. Now I find places to be still and listen to my voice. From whatever one calls God, I ask for guidance from that place that is within us all. I rely on my intuition and ask who am I and what is my truth?

Spirituality was more intellectual for me before. Since the [affairs] I have gone deeper and I read a lot. It is a spiritual sense, not religious. It's about turning life over to a higher power. Who is it that said have faith in God, but still tie up your camel. The verse, "Let go, let God" helps me. It forces you to live in the present. I cannot go too far back in the past and not too far in the future.

The participants' beliefs in affiliation, in their own facilitative beliefs and their transcendent spiritual beliefs are what I understood from the stories they shared with me to be the core "beliefs that matter" within the significant relationships and events of their lives. These beliefs described how they made meaning of their experiences and challenges.

Wright, Watson, and Bell suggested that to find meaning in all events that arise in our lives seems to be a basic human need....By being clear about our view of life and...beliefs...we are less threatened by unexpected or unusual experiences" (1996, p. 31). The descriptions shared in this section were the "how" of the research. How did they make sense of their challenge? How did they make sense of their attitudes, values, expectations, abilities? How

did they make sense of significant others in their life? How did these beliefs contribute to their sense of strength and resilience?

Connectedness and Relationships

The participants all spoke of the significant importance of relationships when they discussed how they overcame the challenges and transitions of their lives. Because my second research question ask how challenging experiences influenced their marriage and/or how the experience was affected by their marriage, all participants addressed the role of their marital relationships. They also described the significant importance of friends, family, and children. Connectedness was the term used by Walsh (1998b) to describe the “counterbalance of unity, mutual support and collaboration (p. 85).” Relationship means connection. In order to look at the “centrality of relationships,” Franz, Cole, Crosby, and Stewart (1994) stress that “individuation/agency and connectedness/community are not dichotomous constructs; instead lives are seen in the complex interplay of both” (p. 328). Another important thread in their relationships was their sense of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Marriage

As encouraged by Paul, I was interested in “the importance of the marital relationship for individual well-being” (1997, p. 172). I wanted to learn about the quality of marital relationships and if these relationships contributed to the protective processes found in resilience. The discourse, the stories and narrative, on marriage and its relationship to their resilience was important. Julie discussed the reverberations in the entire family because of her cancer. Because her husband became very depressed and stopped home schooling their children, that whole family system temporarily unraveled and then changed.

We had been very very close, all of us as a family. I mean we would all go to the grocery store together, we would all go to the gym together, we would all go on vacations. My boys were home schooled so we would go cross country in October or April....And we had a van and we'd camp and we were very very tight....My cancer was found on Christmas of 1996 and I was off till mid February. During that whole time the kids were just playing baseball in the back yard. They were not getting any kind of instruction, so we both agreed that it was time for them to go to school. And they went to school in the middle of the school year. And so they were adapting to that,

but [husband] was also adapting to no longer home schooling, not being involved in the home school. And so he started to look for a job. So all of a sudden, all of the stability and all of the continuity, and all of the givens were either gone or jeopardized. And it was a really difficult difficult time. It has been a very difficult time for me. Until about this summer.

I think that my ability to deal with all of this stuff, and I have dealt with it to a greater or lesser degree, at different points. Because it's obviously been a roller coaster. Have a lot to do with the fact that basically my family is a very loving family. My husband is a very loving person. Very genuine person. That's important.

At the same time Beth felt that her professional life was crashing, her marriage also seemed as though it was unraveling. Beth earned a higher income than her husband. When he appeared to be more concerned about their financial status than her mental status, things got rough. As Beth reflected on some of the major threads of their relationship, she found a sense of coherence in the patterns she discovered.

My husband is the oldest in the family of seven. His dad worked two jobs and all that kind of stuff. And I didn't grow up in an affluent family, but there was always enough. I had in my head that he didn't care about me. I felt like he cared about the income I could produce. And we went through some really really rough times. I mean really, it was very very hard. That continued for quite a while.

And actually the reason why I'm still married is, I do love my husband, and we have other than that really stressful time, he's pretty much the glue that kind of holds stuff together. He's very organized. There's a couple of times I said to him during that year and a half, I think maybe we just need to separate. I just don't think I want to do this. I can't. His feeling was that's just not the answer. This is something you work through and you keep at it.

And the way our relationship worked is he isn't a big risk taker at all. He doesn't like risk at all. It makes him very uncomfortable. Where I take a lot of risks. And the two of us together kind of make a pair. Probably doing the reasonable thing. Taking calculated risks....And that's kind of how our marriage ran. My husband, being the oldest child in that kind of a culture where he was expected to have an opinion and kind of lead things. Our marriage had a good kind of tension almost like in a cathedral. I kind of ignored some of what he said, I listened to him. You know I came in and kind of filtered what you thought you should listen to and so it kind of kept him in check and kept me in check. Me from going way off on that end and him from the other end. But I was pretty depressed.

I also feel...getting a little bit more insightful and understanding, that perhaps the difficulty we were having was just the natural role that someone plays in a marriage or in any relationship, had just gotten off balance. And that maybe my accepting that my husband has a set of fears as well....He also mellowed a bit.

Carol also discussed the effect of her career decisions on their marriage.

He and I have been married 20 years in December. Over that time period he was very supportive of me having my career. I was very supportive of him. One of the things

we'd always promised each other was never to seek an assignment away from the other. The [military] could impose it on us and we would have to accept it, but we would not seek it. He didn't want me to take the assignment. It's voluntary to take that assignment, I could turn it down. But if I turned it down it was understood to be the death notice for your career...I did not want to live apart from him, but I did not want to turn the assignment down because I wanted to contend for...the next promotion.

It was during this supportive decision making process that Carol was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she experienced something similar to the sense of finitude discussed by Julie. Carol decided on a launching into third career that would suit her life better for the next twenty years, and made the decision to leave the military with a greater sense of coherence.

Natalie also acknowledged the supportiveness of her husband during her career challenges. She believes it is her resilience, her husband's stability, and their flexibility that helps their marriage, her career, and benefits both of them.

I think it helps my marriage that I'm able to get over things and move on and not get bogged down in the detail of day-to-day problems. I think that my resilience has helped me keep my marriage together. I think that I really get my strength not from my husband so much as from myself. And that helps my marriage and certainly having my marriage makes my life happy and fulfilled and stable... His stability has helped me a lot. His calmness, his not being emotional has helped me. I remember early in the marriage when I would get furious, just so angry about something and he would just be calm and go to bed. And let me have my tantrum. And I don't have my tantrums very much any more because I don't need to. I mean, he's just going to be there and there's no point in doing that any more. I think we've come to an understanding of each other. We have our disagreements and we express them.

My husband sort of goes with the flow. It didn't bother him that we lived apart. He has always wanted me to have a strong career. He's been really big on that and it's funny because his mother was a stay-at-home classic mother....Having a stable marriage and having that solidity, that solid base. It helps me when I leave this very stressful job.

Karen also described a tension in their marriage that worked when she organized an alternative medical regimen for their daughter's chronic illness.

I like the way he resolves issues. And it helps me to learn how to do these things better....My husband, as long as I'm not off the deep end, he'll talk with me and sort of show me where to go if I lose my way. He's a barometer for me and where I'm at. If I feel close to him, then I feel pretty healthy. If I'm floating somewhere off then I know that I'm not healthy, that I'm not in a good spot. So it's a barometer that I need to get back to normal. I just knew that this would probably work. I had the leap of faith that it would work.

I'm very passionate and he's much more reserved. Sometimes I embarrass him with my passion....In his family they had to be somewhat restrained. They don't go for

emotional outbursts and I'm an emotional outburst kind of type. So I've sort of toned that down. But I think he likes that in me, I think he's attracted to that.

After dealing with both challenges, her husband's past infidelities and her child's manic depression, Josephine now finds that the marriage provides comfort.

The marriage is better. We're better partners and have better communication. The rally point and turning point was around our son. The next 10 years will be hard until he reaches adulthood. There is a 20-30% of him killing himself. We came together saying we would do our part. It's a contract we made. We made a life-long commitment. We're better together than apart, we're good parents and a good team. We have survived what most would consider the worst. We have both developed a spiritual life. He goes to church every Sunday. We've encouraged the children to faith. Both of us have made a conscious decision to heal ourselves individually and constructively in healthy ways for the sake of the children. We have always liked and respected each other. I didn't wish him harm. We've stepped apart and each embarked on a path, a parallel path, to heal in a constructive positive way. We are using this as an opportunity. We can do harm or do good. We both choose to do better. He continues therapy.

Lien also discussed that their marriage is better because of the struggles they've been through since they escaped Saigon. She also is committed for the children.

I think I've been through a lot of bad things. So I think that help us. Even our marriage is up and down. Sometime I think I can leave my husband. I want to divorce him. But because, thinking since the beginning, we've been through a lot of things. And plus I want my kids to just have one dad. That is another thing. I mean really we fight sometimes and it is really one thing that gives me more strength to stay in marriage. For the kids. My husband, I said to him (crying) please spend more time with me. So lately he did. Because I was talking with him a lot about I want to separate. Yes. He didn't realize. I think sometimes he think he's a failure. I think he tried to be rich. With the stocks. But lately I will talk with him. I said you know we have to very strong and help each other. You know. He's very quiet. He don't discuss with me a lot of things. He does by himself a lot.

Donna discussed the changes in their flexibility, understanding, and expectations as she and her husband began to share greater responsibility for the care of their autistic son.

My husband is there with him when I work now. He worked before my mom got sick. She would watch him and either my husband or I, whoever got off first would go and pick the kids up. My husband now is trying to get with the school board so he can drive the bus so he can be there for him and have the same days out of school and hours. So that he can do that. I think my husband didn't know what to do and how to handle it. And maybe I expected too much. Maybe I expected for him to act the way I acted, just to deal with it and go on in life. He would complain and say he should be doing this, that and the other. I said well, yes, but he has a problem so we have to show him the right way and we have to have patience with him in showing him. Because he's not going to pick up like the other two.

Now all the responsibility isn't on me. It was like the brick wall and just chiseling. He could hear and don't hear. He was thinking more of me as being a nag than really

dealing. His way of escaping. It's a lot easier on me now. I feel a big relief in this marriage now. Now that he can see that I'm not out to get him. Before he thought I was out to get him. I was being mean to him. And maybe I was. Certain things I was saying or maybe it was the way I was saying it was very authoritative.

Maya, even though she describes herself as a self-made woman who through hard work and education, rose above the poverty of her early life, states that her marriage has been most significant in helping her overcome her significant life struggles.

The marriage has been the thing that has helped me to overcome a lot of things. That's real significant for me....Heopen[s] your eyes to what a family can truly be like. He adores his children. He adores me. He may not show me like I want him to all the time, but he shows me through the love that I see him give our children. And he's helped me overcome a lot. He's helped me be secure. It's about caring for and loving and being there for each other. If other people have been my angels, he has been my God. He really has. I don't worship him as a God, don't get me wrong. He has faults and everything else. But he has had the most positive influence on my life than anyone else because I just see in him the right way to do things. I may not agree with him all the time but the life style that he has given me is what I wanted. And wanted in a family.

Graziella, Jolene and Jean all talked about the importance of the friendship aspect of their marriage. Graziella emphasized their ability to change throughout her narrative.

We're not afraid of change at all. We really really like to change a lot....I think that the strength that we've had all along is just our love for each other. Our trust in each other. Because we do everything together. My husband won't go any place unless I go with him. I won't go any place unless he goes with me. We're just really really close. And we're a really close family with our daughters. Right. We've just always had a really good, like you say, friendship.

Jolene emphasized the structure of time, activities, direct communication and equality in their friendship.

My husband was my strength from the beginning. We married when I was 17 years old and basically we grew up together. He is my best friend. We do a lot of the same things together even though we have our separate ways. Yeah, we both have our own niche and do things separately and together.

Being able to talk is a big plus. We've been jogging for over 20 years, lift weights together, go swimming together. Every other day we make time for that. Most of it is a communicative time. We sort of have a theory whatever's bugging you, get it out and then it's over. Do it during your exercise time and then you feel better afterward. Usually, that's when we do a lot of our talking.

We've always done it together about six before dinner. Then we have dinner together and that gives us a good quality time. We always cook together, everybody had a certain area they were in charge of. Anybody who didn't cook had to clean up. So everybody cooked [laughing], so then we all had to do it.

Very much an equal marriage. I don't feel like I do more or less than [husband]. For one thing we like to play, and we know that if we get the everyday things done, then we don't have to spend our weekends doing it. And so we both tend, if we see something that needs to be done, we just do it. It's hard to have a good marriage.

Jean talked about having a very different marriage the third time around. After a rough start in life, a lot of struggles to get on her feet during two difficult marriages, she was looking for something different.

I was 12 years unmarried. I'd known [] for years and I thought he was one of the nicest men I'd ever known. Certainly not romantically. And he grew on me. I married [] because he's my best friend and I didn't let emotions get real involved except, analytically I married him. And I have a very nice peaceful life. It works for me. And he's my best friend. You know, it works. It's been 14 years.

Lisa tried to make sense of her first marriage as she discussed the differences in her second marriage.

I went into the [first] marriage and was very isolated, cut off from the family, living in a place where no one understood how I spoke and I didn't understand them. Couldn't, didn't make friends. Didn't know how to get around by car. And my husband, who probably wasn't sure if he wanted to be married at that point, was busy in grad school. And so that was very big isolation. And I think after about a year I pulled out of that to try to at least form a life, because I think I was really depressed.

This is a very different marriage. We've had lots of problems, but they're different. I have a sign on the refrigerator, "I just want to make different mistakes." And we had a couple of bad times, but I am clearly very strong in this marriage. I think I've been able to nurture my husband in some areas, so that he has grown. He is very accepting and supportive of what I have done in my career. And he loves what I'm doing and he will encourage me to do more of it. I will always have my voice. It took a while to trust each other....He would always listen to me. And when he has his voice, I will always listen to him. So we'll get to a tough place and when we can, we talk about it and get at where we're both coming from. We have all the jargon of coming from "I" statements. We can talk about it and understand each other and make some accommodation jointly. Yeah, I'm very different in this marriage. And that's not to say it doesn't have problems. I think we know each other's strengths and weaknesses and use them rather than fight each other on them.....It's more of a partnership in many ways. We each have a real understanding of ourselves and then we can bring it into the marriage.

Pilar discussed her very different attitude toward marriage after rising above her abusive childhood and first marriage, getting an education and building a life for herself and her children.

I met my husband in '87. He's a wonderful guy, but at that point I was so independent. I felt like I don't need a man. I don't want a man. I didn't want any relationship or anything like marriage. This is my house, my car....he had to put up with a lot.

I was real independent. I feel like I've been through a lot, I'm the boss and that's it. And you do what I say or go the highway. And so he was really nice, he liked me, he wanted to marry me and I didn't want to marry him. But anyway I got married....And it's been easy because he told me, you marry me I promise I will help you, I promise I will take care of you, I promise I'll give you whatever you want . And I was looking at what me and the children have....And I said, you know, I'm not going to put up with anything, if you don't like it, there's the door. I go to school, I go to work. I have to come home and take care of the children.

He takes care of the kids, too. He loves his children. He works every day. I don't wash his clothes. He does his own laundry. I cook for him whenever I have time. If you don't like it, you cook yourself your meals....I go if I'm home, you don't cook for me. You cook, I'm home. Equal jobs. Equal. We need to do things together. And if you don't want to, don't do it, but don't expect a lot from me either....He been there for eleven years. I'd probably miss him if he wasn't.

Sadie reflected on her marriage and divorce. She has decided, at least for now, that she prefers to be in this committed relationship rather than a marriage.

...my marriage... was very traditional. And I loved that. I don't have that many regrets. I think back to what Margaret Mead said about marriage...Yes! You need three partners...What are the categories? Romance, parenting, and companionship. Yeah. But I did it in a different order, I think. I did the parenting and then the romance.

[Significant other] would like to marry. I don't think I want to get married. It was so difficult getting out of that first contract. I don't want to make another one. I'd rather make a year to year contract. I don't mean it in a written way, but I mean sitting down and talking and saying what's working for you and what's not. What's good about our relationship. Do you want to continue it? If so what can we do to make it better? I think we [Sadie and her husband] stopped doing that. We stopped checking in with each other, we just keep going on and on and on. And we forget to check in and say, hey, did you notice I changed? Or did you notice I wanted to? But I'm scared. What do you think about this? I just think that would be helpful.

There's a lot going on...so, it's nice having more time with him traveling a lot and with his own mountain home. I think it keeps the relationship young and more alive. I really miss him when he's gone. He's off having his adventure and I'm having mine and we're growing in our own ways, but then it's wonderful coming back together and seeing who each other are now, and seeing what's up and connecting and hanging out and having fun and then taking off. For me this is perfect. For right now. It is. I am the alpha dog here. A loving relationship does take a lot of energy, so it's nice not to be doing it all the time. I can see wanting to be together more once the kids are launched and I'm working less.

Friendship

Many of the participants discussed the emotional support they received from their women friends. Paul suggested that because “the marital relationship waxes and wanes...other relationships may sometimes act as the primary contributor to well-being during adulthood” (1997, p. 172). Blieszner and Adams noted “the importance of support

from friends for dealing with critical life events” in the coping literature (1992, p.97). A common thread running through Blieszner’s research on friendship “is the notion that friendship and other close relationships contribute to personal development and well-being” (1994, p.132).

As the participants discussed what helped them overcome the challenges of their lives, a relational theme that came out clearly was that of connection to friends, particularly their “girlfriends.” Listening to the participants discuss the importance of “girlfriends” led me to believe that these friendships were transformative for the women as they shared a crisis experience. Having friends was vital to most of the women, although, as discussed by Natalie, it also meant having to work through problems with friends also. Sadie described the friendships that sustained her through her divorce, family deaths and transitions:

I'm so lucky to have a really close network of friends which I call extended family really. And a lot of my women friends really rallied during this rough time. It was a really difficult, difficult time. And the divorce was really bitter. It is still incredibly strained. Yes. My mom was so supportive and my very close friends and they're all in the book. I put them all in the book. They were wonderful sounding boards and they love me. So you listen and you hear what they're saying. And they've all got their stuff too. So you listen to enough of them and I had somebody to help me in different ways too. Someone would help me with the legal parts because I knew nothing about that and someone else would help me with the business and someone else would just come over for a hug and someone else would just listen. I'd say two hands full. Ten people that I could call in the middle of the night and say I need a place to stay or I need \$10,000 [laughs]. Barefoot in the snow friends. Yeah. It's a phrase my friend used.

Recognizing the importance of family and long time friends after the break up of a romance, Natalie moved back to the area where she had grown up in order to have relational supports.

I...decided I needed to come back to where I have my life long girl friends. Where I have supports and where I would just have a more comfortable life. Because when I lost the man that I was very attached to. I found myself only with my job...giving me stability. And I wanted to come home to an environment where I had friends. [My girlfriends] are a big part of my resiliency and my strength because there are a lot of things, that well. I really love my husband because he doesn't get involved in emotional stuff with me in a way that's overwhelming or overburdening. But I like to be able to do that with my girlfriends. I think about some times how I love my deep conversations with my girlfriends, but I wouldn't want to live with that. That sort of intensity. But I benefit from the intensity and I like the intensity from time to time. And there's some issues I can talk to my husband about, but he's just not that interested in it, but my girlfriends are interested in it. So I draw strength from being able to talk with

my girlfriends in an intense way about things that my husband's just not interested in talking about that much.

Some of the friends were male friends. It's just that I have a network here of people that I've known all my life. I have friends from second grade. I have friends from high school. And professional friends. By being here I'm really centered. I really feel that I have people all around me, from all different places. I have a college friend and a law school friend. I just have a good network here that I didn't have there. The friendships that endure I find are the ones where the friend is realistic. You don't see each other for six months and then you call and find out all the things that have happened. And you can talk about it in a dispassionate, sort of caring way. Generally what I require of my friends is that they be in the position I'm in. That they're people, they have their own lives, and we find time for each other and don't feel resentful when we don't see each other for six months or a year.

I think having friendships is an important support in life. My parents travel around to see friends. They go to France every year. My mother goes back to see her old friends in Paris. She's taught me how to do that. She really has. You know you have disagreements and you don't get along, but you go back and you just endure anyway.

Josephine described the importance of fewer special friends and family.

My family has been a great support. My mom is 80. I told her everything. She moved here to be closer to us. She cooks meals or buys me a sweater just to make me feel better....My support network is smaller now. It has gone from dozens to two or three that really know me. I have a sister who...knows all of this. She was concerned and incredulous. She was blown away. I know she's there for me, even though she's more structured....She hasn't had to go where I've had to go.

After the crisis, my self-esteem was low. I was there, but not really there. The first thing I did was call two friends. One flew across the country, the other ran down the street. They took me to the garage because my wailing was so large. I went with my friend to a therapist....My friend can hear my pain. And I take hers. There are two women who have emerged and know everything. They sat with me when he told me. They move along my journey with me, yet I only see them only every few months. One friend doesn't get it, the other gets it. We carry each other within.

Other participants talked about the importance of close friends and were concerned about the absence of a close friend relationship. Karen called after reading the transcript to expand on the important role friends played in her resilience. She said she had not connected that sense of friendship to her resilience until she read her transcript.

I had many friends, but no close friends until I was 40. I didn't have best friends until later because of my early experiences. They're terribly important, these women friends. A few close friends are a resource for me when faced with great stress. My husband provides one kind of support, women friends provide another kind of support. The support of both my husband and friends really help me a lot in terms of resilience.

Maya described the difficulty of finding friends. She thought it was because of her low self-esteem from growing up and the difficulty of being in two worlds: A black woman in a white community and a white male work organization.

And then I'm home and there are no black mothers at home. And I didn't know anyone because I'd been working. I didn't have a friend....So I found a play group and I discovered library story time...prior to that the women in the supermarket were my best friends. [laughs] They were the only contact I had to the outside world. And so I discovered those things and started meeting other mothers....I can't say that I truly have friends here. I know people and I think that by virtue of no one having family, you kind of depend on them to help you out and you help them out. I think that maybe this is a negative thing.

Lien talked about her loneliness for family and friends in Vietnam and her lack of time to make friends. She has recently made a friend, but often feels lonely in this relationship because this woman has all of her family here from Vietnam now.

I have friend now. She's the only one. Very close. Very close friend I have. She Vietnamese and she my next door neighbor. I talk a lot with her. Yeah. She been here 1975. She lucky. All the family live here.

Pilar also voiced the issue of a lack of time for friendships.

Friends are important in my life. I have friends, they're not friends that I can depend on. I need friends, but they're not friends that I can depend on. It's not like somebody that stayed. I need friends. They're important, but not as important as my family, my children. I haven't had time for friends, really. There are friends at work. This is where I have my friends. I work here and they're just acquaintance friends...Nobody that I hang out with.

For the Children

“For my children” was a very strong theme for many participants. The women wanted to make it, to survive, to have a better life, to do it for their children. The participants discussed the importance of focusing on goals and their beliefs in active mastery throughout their narratives. But it was for the sake of their children that they were most motivated to surmount their challenge. By focusing on achievable goals, they worked on the practical daily problems of their family and claimed success while meeting major life challenges. This also resembled what Wolin and Wolin (1993) discussed as generating and becoming a model for others to follow. Lisa was passionate about her commitment to be

strong after her divorce for the sake of her children. This commitment helped her work more positively with her ex-husband.

Part of it for me is my ex and I were determined to keep the kids out of it the best we could. And I think we have done an excellent job of that. I always felt we co-parented much better than when we were married. And so we were protective of our kids and put on a good face for them and helped them through it the best we could. One was I was going to do it for my children. A very important factor that got me up every day and kept me going. Because these two boys were going to have every shot they could have.

She was also determined to find her own strength for the sake of the children.

But I was determined that my children would have a strong mother. I didn't hide the pain in the sense that I would say to them this is hard, or this hurts. But I didn't let them see me fall apart. I was determined. My pediatrician said to me when I told her I was separated: "The children need two things. They need to know their father's in their life and they need to know their mother's going to survive." And that probably fed into my own sense that I would survive and these children would know it. And they're not going to be shortchanged because we're divorced. So that was very important to me. It was exhausting being a single parent, very hard. But I think it kept me going.

Many of the participants talked of the importance of goals, of a focus to help them rise above or to get them through the challenge. For Lisa, it was her children.

I have a goal. I need to nurture my children. And I wasn't going to stop that because my life got tough. I can still feel the tears coming. My children, I gave them life. I need to give them life. What's flashing in my mind is this thing I didn't get from my parents, in a way. Sometimes I got it. They have no one else they can turn to to mother them. That was me. I was it and I was going to do it because I only had two of them. It was me and them and I wasn't going to lose it. And I have no idea what they did lose because of the divorce, but I wasn't going to not give them everything I could. I only had one shot. They needed me and I wasn't going to not be there. It's the motivator, it comes from in here. It's a commitment I made to them and to myself. Yes, that's it. I had a commitment to them....My commitment to them was very strong, to survive, to nurture as best I could, to be strong because they had to grow and I had to be the soil in which they could grow. I don't mean to sound like I'm everything to them. But children need a firm foundation so they can grow and test themselves. And if my foundation is weak and shaky and all over the place, then they can't test themselves. And I was just committed to making it as strong for them as I could. So that they could try their lives.

Donna talked about being a single mom to her two boys for many years after her first short marriage. She talked about wanting to be out with her girlfriends, but also of wanting to be a good mom as her mother had been to her. She didn't want to burden her mother, who had already raised five children, with her children.

I had a choice. Either I do take care of my kids or I could go the other way. And I chose to take care of my children, and with my mom's help. And my dad was there.

Donna also described the challenge of getting her husband to help her and take more responsibility for their autistic son after her mother went to a nursing home.

I told him at one time that I think that he needs to spend a lot of time with him, so he will get to know you, instead of knowing me all the time, instead of being around me all the time. I mean, he's a little boy. He needs to know how to do little boy things instead of watching me put on makeup. That's what I told him. You need to take him to the playground, teach him. If you don't, how is he going to learn the basic things if you're not going to show him the way to do it and make him do it? Now he's getting better at dealing the situation now. Now he's gotten very close to him.

Donna dealt with her own emotions as she encountered strangers' insensitivity while riding the bus with her son. It was important to her that her husband also get past this so he too would take their son on the town bus that he so enjoyed riding.

He didn't spend enough time with him as far as taking him out. And riding the bus with him, which he loves to ride the bus. And I told him, are you feeling ashamed of him? He might. Autistic children have a tendency to doing this with their hands a lot [shaking arms around] and people on the bus would see that. But it got to a point where I just went numb to it. I didn't see what their expressions were or whether they were laughing. I didn't even care. This is my child, I have to take care of him. So I don't care what other people think. They're stupid, they don't understand.

That was very hard to get to that point. Over the time of riding the bus, and watching people's facial expression, I'd just have to tell myself you know, they don't understand, so they're silly. They don't understand, or why would they make fun of a child? People would look and stare, and I would pick up on it. I can't let that get next to me so I just said, they don't understand. They're silly and I just have to take care of my child. If they don't like it, that's their problem, not mine. I can't change other people, but I can change my way of dealing with things. So that's what I did.

Josephine discussed the conscious decision she and her husband made to stay together after their marital crisis and heal themselves in healthy, respectful ways for the sake of their children. She voiced her concern both for her manic depressive son and her other children.

He is still struggling. It will be a life-long struggle for him. But overall is doing pretty well. Does better in the world than at home. If he's going to unravel, then is more inclined to do that at home. Which is the good news that he feels safe to do that. The bad news is that it is very stressful for the family. His siblings have learned to live their lives kind of waiting for things to shift or the bottom to fall out. They remain poised and develop coping mechanisms. We all have. I think they have come to understand though that when they feel victimized by the disorder, that it's not their fault. And to see it as separate and apart from them and something that he doesn't intend to do. But he's doing pretty well in school.

Pilar spoke frequently about her commitment to her five children. She wrestled for years with the decision to leave her abusive first marriage. She was determined to give her

children a different upbringing and life than she had experienced and it came through strongly throughout the entire interview. This was her most important challenge.

How can I keep him here? What can I do? What can I do with my life? I have my children. I don't want my children to see me miserable. I don't want my children to see a life like this. I hated a life like that. I hated my life when I was a child. I don't want my kids to grow up like that. I want them to have a mother and a father. I want them to have a mother. And I think because I thought my mother was always so weak, I thought I'm not like that. I don't want to be like that. I have control of my life. And I'm going to take control of my life and my kids. And my kids are going to see that I will be for my children. I'll have them. I will do for them.

And I was the beater. I would beat anybody. I wasn't afraid when I was younger. But that stopped. That wasn't what I wanted for my children. I spanked my children, but never beat them. And then I learned also that when I had my two children, that I didn't want them to see me fighting with my ex-husbandI didn't want to be unhappy. I didn't want to be unhappy in a relationship and I didn't want my kids to be in this relationship. I want my kids to be healthy. I didn't feel they had to be in a relationship with me, a miserable relationship, where I would be miserable and I would be mad and it would be like my mother. Angry. Instead of staying in the relationship, I left.

And I said, you know what, me and my children are going to be happy. Because the only way my kids are going to be happy is if I'm happy. And so I've got to get out. I have to get out of this relationship cause I'm not happy. And if I'm going to be mad and upset and stuff, I'll be mad and upset with my children, and I don't want it. I'd rather leave. I can do it on my own. Well I think that ...a lot of my strength came from my parents....Even as mean...as they were, they really... helped me open my eyes and think there's got to be more than this to life. Because I said, if I ever have children I will never raise them like you raised me. My mother and dad were so hard. I don't think they gave the love that they should have to their children. Maybe that's why I give my kids so much love. Because I know I smother my children now. You know I have five and they all want it. But I've got all the kids there and they really all need my attention. And I love my children so much and I show them. I kiss them and I hug them and I love them and I always tell them that I love them. Because my mother and dad never did. So that's why I do it to mine. [points to a bulletin board full of pictures in her office]

Maya also had to overcome not having a good parent role model and not knowing how to parent, and do it in a culture in which she was not comfortable herself.

My daughter went off to kindergarten. And we go to this school, this very good school and very good teachers. And here again, I'm just intimidated by this whole PTA thing. But I feel like I've got to be a part of the PTA. This is important. This is important. If I don't do this for my kids, it's a disservice to my kids. So at this point, I gotta do it for my kids, even though I'm the only black mom at this meeting, or at this whatever, or at the library, I've got to do this for them. So they'll feel they're a part of society.

And you know what? I'm a pretty good mother. You know I see it in my children. Many people tell me, oh you've got good kids. And I hope that's because I'm here with them and guiding them and helping them evolve.

Growing up without a sense of self-esteem and community was difficult for Karen. She also has been determined to raise her children differently. Being a good mother has been her number one priority.

My mother and I basically agree to not discuss my children. We have conflicts about mothering because my mother feels I'm too wrapped up in my children, because of course I pay attention to them. And I tactfully tell her that she raised us the way she wanted and I'm raising my children the way I want. I get a vicarious experience and thrill from my children because they're successful in the way I wasn't. I get a lot of pleasure out of being a good parent. I worked hard to get there, I've put a lot of work in there.

Jean, who grew up alone and struggled to build a life for herself and her children through many poor years and two difficult marriages, feels good about the life she alone made for her children.

I looked at my children and said they are in real good shape. They're good kids, they're adults, in spite of anything that I may have done that wasn't being a good mother. I mean, you leave your kids for a year, but I did see them.And I looked at them and I thought this is my legacy. And that I certainly did better than anyone in my family. I came further and made more of myself from nothing. I shouldn't say nothing. I did have a good stepmother. I loved my stepmother. And my grandmother. My stepmother had to teach me to brush my teeth. Nobody had ever taught me.

As Lien told of her challenges with loneliness, her marriage and financial situation, she was clear that despite her personal struggles, she wanted to raise her children in this country and in this marriage with two parents.

I think more opportunity if I was away from the country. I'm thinking about my kids' future. And I try to work things out a lot. You know, yeah. Yes. I mean, I cried. I mean, you see, there's a lot of American people divorced. I don't know. Sometimes you might find somebody better than the one, I mean the ex-one. But then I'm thinking for my kids, I feel sorry for them.

Even though life has been hard in many ways for Graziella and she has had to put off getting the education she so values now, the most important theme in her life is her children and family. She feels good about the choices she's made and the rituals they've established to keep this family strong and together.

And the way I was taught was to start out with your dinners, a really important time to sit down. That's the time there's conversation at the table, how everybody's day went and so forth. So everybody gets a little feeling of how everybody's day went and knowing okay, now I know why she's not happy today. So that's one of the things that I brought a tradition from my own personal life into my family life.

I feel that I was a very good mother. I feel that between my husband and I we parented our girls very good. So far we haven't had any problems with any of our girls. That's our communication time. We're always talking, communicating. But at the dinner time, everybody's there. Everybody hears what's going on. I think it's a very very important thing to do. Whoever comes home first starts the dinner, my husband or the girls. Anybody. There's lots and lots of sharing. My girls have done their own laundries. And that's they way I've been with all of my girls. Really good friends.

I'm really hoping to go back to school someday, but right now I have my two girls at home. My 19-year old and my 16-year old and my family is my priority.

Role Models

Another strong thread of connection came from the participants' role models, who provided guidelines as the women adapted to challenges and transitions. Their role models or mentors were often persons who were interested in helping the women attain goals or the person the participant wanted to emulate. Except for the professional women, few of the participants used the term mentor, but instead spoke of the persons who "were important" or "taught" them. Many of the participants talked about the role models, most often their mothers, who influenced their beliefs or inspired their strength. Beth recalled the hard work ethic that was modeled by her mother and discussed the different gender expectations within her family and between generations. She voiced the complexity many of the women wrestled with as they discussed the patterns of their lives and looked back to see what threads from their mother's life and generation were useful to them as they struggled with their challenges today.

I was never close to my mother but I don't know if that's a generational thing. A lot of women my age were never close to their mother. Men are in her mind, head of the household, kind of supreme beings...And I know in many ways I just think differently. Part of it's education, part of it is in living in several different places, you have to kind of be flexible....My mother and her mother worked in the field, yet at dinner my grandfather was always served first. Even though he didn't work. I think he just stayed home all day.

I think from her, the gift I have perhaps is just a really hard work ethic. To the point that sometimes I have a hard time laying off of it. That whole women's thing. I thought who needs this. In a sense I was kind of free as I said. My brother in a way had so much more expected of him. And I used to think he had this great life because he didn't seem to have to do a whole lot of work where I was like vacuuming, cleaning, laundry. Nights my mom was working, I made or started dinner, at a minimum, dishes. I mean I felt like I was inundated

Sometimes I think it's because of my mom that I was that motivated to get a Ph.D. because I always wanted one. My mother didn't want me to go to college, didn't think I was smart enough. And girls, what would I do anyway. She wanted me to be a secretary. And if you know me very well I'm extremely un-detail oriented. I would have been a disaster at anything like a secretary. She was a secretary. She was very detail oriented and very good.

Although not choosing to follow her mother's path Sadie, like Beth, found patterns in her life similar to those that had been modeled by her mother. Sadie described her mother as a:

...wonderfully remarkable woman. She's 78. She just moved and is very creative and loving and spiritual. And one of the gifts that she had taught me just by modeling is, her mind is open. She does not have the answers and she still loves the questions. I think that she is still developing her faith. And I guess that's how I hope mine will be. I hope that if you ask me tomorrow what my faith was, I would give you a different answer. She's also in a lot of pain. And I ended up making some of those very same mistakes because I didn't see them. I got divorced at the same age and it was really hard on my kids like my mom's divorce was hard on me.

Lisa, also was not able to see her mother as a role model for strength until after her father died and her mother's strength was unveiled.

The other thing I see now looking back, my mother, who always seemed very passive and pretty unable to care for herself in many ways. She didn't drive, my father seemed to take her everywhere and do everything. When my Dad died in 1983 my mother picked up a life for herself. She has friends, she continued. That was not the woman who raised me. But there's a strength in her that I never saw before. And when my father died we really all worried about what would happen to her. And she has formed a life. My grandparents came over from Russia, so my grandmother was a matriarch and was incredibly strong. So there's gotta be something that's been passed down that I would never have recognized that now when I look at the family history, I figure there's some survival in there. If I ask my mother, even now, how did she do that she would say I had no choice. Well you always have a choice, but that sense that you just do what you have to is always there. Whatever it is that you have to survive, whatever.

Donna poignantly expressed her experience of losing her mother who has been her most significant role model:

She has Alzheimer's. Mom will be 79 next month. She's been in the nursing home for six years now. That's a long time. I ask her, "Mom, do you know who I am?" And she says, "Well you're my grandmother." And I say, "No, I'm your youngest daughter." [laughs] I understand you can't take it personally. At first I felt strange and hurt. And I do miss her. Even though she's alive, I still miss her. You know, the calling, because I used to talk to her three, four, five, six times a day. And call her up and ask her if she'd fix me something special and she would. I miss all of that. I felt that she was gone. I really felt that. It was more of her strength, her attitude and the way that she was doing things that I picked up on and that's the way I want to be. And then when that happened, I'm sure that she was very frustrated at first, not knowing what was going on with her. I learned so much from her, how strong she was with dealing with certain

things and then I would sit down and talk with her about things. I would talk to her about things that I'm frustrated about. And she would tell me, she would say you keep praying. You trust in the Lord and everything will work out okay for you. And she would say, you need to do things like this. Then I would watch her, too, and see. I got my first strength from my mom. Watching her and listening. Trying to do things the way did things. My first strength came from mom.

Graziella's mother was also a strong role model for the patterns she brought forth into her own family. I can remember my father was always working.

My mother was always at home. I can always remember coming home and smelling the dinner made, the fresh tortillas made, just always looking forward to come home to a nice warm dinner. And that's one of the things I've tried to do for my family also so they could have a memory of coming home and having this great family dinner. Which is one thing that we as a family now do is we always always sit down to dinners together....And that's the way I was taught was to start out with your dinners, a really important time to sit down. That's the time there's conversation at the table, how everybody's day went and so forth. So everybody gets a little feeling of how everybody's day went and knowing okay, now I know why she's not happy today. So that's one of the things that I brought a tradition from my own personal life into my family life.

Natalie found both of her parents to be strong role models. She describes growing up with adversity as part of her family history and overcoming was just a part of their way of life.

My mother was a working woman and an immigrant in the 1950s. I'm 42. When the mothers of my friends didn't work. And so she dealt with that. With her in-laws, my aunt, father's sister didn't approve of the fact that my mother worked because of that. My grandmother lived in the home with us and didn't approve of it very much. And there was a lot of friction there. But we survived it and I think it was good for me. I've learned how to be strong. I've always admired my parents for the courage that they showed. And so when I deal with adversity in my life I think it has to do with maybe some genetic stuff about being strong and not letting things bother me too much. And maybe it's just what they've taught me, what my parents have taught me. There is a lot of resilience and there's resilience in the family history. I think that resilience is the key there.

Lillian also identified both parents as role models for her strength, but not for the education she has so vigorously pursued since coming to the United States.

Those memories of losing our home is really hard for me. But the one thing I have always appreciated was that my mom was able to rebuild, and my dad. Even when we didn't have anything. So they gave us that strength. My mother never had education. She had second tier level education. My dad finished elementary school. And so where is my enthusiasm to continue school? I think it was innate, at least for me and my sister. Because my parents, my mother would have preferred if we went to work rather than go to school.

It was her father that Meg most identified as her role model both growing up and as an inspiration in her adult life. She gets strength for both her work and taking care of her husband from the belief that she carries “his loving presence” with her.

That was something I thought I carried with me and had made my own or somehow that had passed down to me. It's kind of interesting because my dad, of my parents was the intellectual. And I probably have gotten more interested in the intellectual. I think for me the parent that I felt most connected to. The parent that I felt took care of me more than I took care of them...I think from my Dad probably I got strength....I remember that my father would get anxious...every year...about money... basically he was more somehow trusting that things would work out, people would find a way through things. And my mother was always less secure.

Maya discussed the importance of role models from her perspective of not having had one.

I never had a role model to have a nice boyfriend. I'd always been in these crappy relationships where I was giving and getting nothing back. I just didn't think very good about myself. And I didn't know how it was supposed to be. I didn't know how to have a good relationship. I truly believe you need role models. You need a model for everything. You need someone to show you how to be in a good relationship with a person. You need someone to show you how to or what it takes to be a good student or whatever. I didn't have them. And I just always had to struggle because I didn't. I always had to make up my own rules.

Maya went on to discuss the turning point in her life when she broke off her engagement, even though she was then alone, lonely and scared in a Midwest city, in order to find a path that did not follow the legacy of women in her Mississippi family.

It was just that I knew. Every female in my family has had awful relationships. There are not that many married women in my family. All my aunts, only one has been married. She's divorced. My mom's divorced. My sister's divorced. A lot of children out of wedlock. You know that vicious cycle of just having an abnormal life. Nobody's married with children and working and trying to raise their kids as a family. They're all like scattered or alone. These kids have no fathers. I felt that's where I was headed if I married that guy. That we'd be married for a few years, I would have had two kids and divorced with a child probably and on my own. I didn't want that.

Maya found the role model she needed for marriage and parenting in her husband and his family and talked about the early challenges they faced.

So [husband] calls his family and it's "Guess what? I'm getting married and guess what, she's black." So it was like this huge shock. So we had to get over that. They had to get over that. We're talking Irish Catholic. So that wasn't easy. I mean they're the most wonderful family in the world. I love them. His mother has been more of a role model for me than my own. Because I know...what she values. And that's family and love and education and support.

Karen, like Maya, also described the impact of the lack of positive role models growing up and the importance her husband and the women in his family played in her quest for positive role models.

I incorporated the criticalness of my parents so that I don't give myself enough credit for what I do and for what I accomplished. And that's sort of a continuing battle for me to accept that I do pretty good things. It's an ongoing fight to get past a neurotic upbringing. I can be mature on one hand, but I can sort of feel I can't do it, I can't do it, I can't do it. Which was what my parents told me all the time. Because I have a lot of "I can't do it," but then I forge ahead and I do something.

Until I met my husband when I was 27, I was really not a happy person. My husband is a most marvelous man. I admire him. He's the one person who never sort of disappoints me. He also comes from a very healthy family and his mother...and his grandmother were great sources of emotional optimism in life. I try to emulate her and her son because I feel more healthy when I think positively than when I fall into my negative thoughts.

A Sense of Identity

A sense of identity and autonomy, the capacity to be independent and to direct one's own life, was an underlying theme throughout the interviews as the participants discussed their work, their sense of community, their friends and family, their role models in their family life cycle and their sense of coherence. "The development of well-differentiated identity and autonomy is important for competence....[and] requires clear boundaries and an ability to accept differences" (Walsh, 1998b, p. 88). Walsh contended that the concept of the self is a product of relationships, that "it is through our interdependence that meaningful lives are best sustained" (p. 51). Identity is "characterized by the nature of one's relations with others" according to feminist theorists Franz, Cole, Crosby and Stewart (1994, p. 326). The challenge of identity according to these authors "is to make meaning - to improvise - from the positions that are our lot" (p. 328). They described identity as "characterized by many facets....how the woman experiences herself....and how the woman describes herself....she has a unique constellation of relationships to other people....identity [is] grounded in agency and embedded in relationships" (p. 326).

Carol described two struggles with her sense of identity. The first was when she took off the habit when she left the convent. The second had to do with her identity as a woman

when she decided to have reconstructive surgery after her double mastectomy. Julie discussed the sense of identity and strength that came from her sense of community and history. A sense of identity as a survivor was another theme discussed by several of the women. Josephine wove the family beliefs of strong stock into her own tapestry and imposed order on the chaos of her life and marriage by weaving family beliefs into the steps she took one after the other towards survival.

I think the other part of strength was simply having survived.... I mean all the things I had imagined sort of being among the worst that could happen....The bottom line....But once you sort of get through each step and you realize that you don't die, then you can move on to the next step. And it's painful, but there's something that just seems to come up that says okay, alright, that happens. And I did that and I'm still here and I'm okay and this happened so you build a memory of some sort of survival. I came from strong stock. I knew I had the right stuff. I wasn't going to go down easy.

Courage and Encouragement

Courage is required for change as one faces challenge. It is defined by Webster (1968) in Waters and Lawrence (1993) as “the attitude or response of facing and dealing with anything recognized as dangerous, difficult or painful, instead of withdrawing from it.” The participants first needed courage to address their challenge, then they needed courage to make the changes in their lives. The women discussed how important it was to have someone to encourage them, to “literally provide [them] with courage – to continue the journey” (Waters & Lawrence, 1993, p. 99). Walsh cited examples where encouraging and supportive relationships built and sustained courage in the face of overwhelming odds (1998b, p.62). Encouragement was an important part of women’s connectedness and relationships and provided an important sense of strength. They stressed the importance of the encouragement and emotional support they received from their spouses, friends, role models, mentors, therapy, and peer support groups.

For several of the participants, their spouses were an important source of encouragement. Jolene recalls not being encouraged when she was growing up. Her mom thought only one of her girls “had the brains to do anything” and “left handed people can’t learn,” thus the expectation for left-handed Jolene was to “find some guy to get married.”

We've been married 36 years and he has always been my strength. He's encouraged me to change and to grow and to do things. I basically think I learned to be resourceful more than anything else. When I was younger I don't feel like I was. I feel like I sat back and waited on people. In my younger years I don't feel like I was the type person that was outgoing or progressive. I think my husband brought that about. Like I said he has always pushed me to move one step further. ... But you never feel pressured by him. I think he had a lot of confidence in me. And encouragement too. I'd say both. Because he's always encouraged me to do different things. I didn't get that growing up.

Maya also found that her husband was her greatest source of the positive encouragement.

I never thought it would go anywhere because he's white. And he was the first man ever to treat me with respect and really show me so many things. Expose me to so many things...I mean just little things that I'd never, at 27, never ever done....He has a wonderful sense of intuition. And I think he's so able to see people for what they really truly are. I think he saw it in me. He saw it in me before I saw it in myself. And he has helped me to be a better person. I don't want to disappoint him. He really saved my life. He really did. He saved my life.. I didn't feel like I had any friends. I was very lonely and alone. Just scared and like what am I doing here, why am I here? And he just came into my life at that point... I truly believe I found my soul mate.

Natalie described the supportiveness of her husband as much more of a participant in the day-to-day working of the house who does most of the cooking, laundry, all of the shopping and takes the kids to school.

Even though he's not verbally supportive, a lot of the ways he supports and helps me are important. He shows it by doing things. He's a silent emotional support.

Others talked of the importance of the emotional support they received from their peers, mentors and role models in work and school settings. Beth found emotional support in her doctoral program.

I think what got me through was, because I was still in my last year in my doctoral program. Most everybody was around my age. My age and the fact of early forties...there was a lot of peer support there. So that helped, having a support group. I didn't discuss my marriage that much with them but it was enough that there were people who accepted me. And kind of understood that phase in your life.

Maya called these supports her "angels."

I think. I listen. I want to be better and I think I listen to what people tell me. I think I'm smart enough to know that I don't know it all, that I need help. I think that's what can make the difference. That you can learn from somebody else. I think I depended on other people to help me learn the right way or point me in the right direction.

An emotional outlet for Josephine for issues regarding her son is a bipolar support group.

I have an anonymous support network where I can say the really yuck stuff that you can't say to your friend. Everyone there has risks, but the need is so great to talk, that to dishonor the code is unthinkable... we don't want to lose each other.

Lisa felt that an external self-help support group saved her life after her divorce and offered her a place to build new friendships.

I remember the first meeting I went to. The format is a support group kind of discussion. We were discussing some issues, probably trust and risk, those were the first meetings I went to. And I finally got up enough guts to voice my opinion. And the room listened to me. And I had never had that feeling before. And somebody then responded to what I said. And at the end of the evening somebody came over to me and said, you know, what you said made sense. And I had never been listened to. That feeling was incredible. I'm very outspoken now in those kind of groups. [laughs]. But that took some coming.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness

The last major theme of relationships that the participants discussed had to do with reconciling and forgiving family members and spouses in order to get past the hurt and move on. For some, it involved reconciling and forgiving aspects of their own lives and choices. The potential for reconciliation is determined by the will to be reconciled, to weave together disparate experiences and to exonerate the person responsible for the hurt. Forgiveness, which can come from seeking insight and understanding, creates the possibility for transforming relationships. (Hargrave, 1994; Walsh, 1998b) The participants discussed redeveloping relationships, repairing cutoffs and sometimes acknowledging their part in the breakdown of a relationship.

After years of estrangement from her mother, Karen and her mother “had a reconciliation” after her father died. Karen recently ask her mother why she never visited her when, as a child, she was in the hospital 12 days.

As I understood more about her mother's weird behavior with the Christian Science religion, and my grandmother ended up dying of breast cancer because she didn't attend to it in time, I understand why my mother is so weird....Partly because of the way I grew up with this neurotic weird family I of course always thought something was wrong with me, not what's wrong with my family or whatever. So I am constantly dealing with that, the lack of self-esteem. But part of me is disciplined and has some kind of esteem somewhere. It all gets sort of muddled.

Pilar learned how she did not want to be from her mom. She learned the importance of having patience with children because her mom had none with her children.

But then she was having a hard time, too. But when you're little you don't understand that. You only understand that you got beat for everything and you got hurt. Because my mother was just that type of a nervous person. And my mother was brought up being beat and so that's why I think they did it.....My mother would always say I can't do nothing, I gotta tell your dad. I can't do anything because of your dad. I can't do nothing because I gotta deal with your dad. What is this? Now I tell her. You know, she's 75 tears old. God, mom, you're only the boss whenever you feel like you want to be. [laughs]

Linda: It sounds like you've forgiven her?

Pilar: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I love my mom and dad. As much as we have problems and stuff. You know with my mom, I'm the fighter of the family still. I've forgiven them and gone on with my life. I've grown up. What's gone in my past and what's done in my past, is the past. I've dealt with it. I've taken care of it. And I just go on.

Donna also described forgiving her dad so she could go on and help him after her mom had to be placed in the nursing home.

Now my mom is in a nursing home and now the tables are turned towards my dad. My dad is leaning more on me now. I had to learn to forgive my father, so I can go on with my life. Because if I hold that animosity, anger, whatever I was feeling negative inside of me, I would never get from point A to point B because point A would always be a hindrance to me. So I had to let that go and do whatever I can to help him with the bills, helping him fill out money orders and help with all the papers and stuff now. So we've gotten a lot closer since my mom has been in the nursing home.

And my dad was there for the grandchildren. I can't take that away from him because he was always there for them. Anything they ask for. He related better with the grandkids. He stopped drinking when mom went to the nursing home.

The forgiving process with him happened over a period of time. The more I saw him the more I forgave. And I kept telling myself I had to let this go, so that's what I did over a period of time. So now we get along better than we ever did when I was a teenager or a young child.

But he's always been good with the boys. He'd get up in the morning, he would fix my kids breakfast whether they wanted to eat it or not. And then the bus would come, like six in the morning and he would put them on the bus. And he'd take pride and joy in the grandchildren.

Maya and her mother are also getting a better understanding of their lives as they spend more time in conversation together.

My mother, somehow I was having a conversation with her a week ago and she said, "You know I'm so happy for you that you married such a nice guy. And I prayed that you would meet a nice guy. You were in so many bad relationships." And I said, "Really, you were praying for me that I would get a good husband?" And she said, "Yeah." And I said "Why?" And she said, "Because you're such a nice person." And I'm thinking I'm 40 and she's just telling me I'm a nice person. She never told me that

when I was growing up. I always thought she thought I wasn't. That I was trying to get my way by doing what I did, by branching off on my own and doing my own thing. That in a way I was a selfish person.

Josephine has worked hard to forgive her husband his infidelities and move past the pain. She found by reading she could detach herself.

Understanding has been really important. It got me out of the tendency to feel victimized. Although sometimes I still do feel victimized. Then I look at others without the resources I have and I feel gratitude for my circumstances. I have not forgotten, but have forgiven. I used prayer and meditation to forgive. A prayer from Fire and the Soul: May I have peace, May I be healed. This was my mantra. I would say it 10 times per day. I identified the opening of the heart as the forgiveness piece. When I did acupuncture, I had such pain in my heart. It felt like a heart attack. It felt like the breaking of my heart.

A sense of connectedness and significant relationships were most influential in the women's sense of resilience. The relationships that were important to the participants were a combination of marriage, friends and family, their children, their role models, and their ability to reconcile and forgive.

Resources

The participants mobilized their resources to reorganize and develop the strength necessary to deal with their challenges. Because the participants came from all walks of life, different cultures and ethnic groups, a broad spectrum of socio-economic groups, a wide range of educational levels, the availability of resources and opportunities over their life course varied widely. In addition to the resources included in the relationships just discussed, a separate set of resources emerged as very important to the women's appraisal of their challenge, belief systems and connectedness. Seventeen of the eighteen women described the importance of work and education to their sense of resilience and strength. I initially had work and education as separate themes, but as is typical of women's lives, these resources were so intertwined throughout their lives, it was not feasible to separate them here.

Work and Education

As the participants discussed the significant threads in their lives that helped them develop the strength and resilience to overcome their challenges, work and education came

up frequently. It was not only that work was important for financial security and stability, but along with education also important for a sense of community, identity, self-esteem, independence and pride. This fits with Barnett and Rivers' research that is "proving conclusively that paid work is good for women....Research clearly shows that work offers women a chance for heightened self-esteem, a buffer against depression, and enhanced mental and physical health" (1996, p. 29). Education was also an important resource, and was seen by many of the participants as being "the most effective way of developing the ability to care for oneself" (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 215). Whether to complete a GED, LPN or a Ph.D. education was important to a number of the participants, many of whom continue in school.

Beth, for whom one of her major challenges had to do with her career, could relate some of the career pressure, self-esteem and sense of identity she was struggling with back to the work ethic instilled by her family of origin. When Beth's mother went back to work full time Beth also started working.

I picked up stuff at home. I did the laundry at my house from the time I was about 11. I think I baby sat every afternoon for the lady across the street when I was 12 during the summer. I've had a summer job since I was in seventh grade. It was just kind of how you worked....Your value to the community is how hard you work and what you contribute in work. Not necessarily scholarly work, but work, work. ...Maybe it was a self-esteem issue. I don't know, I haven't really pondered on that insight yet. But it could have been a self-esteem issue that that was role modeled for me.

Last fall, I'd equaled my husband's income....I guess I felt it gave me leverage and I could say you're not making any more than I am. So hey that was part of it. That was part of it. And because this consulting project was pretty financially rewarding, it kind of took some tension [off]. He felt that there was some money coming in. I think that helped. And as I got more myself back, more confident, less upset, that helped.

School has been an equally important piece of Beth's sense of strength and resilience.

She has combined the threads of work and school most of her life.

I think I figured out I've gone to school probably half our married life. Yeah. I started my master's shortly after we got married. After the twins were about three years old, I started taking classes towards an MBA. The [organization] I worked at was pretty supportive of that.

Pilar also has always worked since she turned 13. It is at work that she feels she can best think through her problems. In listening to Pilar, her love of work was obvious and clearly a very significant thread in her sense of strength and resilience.

I chose to not be home. I chose to go to work. And I just wanted to get out, so that's what I would do. I would work. I would go out and work and work and forget about my problems because I was working. I was busy. And I would go to work, come home and go to school and come home and go to school and work. And I thought that's what life was. That was my life and I loved it. I loved school and I loved going to work. I hated being home. I finished high school....I worked as a cashier at a store by the house, I washed dishes at a restaurant, I worked at the packing house during the summer. When I got out of high school I worked at an arsenal. It was the Vietnam War so we were making bombs there. And so I did that for a couple of years. And I loved that job. I was working nights at that job.

But I wanted better things for myself. I was thinking I need something, I need education. I was tired of working hard, I was tired of these dumb jobs. I wanted some kind of education. And I started thinking, you know, I need something that I don't get tired. I'm going to get old and I'm not going to be able to do anything. I'll be working these hard machinery jobs all the time. You know I need to start thinking about my son and myself. And I need to do something.

It was at this time she borrowed money to go to cosmetology school.

And then at that time after the divorce....I was working three jobs. I was working as a secretary, I was working as a beautician, and I was working at the bar. And that was for nine years.

Now I'm the migrant outreach coordinator. I take the bus out to the fields and take care of farm workers that come from Mexico or anywhere on the field. I do all the medical work. I switched totally from the dental to the medical in 1993 And I always continued to go to school through out the year for one thing or another. Computers. I did computer training and went to school throughout the years, on and off.

I decided, you know what, I really, really, really want to go to school, but at that time I was so busy...I couldn't. And so Ed offered me the job I have now. And he goes Pilar you can do this and you'll have more time, you'll just work the migrants So I decided to take that job, because I got a raise. And then I decided to go into nursing. And so I'm continuing to go to school now. I graduate in May with my LPN, and then I'll continue with the RN program. But I had to do the LPN first before I could do the RN. [laughs] But at least I'll be a nurse and I'll be a provider. So that's what's I'm looking forward to in May, but I've been to school for a long, long time.

And my husband, he didn't like my work at first. And I says, you know what, you'd better get used to it. But this is what I do, is I work. I work and go to school and I've always got to be busy because this is what I've always done. If I have a problem, I go to work. And I try to take care of my problem. And try to deal with it that way. And then I can go home and say you know what, I can face my problem now. To take care of it.

I don't know what I would do if I couldn't work. Because that's what I used to do. Oh yeah. That's a strength. That's another strength. Yeah. I think it's the knowledge of

work. I can just about do anything. When I left dental to come to medical I thought about it and I says, you know what, I can't do it. I know I can do dental, because I do it now and I know I can do that really well. But how I can go into medical now. I don't believe it. What if I don't do it? What if I can't make it? My friend Penny told me, Pilar, you can do it, you can do anything.

Julie has always worked outside the home. It was her husband who changed his career when their children were born to home school them. Julie described the sense of self and independence that comes from work.

Linda: Did that come from growing up? That sense of identity and sense of self, a sense of strength that you have, has that always been there?

Julie: No I don't think it's always been there. I've always felt that I was smart, but you know I wasn't a particularly good looking kid. I guess my really strong sense of self came when I graduated from college. And I could be independent. When I went back to Europe, I went on my own money, waitress money. When I got over there I got a job. I've always worked. When I was in Germany even though I was in the university, I was working in Hertz Rent-a-Car. And I paid for university through working. Which a lot of people didn't do in Europe. A lot of people were getting money from home. It was hard to get a job actually. So I always worked. And I just loved the independence. And I really felt, even though I had a loving family, I really got to feeling good about things when I was on my own. Because neither my brother nor my sister had that same....it was always important to me. Always important to me. The financial independence. Having your own money so you could be independent.

Donna also discussed that "having your own money" was important to her sense of strength as she was coping first with single motherhood and now her autistic son. She likes working and at one point went for 11 years without a sick day or vacation.

I didn't want to stay at home. I wanted my own money. I did not want to depend on welfare. I hated that. I had to do that for a short time with the first child. Then I went to school and I said I have to work. So that's when I started cleaning office buildings and I went with my brother-in-law. He was doing it part time while he was working someplace else. So his sisters and I. They would come pick me up and we'd all pile up in the car and go clean offices, which wasn't that hard to do. We'd work from seven to ten-thirty. And during the day I went to beauty school and high school. I finished beauty school before high school. I got a GED. Then I started working in a beauty salon. I stopped the cleaning after I started working full time.

My mom and dad, both of them, but more so, my mom. She never liked the welfare system. She was never on that system. She said it's nothing like having your own money. To work and have your own money without those people in your business, your personal life. They send through changes and then they give you a little bit of money and then you don't do anything with your life. So it's better to have your own money. So that's what I instilled into my kids. It's better to have your own money.

Lisa has also always worked outside the home. She felt fortunate that she had an education and could earn a living when her husband decided he wanted a divorce.

It's interesting. I was the scholar in my family although I wouldn't call myself a scholar. But I liked school. My sister just barely got through high school. My father probably never finished high school in the Depression. He was a policeman and that was not information I ever had until after he died because I think my mother said he was ashamed of that. He didn't want me to know. I have cousins who went to college, but in my immediate family I was it. I always knew I wanted to go to college. I don't know where that came from. There was never any question in my mind. And in New York there were plenty of city schools, so money wasn't an issue. I don't think my parents could have sent me. But in my nuclear family I was it. My family is Jewish. Education is highly prized in my culture certainly, but it didn't come from my parents...I don't know where that came from, but it's been very strong in me.

Jolene found that school and work kept her going during all of the challenges with her family and children.

I keep saying if it wasn't for going to school I wouldn't have made it. Because I could focus on it. I knew I had to. To me that was more important. I would study, usually late at night. During that same time we found out that Danny's dad was dying. So he was flying off to Texas while I was going the other direction. So it was kind of hectic around here. Most people said I don't know how you're dealing with this.

Work gave Josephine a sense of purpose and values outside herself during her crisis.

Work is important. I changed organizations right in the middle of this in order to have more flexibility and to work part time. Work gets me out of myself. I feel useful in the larger world. My work allows me to give back. I work with people who have shared values. I hear others' stories.

A Sense of Coherence and Moving On

Although there will always be stress, chaos, and disorder in our lives, a sense of coherence involves "confidence in the ability to clarify the nature of problems so that they seem ordered, predictable, and explicable. Demands are believed to be manageable" (Walsh, 1998b, p. 56) so that we can deal successfully our challenges. This sense of coherence fosters successful adaptation to future challenges and allows us to keep moving on our life journeys with increasing confidence and grace. Grace was the word Josephine chose to describe how she has moved through her challenges. Her description portrays a vivid example of a sense of coherence for me.

Two years after the crisis with my husband....we have developed a way, we are a tag team....My husband is much more connected now....He sees and appreciates me more clearly. I could have gone from here, but I wanted to be a model for my kids. They saw my loss....I wanted my kids to have a model of moving through with grace under fire, not victimization. Grace was really important to me. Being the bitch is pretty easy. It can be immediately gratifying. I didn't feel good about it. It wasn't how I wanted to win. I didn't want my kids to learn that.

After her divorce, Lisa was also clear that being a victim was not how she wanted to see herself. She describes her journey out of anger towards a more coherent, worthy person.

What I've grown to learn is...to give myself the same nurturance and ability to grow...I could do that for my kids. I couldn't do that for myself. I now can do that for myself. I don't know if rising above is right. I went through the divorce and I came out of it intact, although I'm not sure that's the word. I'm reformed. But I'm not bitter. I can get angry, but I'm not bitter. I haven't stopped my life. I didn't come out the victim. I don't like to wallow. I felt unworthy, but I don't think I felt he did it to me. What I felt was I should have been better. If I had been better, then I could have kept him. But I don't think I felt he did it to me. I don't think I felt victimized. I don't know that I say I rose above it, because it's a part of me. But I have a life and I have a full life now. I didn't stop at that point. It marks me but it didn't stop me. And where I am now is, I'm at a much more congruent place for myself. I'm more forceful, I'm clearer. And even those parts of me that I don't like, I'm more accepting of them. And that I think comes with age too. I don't sit here and say I should be better. Yeah, there are things I still want to do differently, but I don't sit here now saying "If only I were better" like I did then.

Although it wasn't Lisa's choice for that marriage to end, she found, "in hindsight it was the best thing that ever happened" to her because of the changes she had to make and the new insights into herself that she accepted. Regarding the persistent scars that still exist and the anger she did not have the energy for, she related:

I always say, it's as if you had a sore and it scabs over and heals. But if you scratch it you can feel the original pain. And so when I scratch it, it's amazing how I can still feel that pain. And it starts to come up now and part of me says, I don't want to go there. But it's amazing to me when you have had what marks you or a trauma in your life, that original pain does come back. Even after. I was separated in '83, divorced in '85, remarried in '88. So it's a lot of years. And that original pain can come up very quickly.

I think what surfaces now for me is an anger at him that I kept down a fair amount back then. I mean, I was angry, but I would never really confront him and that was our history anyway. I would never confront him. And I never confronted him about it and now all these years out I can get just as angry. [laughs]. I never confronted him. But I never confronted him because I had to survive. I had to get my kids through it and I had to get me through it. And that meant focusing on survival and not all that anger. I didn't deny it and I had outlets to talk about it.

She described the process of getting in touch with her abilities and strengths:

I think through the divorce challenge and ever since I've been moving more and more back to myself. I'm never sure I was there as a kid, but certainly I think that that's been the process, of getting more in touch with Lisa and who she is.

[Husband] was a bright man, although I'm suddenly deciding that I'm bright. It's taken me all these years. I'd never seen myself that way, even though I'd done all this

academic stuff. I never saw myself as bright. The things I saw myself as bright in, were put down. People's feelings, people's reactions to things, people's connections, being aware of people's feelings. It was like all these years in higher education didn't count.

I think it's only now that I feel worthy enough to say what did you do? And how did I tolerate that? And why would I ever have tolerated that? And that's a long time in coming.

With new career possibilities, increased understanding of what she can see now as a good marital tension, and the completion of her doctorate, Beth found that in time things played out.

But I guess what got through was eventually [crying] I just started feeling better. I kind of started to realize that things happen and there is constantly a struggle between good and evil. ... I started...getting a network ...and continued working on and had some success on one...project I was doing. And I was facing the end of my course work... So it wasn't like I was jumping ship on something that was actually turning around or I just didn't have the courage to stay. It was that I had seen that. If I stayed I would have felt like a loser to be part of a losing organization. Instead I kind of have a career going and I finished my Ph.D. I can see myself doing all sort of different things. Maybe the fact that I'm not a big bonder is okay. It was kind of full circle. I've had that new insight only for a couple of months. You see that in time things play out.

Many of the participants' stories described, although not directly, being uncomfortable or in life pain and the importance of time passing before being able to find coherence and being able to move on. I found a metaphor Beth discussed when she was encouraging others to take time during a difficult transition useful for the patience that is often needed before finding a sense of coherence and moving on.

I felt that a transition time where you kind of wander that desert for a while and think about things and are truly uncomfortable helps. There needs to be a chance to wander that desert and kind of a way to make a good ending here and start over fresh in a way.

Jean concluded our first interview with a exclamation that she had never sat down and reviewed the challenges of her life like this. She described feeling proud when she thought about how far she had come and how much she had overcome. Her story, looked at retrospectively, portrays a sense of coherence which is defined by Walsh (1998b) as an orientation to life as comprehensible.

It's just been a whole life of having struggles. Now I did feel good about myself when I opened my [business] and it was a success. I bought it in 1971 by wheeling and dealing. I probably didn't really look at myself and say, you know you're smart, you're really smart until I was about 50. I'll be 60 in December.

A sense of coherence, according to Walsh (1998b) contributes to health and mental well-being and addresses purpose in life. An example of Jean's sense of coherence for me was in a story she related on how good it was, for a woman, without a high school education to have that conviction that she made it because she's smart.

I figured out what I wanted to do. I used my head. I remember giving a talk to women in small business. It was a great big thing down at the Senate Caucus Building. The one thing that I said that impressed people and also impressed me because I heard myself talking was: Men, when they succeed, they are smart. People say oh isn't he smart. He's so smart. And when women succeed, they say, isn't she lucky. Women are just as smart as men, smarter sometimes. But I guess I had this little thing in the back of my head that always said, you know, Jean, you're really lucky. You're very lucky. Whatever you do works, you're lucky. And not thinking about all the bad things that had happened to me. I was lucky because I got beyond that. But you know, I did it because I thought about it.

A sense of coherence which involves an orientation to life as comprehensible and manageable is portrayed by Meg as she continues to move on through her journey more and more alone as she loses her husband little by little to Alzheimer's. As Meg acknowledges the increasing debilitation and disease progression of her husband's Alzheimer's and looks ahead, she sees a fragile process.

I struggle some with [husband] about how optimistic to be and how much do you keep looking for solutions and how much do you give in to fate and stop the struggle? But, at this point, there isn't anything that's going to be different.....it's been 9 years now. And it seems like working through this has been and continues to be a fragile process. I think at this point I feel very much more that I have to depend on myself...I probably at this point have more of a sense of being able to manage and live on my own without a spouse that I can depend on.

Meg's sense of coherence seemed illustrated by a metaphor on hardiness she thought back on from her grandfather's orchard. This sustains her in her ongoing challenge.

When my grandfather planted the family apple orchard he planted golden delicious and red delicious and Jonathan's, different kinds of trees, which I guess he planted in the late 20s or early 30s. There was an armistice day storm in 1940 the year after I was born that killed all the orchard or most of it. So at that point my father, and this is a process going on in my childhood, planted what he called hardy stock. That's what the word hardiness made me think of. Where they planted a hibernal apple for strength on the base and then grafted Jonathans on. And so as a little kid we helped graft, learned to graft on to trees. So I was kind of thinking of what makes for a stable trunk and roots so you can have the more fragile stuff and survive it. That's a nice metaphor. So what happens as they grow, you cut off the hibernal stuff and let the top of the tree be something else.

Although many of the participants were looking back on an experience they came through, Donna, like Meg, continues to be right in the middle of her challenge, yet she still finds a sense of confidence and coherence in her resilience.

I learned that everything is not going to be smooth sailing in life. And if I had to do it all over again, I'd do the same thing. It taught me that I can be strong and I can cry and go on, but I can still be strong and carry on because it's not all about me, it's about my kids, and it's about doing right for them. That's what I worked so hard for.

Maya escaped segregation and poverty in rural Mississippi via scholarships in predominantly white universities. The struggle continued as she set about the task so important to her, parenting.

I thought I was such an ignorant parent. I thought I knew nothing about places and library story time and all those wonderful resources out there for little kids. It's like a little sub-culture out here that I never even knew about. And I'm so intimidated by white women because I felt like they were smarter, more qualified to be parents, more educated, they had friends, they travel in groups, they support each other. So anyway I went for a year feeling very inferior at that school, wanting to leave it, not feeling a part of it. And not that anybody's doing this to me. It's my own self imposed fear. I don't blame anybody for anything. But I got to the point where I felt like, you know, you can't complain if you don't do anything about it. You don't have the right if you don't do anything about it. So I got the opportunity to volunteer for one event. To do one event. And from that someone called me and they said, how would you like to be an officer in the PTA? And so that was another thing that gave me confidence.

As she worked to weave the thread of cancer into her life in some meaningful way Julie found herself reaching back to her liberal arts education in the humanities and found that a sense of history helped her, thinking in terms of how much less life expectancy we had at the turn of the century and the fact that life and death are part of what we all go through.

And she found that:

There is something that came of this experience that was a real change in myself. And that was the sense of finitude, I guess. All of my life I've sort of felt like I was on this apprenticeship, that I was getting ready to do the really big thing that I was going to do. You know I remember when I hit 20 and I thought, Ah, 20. Then I hit 30, same thing. And I kept thinking, you know, this is all part of my CV, even if it never fleshes out as such. Getting ready for that really big thing. And then you realize, well...this could happen. And that too in a way is a beneficial realization because it puts the present in a much sharper focus, you know. And I think in many ways I've enjoyed myself in the present more than I would have otherwise.

A healing sense of humor was apparent as Julie discussed the importance of feeling like you're part of something as you face the challenges of life's journey.

The friends, the colleagues I guess gives you this feeling that you're part of something. I kept thinking, well, you know if I were to die right now, there would be a lot of people at my funeral. [laughs] Which somehow also made me feel really good. I knew that that would be the case ...I think Stephen Covey, I'm sure you're familiar with him, he says, "How will people look at you when you're dead?" And that's a good perspective to put on things.

Julie talked of a turning point and how she offloaded things and lives life differently since the cancer.

Two weeks ago we had an estate sale for my parents' things. I actually took things down there of my own to off load. At this point things are the last thing I want. I think that was sort of a turning point. Yes, I would say that it is. Because another example of that is that realization that experience is really the most important thing. The most informing thing that you can have. And up until then, my kids never had the obscene Christmas giving that tends to be typical more and more now days. They got things. And I realized after the cancer that the more important was to have experiences. They will have a trip instead of a Christmas. We've done a lot of trips. We've sought experiences that we probably wouldn't have had.

Sadie also described a sense of finitude as she examined the threads of her life.

I think it's all the clichés. I think it's that midlife time when you realize you don't have forever to do what you want. So I think it was that, it was the kids growing up, it was my sister's death, and dying process and the prospect of taking on another child. And it seemed as though it was going to be so much easier to do that without my husband. [laughs] That's awful. Even though I had to take care of business. I tell you he just takes up a lot of air in the room...I think it is a combination of all the things. I really do. I don't think it's any one person, or any one thing. I think the stars were lined up right for me. I feel as though I have been dealt a lot, but I feel as though I was given the tools to handle it. All I have to do is realize them, which is the very frustrating part. One of my beliefs is that everything I need to make me as happy as I want to be I have. And I have. And it's there. And it exists. And I just have to figure it out, call it to me, connect with it, work for, whatever. But it is there, I believe. I believe.

As she reflected on her the many deaths in her family and what sustains her, Sadie always came back to her family and again reiterated that sense of finitude.

I am enjoying my children so much. One of those reasons is that I know that they might not be there tomorrow. And I don't mean that in a morbid way. But just in a real way. I know. I know about the preciousness of life. And that has really made my life in some ways more joyful. And more rich for sure.

Writing about her children, her divorce, the death of her sister and father has sustained Sadie and helped her find a sense of coherence in her challenges. Water provides a fitting metaphor that for her.

Well water is a good analogy for me because it's so primordial for me. I love the ocean, I love rivers. If we do a river analogy right now I feel as though although I'm following the current of the water which is like the Greek word 'tehee' or fate or life,

there's a current. I'm going with the current but I feel as though now I'm doing more of the steering. And I'm stopping at more of the banks. I'm exploring, doing more exploring, both of myself and the river and the banks.

Summary

Setting the stories from the lives of the eighteen women who participated in this project side by side and integrating the themes that emerged helped me better understand the many ways we face our life challenges and develop resilience. But to respect the individuality of each woman and not lose her in the middle of all this integration, I will briefly summarize the themes that emerged for me from each participant and where she chose to situate herself in the lifecycle as she related her challenge.

Early Life

Pilar, who grew up physically abused, escaped her “hell hole” by getting married and suffered more abuse until she got out of that marriage with low self esteem and decreased inner strength. Her ability to deal with her challenges primarily came from work. Her strength came from her knowledge of work. She has worked since she was 13 and until the last few years worked up to three jobs at a time to survive. She continued getting educated, often on the job training. She persevered and focused on her goals to take care of her children and give them a better life and to become independent. She bought and lost several homes in her first marriage. She has a career as a medical assistant and at 51 will receive her LPN and go into an RN degree program. She has mentors at work who have recognized her strong work ethic and tenacity and given her increased opportunities. She has a strong sense of pride. She has forgiven her parents, from whom, in a negative way, she learned strength. She is sustained by daily prayer, although she does not attend Catholic services. She is remarried to a younger man with whom she has a very different marriage. She is very independent and keeps her house and car in her name. Her focus now continues to be on her children, work and school.

Jean described a whole life of having struggles. Her early challenges started with an irresponsible mother, an alcoholic stepfather and an isolated upbringing where she was

essentially alone and raised herself. She was pregnant and married by 15 and had another baby by 17. At 18 she was poor, no high school degree and in a marriage where neither loved the other. She used the skills she developed in the years alone in her home: self sufficiency, organization, taking control, learning by listening and watching. She also had the knowledge of work as she had worked since was nine years old. She had goals and a focus. She had to leave her children for one and a half years to go to school. She is self-taught and “wheeled and dealt” to open her business which has been successful for over 25 years. She struggled through a second marriage complicated by manic depression, increasing violence and credit card debt. She focused on goals, persevered, got out of debt and the marriage. She stayed unmarried for 11 years and 14 years ago married her best friend with whom she now at 60 has a peaceful life. She is proud of her children and that she did better than anyone in her family, that she made more of herself from nothing.

Maya’s challenges also started early in a home with alcohol and abuse in the segregated south. She grew up with few resources, no role models, isolated with self doubt and a sense of always having to come from behind. She also rose above by hard work. She had the highest grade point in her high school and played basketball and went to a predominantly large white university on full scholarship. She then worked her way through graduate school and into a career field dominated by white males. She had goals, was focused and persevered, always “being one of few” she “just did it” because she wanted “to live life.” An inner strength, meeting some “angels” who helped her along the way and a good marriage helped her “overcome a lot of things.” An ongoing challenge has come from the isolation of being again, one of few. In this case the only black mom in her community at home raising her children. For a woman who worked hard to make it and has what she wanted in a stable home and family, it is never the less a hard adjustment. A two year struggle with unresolved health issues complicated her sense of being okay.

Karen also described her childhood as isolated, although for her it was in the middle of a community in which she did not she fit. She struggled growing up with a distance critical

father and an negative alcoholic mother. She has worked hard since to build her self esteem and replace her negative expectations. Her strength comes from a solid marriage to a positive man, from close friendships that she has consciously built because she needed the emotional support of good friends. Like Jean, she identifies organization and discipline as strengths that have helped her deal with a child's chronic health problems. Although she does not consider herself religious, she chose a religious community because she wanted a community for herself and children.

Lillian's early challenges came from poverty in El Salvador and her parents bad luck in losing everything several times in earthquakes. She desperately wanted to get out from under and have an opportunity to better herself. She had a strong sense of efficacy and was determined to build a different life. She came to the United States on a leap of faith, with a strong goal orientation to get an education and make money to help her family. Her marriage is supportive, but her inner strength and sense of efficacy seems to be what propelled her leap from poverty and lack of education to two college degrees, and a successful career in which she is currently on a fellowship work study. She always looks forward, never back.

Leaving Home

The major challenge for Lien was a harrowing escape from Saigon, losing all the money for which she had worked years to pirates on the journey, hiding for a month in a jungle before spending nine months in different refugee camps. Although she has struggled in the U.S. with loneliness, isolation and difficult financial situations, she does not regret her decision to leave all of her family and country. She wanted to have choices in her life and be able to raise her children with freedom. She thinks her inner strength and focus on goals gets her through her challenges. She has been lonely in her marriage, but she is committed to it for the sake of the children and because she and her husband have been through much together. Her present goal now is to help her husband through their current financial difficulties.

Sadie's challenges started during the years of leaving home when the family legacy of suicide, began by her father when she was an infant, hit close when her brother killed himself while she was visiting him. There has since been more family depression, suicide and other more recent losses, including her sister to AIDS. She adopted her sister's son at the same time she was going through her own divorce. Her family of origin, whose tragedies challenge her, also sustain her. She is also sustained by her love for her children, a close network of friends, her writing, her work, her sense of home, and a significant relationship. Even as she struggles with some of the same mistakes her mother made, she finds her mom a good and loving creative role model. She has an inner trust and makes conscious decisions. Reading about the issues that concern her, a sense of spirituality, humor, physical activity and downtime all sustain her as she "keeps on keeping on."

A series of losses of close family members in a one month period propelled Josephine into what she now recognizes as depression and forced her to drop out of college. The marriage she soon entered into in order to be taken care of, turned out to be controlling, and more recently challenged by promiscuous infidelities. As she was dealing with that, her adolescent son was diagnosed with a bipolar manic depressive disorder with severe depression. She found strength from a family legacy of strong women, from having survived other losses, from two very close friends and family members, from work, from therapy and a support network, from reading about addiction, and a sense of humor. She made a conscious decision to heal and stay with her husband, while he embarked on his own healing process, for the sake of the children. She finds that they are now better partners with better communication.

When she left home for work in another part of the country, the loss of her significant love relationship prompted Natalie to move back to the area where she had support from friends and family. In rebuilding her life by returning to school, Natalie had to deal with old school failures and a sense of not being smart enough. This thread of not being smart enough came up again after she was fired from a job while she was also caring for her

mother. Around the same time a series of miscarriages created additional challenges. A strong family history of overcoming and family role models also helps Natalie deal with adversity. She has a strong inner strength, and believes perseverance and endurance gets her through. She has a network of girlfriends who provide verbal support and a stable marriage that provides silent emotional support. She sought counseling during the breakup and a support group during the miscarriages. She brought religion into her life for herself and children because going to church helps her.

Marriage and Children

Graziella was challenged by not having a high school education or GED when her husband was out of work and she and their three young children had to move to her husband's native country which was a much less expensive place for them to live. Her sense of home and family is strong. She set goals, dug in, endured and saved. She's not afraid of change and has learned from her mother's role modeling to stay positive and calm. She eventually completed her GED, values work and on the job training and works in a medical clinic with young pregnant girls to keep them in school. Her marriage is a source of strength and trust.

Maria found marriage a challenge because her husband did not want her to work. A supportive family, good friends, taking responsibility for herself and her own happiness, and a sense of a supreme being helped her. She plans to always work because she needs people.

Work is very important and also sustaining to Donna as she deals with her autistic son, her marriage and the loss of her mother, who was her support system, to Alzheimer's. She used the strength she learned from her mother's role modeling and a strong spiritual faith to work through marital problems for the sake of her son. The strength to forgive allowed her to reconcile with her father in order to both help him and her son.

In order to survive the challenge of a divorce that she did not want when her children were young, Lisa found strength in her sense of commitment and her goal to survive for

the sake of her children. She has a strong legacy of a family history of survival. Education continues to be important as is the ability to work and earn a living. She found an inner strength in therapy and a support group. Because her father died one month before she and her husband separated, she and her mother were both dealing with loss and crisis at the same time and she didn't tell her mother about her separation for several months. She felt she didn't grieve for her father fully at that time because she was in "crazy time" of her own.

Midlife and Multiple Roles

The most significant challenges Carol struggled with were her decisions to leave the convent when she was 28 and then at midlife to leave the military at the apex of her career for the sake of her marriage. In both transitions it was a loss of identity and stability that made the decisions so difficult. Ironically it was another challenge, cancer, in the middle of the military decision that impacted her choice. She found strength in an inner trust, her marriage, the experience of previous challenges and counseling. She learned to reframe her problems and look at new possibilities.

At the same time Beth's professional career was crashing and her marriage getting tense, her parents moved across the country to be near her for help. She had three children and was full time in a doctoral program. As a life long religious person, she was unable to turn to her church because it was also in disorganization at the same time. The strong work ethic that had been role modeled by her mother was a strong theme in her life: When things get tough you find a way to survive. Her marriage struggled, but provided good tension. She found peer support in her graduate program, did spiritual devotion on her own, sought counseling, and had the inner strength to let things play out in time.

Julie's career provided strength when her diagnosis of cancer put her husband in depression, her home-schooled children in school at the same time her dad died and her mom went crazy and had to be institutionalized. Her strength came from a good marriage and her children, a strong sense of self, a sense of community, spirituality, finitude,

humor, and a very strong will to live. Cancer was a turning point. Julie consciously lives life with joy and energy every day.

Jolene's parents and sister, her husband's parents, and their daughters provided the greatest challenges to Jolene and her husband. Adaptability played a huge part in their survival, in addition to having a focus and sense of purpose, good communication, sense of independence and resourcefulness, and humor, education, and a commitment to make their marriage work.

Meg's challenge continues as her husband's early Alzheimer's becomes increasingly debilitating. As she moves along this journey of loss, she digs deep for a greater sense of independence, stability, spirituality and emotional support. She stays close to her children, friends and family. Work gives her a focus, exercise has increased her energy, and her piano brings joy and a release.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

The traveler metaphor provided an apt description of my experience in this research journey as I explored several domains of the country and entered into conversations, asked questions, and listened as the women I encountered told their stories of the lived world. The purpose of this study was to learn about the challenges of women's lives at midlife and how they developed the strength and resilience to rise above their adversity. My goal was to listen to women's voices and "try to hear without being distracted by premature judgment, by dismissiveness or idealization" (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995, p. 2).

The women who participated in this study presented a complexity of challenges and an enormous diversity of resources. They struggled with cultural expectations, autonomy, independence and interdependence as they made their own choices and created resilience out of their experiences. Their stories provided insight into the role of individual agency in weaving the threads of challenge into the complex patterns of resilience. Many of these women described their struggle with powerlessness both within their families of origin and in the adult families. They talked of growing up with physical abuse and alcoholism, abandonment, isolation, poverty, lack of education, being told they weren't smart enough, immigration to get out of poverty or communism, and a family legacy of suicide. They struggled with multiple losses of loved ones to death, loss of significant love relationships and divorce, marital affairs and sexual addiction. They were challenged by unexpected pregnancies, unemployment and multiple moves to find work, career transitions, serious health problems for themselves, their children or parents, and family of origin needs.

A goal of this research was, as encouraged by Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995), to give a fuller range of women's experience by bringing women in "as first-person narrators so that...[their] voices can directly inform theories of human development" (p. 6). The heart of this research are the participants' stories of their struggles to make sense of the

challenges that “most marked” them. They reflected on the meaning they made of these experiences in order to integrate them into the fabric of their lives and their life tapestry. I brought the similar threads from their stories together in order to weave yet another tapestry that offers a broader and deeper insight into resilience, believing as Clarissa Pinkola Estes wrote in *In The Gift of Story*, that “a sequence of tales is thought to offer broader and deeper insight than a single story alone” (1993, p. 1).

During this process I often reflected on the wonderful play, “Quilters,” which weaves in my Midwestern heritage and tells the story of women’s lives on the prairie through their quilts. Women family members, friends, and neighbors gathered together in sod huts to sew together scraps of material from the clothing of their lives: a bridal gown, a mother’s dress, a dead child’s smock. From these bits of material they wove their experiences into quilts that told the stories of their lives and had names such as the Bridal Ring, The Log Cabin, or Robbing Peter to Pay Paul.

My process has been similar to the quilters as they told stories of their challenges and experiences through the patterns they chose. I integrated the themes that emerged from the narratives of the individual women into a larger story that I believe remains respectful of each woman’s individuality. Thematic lines were the most fitting way for me to integrate these life stories of struggle and resilience that are concerned with women’s evolving experiences as they make sense of conflict and tension in their lives. McAdams (1994) described theme as a “complex dimension...[that] implies a temporal dimension in narrative” (p. 162). “It is at the level of theme that we...see conflict and tension in a story, as when a character...is frustrated, or when conflicting goals...arise” (p. 162).

The themes discussed in the previous chapter represent my efforts to organize the experiences of these 18 women to facilitate understanding of how these women appraised their challenges, made meaning of them, confronted them and integrated them in a way that was useful and protective to them. The themes were my attempt to identify and interrelate some of the individual, relationship and protective processes that were revealed by these

women as they recounted challenges that occurred and what helped them to rise above these challenges. Although the participants were very diverse, many had issues in common and many of the themes they discussed were strikingly similar. Certainly not all of the themes were experienced by all of the participants. Selected portions of their stories were used to illustrate their experiences and the themes and how they were demonstrated in the lives of each of the 18 women. These themes and their interrelationships are not exhaustive or necessarily the only way to organize the data, but for me, they were compelling representations of the unique experiences of these women. What emerges from the data analysis is a clear sense of the complexity and interrelationships of the processes involved.

The metaphor of a tapestry provided an excellent structure for working with the tension of themes or threads that wove through the women's life cycles, and how they appraised their challenges, made sense of their belief systems, evaluated their connections, relationships, and resources. By visualizing a theme or strong thread as one that weaves through the life cycle and takes on different meanings in different contexts, I could appreciate how a thread appeared in affiliation as community and later in spiritual beliefs and perhaps again in resources and education. So although there are thematic lines in these life stories of resilience, they are not fixed lines, but rather flexible threads that wind throughout the women's lives and create different patterns in different contexts and times.

Theoretical Overview of Resilient Women at Midlife

The systems perspective enabled me to better understand the women in their multiple roles. The women who volunteered to participate in this project met their challenges with courage and strength, but did not necessarily consider themselves resilient. They described how they overcame obstacles posed by their personal history and a larger social history. Their sense of strength and resilience came through as they described their efforts to create meaning in their lives by improvising, recreating, and reconstructing their lives. They made meaning of their lives and challenges in the context in which they found themselves.

The life cycle approach allowed me to set the stories of the women who suffered early life challenges, and on whom there is more research (Werner, 1993; Wolin & Wolin, 1993; Higgins, 1994), next to the other women in order to compare and contrast how they made sense of their challenges and developed their sense of resilience. How and when the women appraised their challenges influenced their responses. The women whose challenges began in early life described an early absence of affiliation, encouragement, spirituality, or role models, but they “just did it.” They learned by doing, then looked back. They focused, set goals for themselves and took charge of their own lives, made choices, and “acquired a depth of experience through purposeful pursuits” (Walsh, 1998b). Be it education, work, marriage, or family, they found a sense of coherence and were able to move on with an increased sense of pride, confidence and competence, and a sense of strength and resilience.

As discussed in the literature review, most of the research in resilience has focused on subjects who suffered early trauma. This study corroborates what other studies have documented. The women in this study who endured early suffering emerged with a resilience similar to that described by Grossman and Moore (1994) who found that resilient adults used their survival skills to perform well in various adult contexts. They transformed the nature of their relationships by moving beyond dysfunctional ways and relating in a relatively open trusting manner. They made their experiences into something that had meaning for others.

The participants who faced the challenges that most “marked” them in the stage of leaving home, or married with children, or at midlife, described threads similar to their cohorts who were challenged earlier in life. They also had to negotiate their identities, overcome social forces and personal misfortune. Although as they endured and resisted, those whose challenges struck later, were more able to draw strength from a sense of affiliation and spirituality, role models or positive family legacies. All of the participants dug deep and searched their core beliefs for the strength to make meaning of their

challenges. They all reassessed their significant relationships and looked for opportunities and resources in education and work. As these women recreated their lives, many bypassed restricting structures, overcame tremendous adversity, transcended their challenges, and created new lives for themselves and their children.

These women, many of whom have overcome staggering odds, were determined to shape their pain into “something else” as described by Wolin and Wolin (1993). They displayed tremendous initiative and tenacious perseverance. They had a “faith in surmounting” found by Higgins (1994). They continue in midlife to modify their life experiences and achieve success in work, marriage and their ongoing life challenges. The women have a sense of pride in acknowledging and celebrating how far they have come and how well.

Belief Systems

As the participants described how they made meaning of their experiences, the family resilience framework (Walsh, 1998b) and particularly the concept of belief systems (Walsh, 1998b; Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996) provided the structure for the themes that emerged from their stories. This process began with the women’s appraisal of the challenge that most marked them and their possibilities for change. It was through these belief systems that they made sense of their challenges and their ability to rise above or integrate the challenge into their lives in a way that worked for them. Their belief systems were composed of three main family groupings: affiliative beliefs, facilitative beliefs and transcendent spiritual beliefs.

Affiliative beliefs and values were the significant connections or associations in which the participants valued the importance of their membership which generally fell into three categories: their homes, their family legacy, and their communities. Walsh stressed the importance of affiliation to resilience: “...strength is best forged through collaboration....In joining together, we strengthen our ability to overcome adversity” (1998b, p. 51). Results of this research are consistent with other studies that showed that the concept of community

is highly important to women. In her research on how older women have been empowered by their religious faith to survive crisis in their lives, Ramsey (1995) found that community is more like a world of meaning than a social activity. [It] is a “resource for deep friendships...a place to love and be loved, a safe environment where one is fully accepted and affirmed” (p. 249).

Facilitative beliefs were vital to the participants’ sense of resilience. For this research I listened for what facilitated resilience and at the heart of the participants’ stories of resilience were core beliefs, both facilitative and constraining beliefs. Core beliefs are the “beliefs that matter” within the significant events in our lives according to Wright, Watson and Bell (1996, p. 43). Whereas constraining beliefs decreased solution options to problems and often perpetuated their problems, facilitative beliefs increased solution options. All of the participants described beliefs that were both helpful and facilitating. The facilitative beliefs and outlooks that I identified from the participants’ discussions included a sense of inner trust, a sense of initiative and perseverance, a sense of hope, optimism and humor, a sense of choice and independence, and a sense of creativity and generativity. These beliefs proved vital for the resilience participants needed to withstand and rebound from adversity (Walsh, 1998b).

Transcendent and spiritual beliefs provided meaning and purpose beyond the adversity faced by the participants. For many of the participants their religion and their extrinsic involvement in their religious community with its shared values and beliefs about God gave them hope and strength to meet and make meaning of their challenge. Many participants who did not have a formal religious faith, had a strong personal intrinsic spiritual belief in a supreme being. This system of spiritual beliefs transcended the limits of their experience and allowed for hope as they made sense of our challenges. Ramsey (1995) found the spiritual resilience of the women she interviewed “developed along with and out of the emotional experiences” (p. 254).

Connectedness and Relationships

As the participants made sense of their challenges through their belief systems, they discussed the people who matter in their lives. Their relationships and sense of connectedness to others was important to how they integrated and rose above their challenges. Connectedness was the term used by Walsh (1998b) to describe the “counterbalance of unity, mutual support and collaboration (p. 85).” The complex interplay of individuation and connectedness in one’s relationships (Franz, Cole, Crosby, & Stewart, 1994) was addressed by all participants because my second research question asked how challenging experiences influenced their marriage and how the experience was affected by their marriage. As the participants discussed the role of marriage in their sense of resilience, they also described the significant importance of friends, family, and children. I was struck with the sense that although their marriage was described as supportive and providing stability, their other relationships were equally important. This is consistent with Paul’s suggestion that because “the marital relationship waxes and wanes...other relationships may sometimes act as the primary contributor to well-being during adulthood” (1997, p. 172). When they looked at what sustained them, they found it was also very much their family, their friends, and their children in addition to their spouses. These significant relationships provided role models and encouragement and through this sense of connectedness they forged a sense of identity, found courage, and struggled with issues of reconciliation and forgiveness as they developed their strength and resilience.

As the participants discussed the connections that helped them overcome the challenges of their lives, the relational theme that clearly emerged was that of connection to friends, particularly their “girlfriends.” Listening to the participants discuss the importance of “girlfriends” led me to believe that these friendships were transformative for the women as they shared a crisis experience. The emotional support the participants received from their women friends was significant to their resilience and corroborates what other studies have

documented on the importance of friendship. A common thread running through the research of Blieszner and Adams on friendship “is the notion that friendship and other close relationships contribute to personal development and well-being” (1994, p.132). They pointed out the importance in the coping literature of “support from friends for dealing with critical life events” (1992, p. 97).

As the participants discussed the importance of friendship to their sense of resilience, the friendships they described fit into the two types of friendship processes, affective and behavioral, discussed by Blieszner and Adams (1992, pp. 12-13). The affective processes, described as empathy, trust, loyalty and commitment, were important threads throughout the participants’ vignettes on friendship. The behavioral processes of friendship which Blieszner and Adams define as the action component of friendship were vivid in the poignant examples of “Josephine” whose friend who flew across country to be with her during her marital crisis, and “Sadie” who called her friend a “barefoot-in-the-snow friend.” As I heard the women describe the importance of their “girlfriends” in the transcripts, I wondered if in these relationships with other women they had more a sense of their own voice than they had with the men in their lives, but I did not address that in this research.

Resources

The participants mobilized their resources to reorganize and develop the strength necessary to deal with their challenges. They came from all walks of life, different cultures and ethnic groups, a broad spectrum of socio-economic groups, and a wide range of educational levels. The availability of resources and opportunities over their life course varied widely. In addition to the resources included in their sense of community and connections, an additional set of resources emerged that was significant to the women’s appraisal of their challenges, belief systems and relationships. Seventeen of the eighteen women described the importance of work and education to their sense of resilience and strength. I was struck that the importance of work and educational resources did not

include financial resources. What they described as important was the knowledge of work and education and the possibilities those resources created for them. Work and education were discussed as a source of identity, community, pride, a place to think through problems. Financial resources were discussed as necessary, but not one of the significant threads for their resiliency.

Implications of the Research

In this research project I explored with women their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of resilience in the context of their marriage. From my conversations with the participants who responded after reading Chapter 4, I believe this study will be of value and inspiring to women as they affirm their own resilience and make decisions as they respond to the challenges of midlife and marriage. In studying resilience in women at midlife, I sought to provide a supportive and a constructive model for women to better understand their own resilience. I hope these stories of resilience will offer encouragement to women to struggle well, to try new behaviors, to learn from the past, and to venture courageously into an insecure future. In addition to these practical goals, I hope this study will contribute to qualitative family theory, adult development, research for women, and provide a resource for marriage and family therapists in their clinical practice with women at midlife. I also believe that research such as this, that looks for protective processes, is increasingly relevant to the general medical community as it becomes more attentive to the mind-body connection and respectful of the power of beliefs and fulfilling relationships for maintaining health and healing.

Research for Women

I chose a feminist perspective for this research because it stresses that the stories of women's lives have worth and that the telling of their stories promotes change (Walker et al., 1988). I used Thompson's agenda as a guide to conduct research *for* women. She stressed two ethical questions that must be considered when conducting research: "Is my research project exploitive of or empowering to participants and other people involved in

the project?” and “How can I avoid oppressive objectification of my research participants?” (1992, p. 14). I have been rigorous in this research that it not be an objective disinterested portrayal that strives to explain the experience of others.

I selected small vignettes from each woman to present her story and also to protect her privacy. I tried to be respectful of the integrity of their words as I looked for the significant threads and themes that emerged in their narratives. I presented the participants’ voices and words as much as possible in order to be faithful to them and to the tenets of feminist research. I followed Stewart’s (1994) feminist strategy which urges us to look for what’s been left out, analyze our own role or position as it affects our understanding and the research process, identify women’s agency in the midst of social constraint, identify other significant aspects of an individual’s social position and explore the implications of that position and avoid searching for a unified or coherent voice.

I have attempted to work with the participants as “co-researchers” as much as possible and throughout the process I have been in close contact with the participants. I first mailed each of them copies of their condensed transcript and the themes that emerged for me from their transcripts to give them a chance to correct any misconceptions or details from the interview. In the second mailing I sent them Chapter 4 which contained their vignettes integrated into themes with those of the other participants. Fifteen of the participants called or wrote after receiving either the condensed transcripts and themes and later Chapter 4. This gave them the opportunity to add more insight, clarify, remove parts or just say thank you.

It is my hope that this research might prove of value for not only women but also their daughters. Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995) found that “the voice of women’s experience affords a crucial resonance for girls, providing girls with...a compass for centering themselves” (p. 4). They found that “women’s voices could be psychologically life-saving” (p. 5) and provide internal counter force to other life influences. This study is a continuing conversation. Just as the participants in this study described the importance of

role models to help them make sense of their challenges, their stories of challenge and resilience provide wonderful role models for girls and women of all ages as they deal with the challenges and transitions of life. A goal of this research was to learn more about the protective processes for women. The stories of the women who participated in this research can give us, as Kesho Yvonne Scott found in the stories of black women survivors, “examples of great courage and perseverance as well as new perspectives on the habits of survival that may – or may not – work well for us” (1991, p. 36). One of the participants, who was the most concerned about anonymity because of the nature of her story and her concern for the protection of her family, said after reading Chapter 4 that she hopes I will turn this into a book that she can have on her shelf so her daughter can read her story of resilience, even though she can never know it is her mother’s story.

I was particularly touched by the participants’ desire to turn their experience into something that had meaning for others. Although this woman was very concerned about confidentiality because of potential harm her disclosures could do to loved ones, she was nevertheless very open in sharing her story with me. Several others have also voiced the hope that I will do something with this that reaches more women. I understood the women’s participation in this study as a way to use their experience in a way that has meaning for other women.

Many expressed at the end of the interview or in the follow-up conversations that it had been an enriching experience to look back across their lives and experiences and see how they had integrated their challenges, how they had risen above, survived and moved on stronger and more resilient because of their experience. I approached the participants as authorities on their own experience. The interviews and the reading of their transcripts and Chapter 4 were emotional experiences for the women and for myself. Most of the participants both cried and laughed during the interviews. Another said she “sobbed” while reading Chapter 4, and even though she was anxious about participating and then again nervous while “reading one’s own story,” she “didn’t regret it and would do it all again. It

was healing to revisit it.” Another said, “Even as I cry I don’t feel bad – I guess it’s part of the forgiving process.” Another woman said: “I was a little bit in tears when I read my story. It brought back many memories. It was good to do.” They found the re-storying of their experience retrospectively allowed them to see their story from a different angle and increased their sense of pride, their strength to be vulnerable and gave them a deeper sense of their resilience.

After reading Chapter 4 one participant wrote: “I enjoyed reading [the draft] and was surprised and gratified to read other women saying the same things I have felt. I have found it hard to explain some of what moves me along and these women were saying the same thing and I felt very connected to them....Thanks again for sharing this....Thanks for helping me feel strong and understanding more of where that strength comes from. Another reported: “I found the other women appealing as well as inspiring.” Along the same line, another asked twice, “When can we all get together for dinner?” “It was a lovely experience. Thank you.” Another said: “I was proud to be involved. I was riveted to the story.” One of the African-American participants told me she “liked the diversity of women” and felt a “sense of continuity of people” in this study.

Others related that the interview and review process helped them develop and recover knowledge about themselves and their feelings. The participants discussed finding a sense of integrity in their struggles as they discussed and read about them. They described the interview as positive or as a “neat and very unique experience.” One woman said the themes “captured the essence of our conversation well.” Another said: “I have never before “disclosed so many things that are very important to me. I’ve never done that even for myself.” Most related that they felt very comfortable during the conversation which made it possible “to entrust my most inner thoughts about myself.”

Lisa said,

It was me. When I was going through the divorce I didn’t see myself as strong as this describes. This helped me see there was more of a foundation in my family than I ever saw or felt in the moment. I guess I was not following a new path as much as it seemed at the time. My dad had just died and mom had not made her passage at the time that I

was going through my divorce, so I didn't see her strength at the time of my divorce. She didn't have a choice either. My father died. It was something she had to deal with. Just like me. It was not my choice, but I had to do it.

Maya gave the transcript to her husband and reported that he liked it.

He said there was a lot he didn't know. I think it's going to make us closer. I tried to be removed as I read it. I was trying to look to see how this person came across. I felt good about this person. She was not too whiny or self pitying. My health issues are resolving. Now that I know I'm going to have a long life, that I'm not going to die like I thought I was two years ago, I can move on with life.

I think being an "insider" in this process helped establish a sense of trust and rapport with the participants. My awareness and personal experience of women's challenges across the life course increased my understanding of many of the struggles the participants' were sharing with me. From these interviews I gained a sense of "connected knowing" discussed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), a knowing achieved through the empathy and experience the participants shared in their interviews. I hope and think that this research process allowed, as Isasi-Diaz suggested in Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995) both the participants and myself to come back to ourselves – to our "strengths, experiences, questions and knowledge" (p. 141).

Implications for Therapy

All approaches to couple and family therapy seek to repair and strengthen couples and families (Walsh, 1993). The therapeutic approaches that I am most familiar with have a systems orientation in which therapists build relational empathy as they help couples and families express needs and share painful feelings as they resolve problems. The family resilience approach proposed by Walsh (1998b) extends the strength based practices of the competence-based, narrative, and structural-strategic approaches that I primarily use in my practice. The aim in a family resilience approach is "to strengthen key interactional processes to foster coping, recovery, resilience, enabling the family and its members to integrate their experience and move forward in life" (Walsh 1998b, p. 136).

The resilience approach "emphasizes the importance of finding strengths *in the midst of* adversity" (Walsh, 1998b, p.147) which is when individuals, couples, and families come

in for therapy because they are overwhelmed and “problem-saturated.” The combination of a resilience approach integrates well with the system-based therapies. I find it useful to begin with a strategic approach in which my therapeutic task is to formulate the problem in solvable terms. The competence-based approach of Waters and Lawrence (1993) recommends “courageous engagement” between the therapist and clients that appreciates and brings out the best in clients as they struggle with difficult situations. The narrative approach to “restorying” an experience emphasizes enlarging the story to include marginalized aspects and envisioning new possibilities (Walsh, 1998b). I saw in this study and during the research project, as I was concentrating more on “resilience thinking” in my practice, that resilience was fostered when the women made connections between their past, present, and future and integrated their experiences, their beliefs, relationships and resources.

I am seeing the usefulness of the resilience framework in my practice and after the completion of this project I hope to design a class on loss, reconciliation, and resilience and offer a support group based on this model. I am finding it useful with the many challenges clients struggle with such as those of the women in this study: divorce, death, health and career issues, children and family of origin needs. I also find it a helpful approach as we deal with the changing dreams and expectations of women, and particularly those in their 30s and 40s who are not marrying and wrestling with issues of having children.

The findings of this study suggest some areas in which family therapists could assist women deal with the challenges of life. Many of these participants reported seeking help from counselors at the time they were experiencing the crisis or transition, in addition to attending support groups. As a marriage and family therapist, one of my research interests for therapy was to learn how women’s sense of strength and resilience was influenced or influenced their marriages. Although 13 of the 18 participants are still in their first marriage, many described protracted struggles and “shifts” in their marriage brought on by crisis and challenges. One of the participants described this “shift” after her husband’s

affair: “Although it didn’t threaten the marriage, it dashed the childhood beliefs of you would live happily ever after and marriages just go on, and you don’t need to work or go through really hard times.” Many described these “shifts” as pushing them more toward independence and strengthening the marriage in the long run.

This phenomenological research has allowed me to "borrow" other women’s experiences and come to a better understanding of the significance of resilience for overcoming adversity. Van Manen (1990) expressed an important value of phenomenology for my research on women with this statement: “*We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves*” (p. 62). I have that sense of being more “experienced” because of this project and the wonderful life stories the participants in this research shared with me. I frequently think of these courageous women, their challenges and the resilience they forged as I am working with clients in my family therapy practice. I am grateful to have this increased depth of understanding of strength and resilience and this wonderful arsenal of protective processes, stories and metaphors to use in my work with clients.

Implications for Future Research

Stewart (1994) reminds us to see each woman as different and recommends that scholars avoid the search for a unified or coherent self or voice. My goal was to adhere as much as possible to this feminist strategy for studying the lives of women. It has been a challenge to figure out how to re-present the participants’ stories respectfully and individually by avoiding the search for a unified voice, and at the same time be able to “tell a good story” and have a structure and coherence for the presenting my findings of 18 in-depth interviews.

In the future I would ask participants for their recommendations in the follow up thank you letter (Appendix F) for what might have been done differently to improve their experience in a project such as this. I did ask this in the follow-up telephone conversations, and one of the participants said she would like to have had more time than the three hours

we had allotted for the interview. Overall, however, I think that three hours was a reasonable allotment of time for this project and that most of the participants felt they had enough time to tell their story.

Two participants were concerned about their articulation when they read the findings chapter that contained their vignettes. In the future, I would add an explanation in the letter (Appendix G) that accompanied the findings, explaining that what is used in qualitative research is the actual conversation and that the focus is on the content of the message, not the conversational style which is more informal than one would write (R. Blieszner, personal communication, March 3, 2000).

This research experience has been a very positive experience for me and also for the participants, according to their follow-up conversations with me. I am committed to research for women and girls. It is research I am interested in pursuing with women of different ages and in different life contexts. In future projects on resilience I would like to add older women, women who have never been married, women who are divorced or widowed, and women in same sex relationships. I would also go back to the women who participated in this research for a longitudinal perspective that allows for more in-depth conversations with those who would like it. I am interested in following up on the focal challenges they discussed and exploring what new challenges may have emerged and in what ways they faced and integrated them. I plan to develop this project into a book, not only to further my research interest, but also for the women who participated with the hope that their experiences with the challenges of life would be of benefit to other women. In a future research project I will also use a more semi-structured approach with some specific questions in order to go deeper into some of the insights I gleaned from this research.

Fostering Resilience in Women

“The diversity, richness and complexity of women’s lives can be brought to the surface by looking at individual lives. In turn, that diversity, richness and complexity opens new avenues for the development of theories of lives that reflect and incorporate women’s

experiences” (Franz & Stewart, 1994, p. 7). None of the women portrayed themselves as having resolved all their areas of pain and struggle, but I think that as they acknowledged their strengths and resilience they could come closer to an acceptance of uncertainty. I hope by contributing to this conversation, as we all continue to have to come to the edge and face the pain, confusion and impasses in our lives, described by Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995), we will have more tools to appraise our challenges, to trust our belief systems so that we can “hold steady [and]... stay with ourselves and each other” (p. 173). I hope we will continue to work to develop relationships that are mutually sustaining and resources that benefit all women, men and children. I hope by adding to this conversation we will continue to support women’s strengths and resilience.

The rationale for this study was met. My first goal, to focus on a strength based approach for women at midlife, was achieved. These women rebounded and grew through their challenges, they found the resources, within and outside themselves, and faced their challenges with greater confidence. The second goal, to study women through their own voices and recognize and celebrate their agency in their lives was met. These women described the choices they made, the goals they set, the focus they followed. They emphasized, no matter what their challenge, they did not want to act the victim or be in the victim role. My third goal was as a therapist, to better understand women’s struggles and the effect of these challenges on their marriage. All of the participants described a sense of being stronger as individuals within their marriages at midlife. The women discussed their independence and their interdependence in marriage, a tension one participant described as being like a cathedral.

My research questions asked how do women develop the hardiness and strength to rise above their challenges. I learned from the women who participated in this study, that rather than rise above, they integrated their challenges into their complex life tapestry with the threads they pulled from their affiliations, belief systems, spirituality and resources. In the process of reweaving they found a new patterns and an a sense of coherence that allowed

them to move forward stronger, more well armed and experienced to face whatever challenges life may throw them in the future with greater confidence.

As I finish this piece of this research project I believe as Estes wrote that "...it is the experiences you share with others and the stories that you tell about those experiences afterward, and the tales you bring from the past and future that create the ultimate bond (1993, p. 28). "The tales people tell one another weave a strong fabric that can warm the coldest emotional or spiritual nights (p. 29).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Notice to be placed in newsletters and bulletin boards
to recruit participants

For woman 40 years of age and older
who have been married at least 10 years

I am doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia carrying out a study on women's experiences of resilience in their adult life. I am particularly interested in hearing from women who have found the resources and strength to rise above difficult challenges and transitions in their adult lives.

Taking part in this study will involve two interviews about the challenge(s) you have experienced, how you developed the strength to rise above and how this experience influenced or was influenced by your marriage. The interviews will be carried out at a time and place convenient to you. The information collected in the course of this study will be strictly confidential. It is my hope that the findings from this research project will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges of women at midlife.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call Linda Peterson Rogers at (703)683-0002.

Appendix B

Flyer Posted on College Campus, Medical Offices, Bulletin Boards

MIDLIFE WOMEN

Your experience is important

Volunteers are needed
for a study on how women
have developed the strength to rise above
difficult challenges or transitions of life
and the effect of these experiences
on marriage.

If you are 40 years or older
and have been married at least 10 years

please call for more information:

Linda Peterson Rogers
(703)683-0002
(Private phone mail available for messages)

Appendix C

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Study: Women Recreating their Lives: Challenges and Resilience in Midlife

Investigator: Linda Peterson Rogers Faculty Advisor: Howard O. Protinsky

I. The Purpose of this Research/Project

This research study is an exploration of midlife women's experience of resilience and how they have risen above difficult challenges or transitions in their adult lives. The purpose of this study is to listen and learn from midlife married women who have developed the strength and hardiness to rise above adversity.

II. Procedures

Participation in this study will consist of two interviews of approximately two hours for the first interview and one hour for the second. The first interview will be a discussion of your experience of dealing with adversity in midlife. The second interview will be to review and discuss the material and themes that came out of the first interview. Our interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed by me or a typist so that I may examine them in detail.

III. Risks

I am aware that uncomfortable reactions are possible. If at any time you change your mind about continuing in the study or interview, you are encouraged to pause, postpone, or cancel your participation.

IV. Benefits of this Project

Women at midlife have much to tell us about facing significant adult-life changes. By attending to the stories of women's strength and endurance, we might understand better how most of us acquire our often uncelebrated resilient strengths. The focus of this study is on the protective processes that promote growth over the life span. I hope that participation in this study will prove interesting and illuminating. However, I do not encourage you to participate for this benefit, as there is no guarantee you will benefit from the study. Participants may contact me at a later time for a summary of the research results.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Our interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed by a typist or me. Only first names will be used in the transcriptions. Any future documents and oral presentation (e.g., dissertation journal articles, conference presentations) will use pseudonyms. Only the researcher will have access to the master list associating your name with interview material. This list and the audiotapes will be secured and stored in my private locked file cabinet to which no one else has access. They will be destroyed at the end of the project. Any identifying information such as place of work or address will be held confidential and not disclosed in any way. All conversations will be considered confidential. Should an assistant transcribe your audiotape, she or he will be required to sign a statement pledging confidentiality.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for participation in this project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Participants are free to withdraw from a study at any time without penalty. Participants are free not to answer any questions that they choose. There may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a participant should not continue as a participant.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by the Department of Human Development.

IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Signature and Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Linda Peterson Rogers, Researcher 703-237-7375

Howard O. Protinsky, Faculty Advisor 540-231-6782

Tom Hurd, IRB Research Division 540-231-9359

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Project: Women Recreating their Lives: Challenges and Resilience in Midlife

Interviewee:

Date:

Place:

Time of interview:

Description of the research project:

I am interested in women at midlife - and how they have risen above difficult experiences in their adult lives. I am especially interested in women's strengths and resilience and how they developed the hardiness they needed to overcome the challenges and transitions of life. I am interested in the effect of these difficult experiences on women's marriages and the influence of marriage on their experience.

The interview:

The interview is loosely structured and is more of a discussion than a question- answer type of interview.

Grand tour open-ended questions:

- 1) When you think about the challenges you've experienced and dealt with over your adult years, what first comes to mind? Is there anything else?
- 2) Has there been a time during the years you've been married when you have had an especially difficult experience, transition or adversity? Where did the strength or hardiness or resilience that you needed to deal with it come from? How did you use your resilience in this situation?
- 3) How did this experience or experiences affect your marriage? How has the experience been influenced by your marriage?

Exploring questions to focus more on the subjective experience:

What has your experience been with adversity - hardiness - resilience??

How did you come to have experience with adversity - endurance - hardiness - resilience?

What was that like for you?

Is there a story about being resilient that stands out in your experience?

Are there details about your experience you can remember?

What was your experience like?

What does it mean to think of yourself as able to rise above tough challenges or as able to rebound from adversity?

What are your strengths and resources?

What are the turning points in your experience?

What are the markers that have brought about shifts in your experience

Additional questions recommended by Moustakas when the story has not tapped into the experience with sufficient meaning and depth:

1. What dimension, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
2. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
4. What feelings were generated by the experience?
5. What thoughts stood out for you?
6. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?
7. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

Thank you for participating in this interview. I again want to assure you that your responses in this interview are confidential.

(Creswell, 1998, p. 127; Moustakas, 1994, pp. 116)

Appendix E
Participant Information

Interviewee and Age:

Address

Telephone: Home and Work

Religion: Active participation?

Number and length of marriages:

Age at first marriage: Years married:

Age when divorced (if applicable):

Occupation: How many years in this job?

Educational background: Income:

Spouse's name: Age:

Ethnic heritage:

Religion: Active participation?

Spouse's occupation: How many years in this job?

Spouse's educational background: Income:

Number of children and ages: Location:

Parents: Age if living Location:

Siblings: Ages Location:

Appendix F

Thanks you letter following interview

Linda Peterson Rogers Home Tel: 703-237-7375
4600 North 32nd Road Office Tel: 703-683-0002
Arlington, VA 22207 Home Fax: 703-237-7376
E-mail: lirogers@vt.edu

January 22, 2000

Dear { name),

Thank you very much for participating in my research study. I am very appreciative of the time you took to share your thoughts on resilience with me. I have enclosed, for your review and comments, a condensed transcript of the material that I thought was most relevant to my research on how women develop their strength and resilience. From this material I tried to illuminate the themes related to how women at midlife have risen above and developed the hardiness needed to overcome life challenges and transitions .

Women at midlife have much to tell us about facing significant adult-life changes. By attending to the stories of women's strength and endurance, I hope that we might understand better how most of us acquire our often uncelebrated resilient strengths. My focus in this study is on the protective processes that promote growth over the life span. It has been a wonderful privilege to listen to the rich tapestries of women's lives. I will honor them most respectfully in my writing.

In order to protect the anonymity of all participants, no single story will be presented in its entirety. Excerpts from stories will be shared throughout to illustrate women's transitions, challenges, experiences, strengths and resilience. Pseudonyms will be used and any identifying characteristics such as city, work, other's names will not be disclosed. You may call, fax, email or write me with your comments or set up a meeting for further discussion. My home number will work best for the next week as I am working on this full time this week.

I very much enjoyed visiting with you and truly appreciate your help with my dissertation. I welcome any comments on women's strengths and resilience that you may have thought of since we last talked. Please feel free to call me with any questions you have about any aspect of this project.

Sincerely yours,

Linda Peterson Rogers

Appendix G

Letter to accompany rough draft of findings

Linda Peterson Rogers Home Tel: 703-237-7375
4600 North 32nd Road Office Tel: 703-683-0002
Arlington, VA 22207 Home Fax: 703-237-7376
e-mail: lirogers@vt.edu

Dear [name],

Attached is a rough draft of the “findings” section of my dissertation where I have used your “voice.” I wanted to let you review it to see how I integrated the vignettes I selected from the transcript of our conversation.

I have really enjoyed working on this research. It has been very inspiring to me. Each time I reread the vignettes, I never fail to both laugh and cry and always be inspired. I have certainly learned from each of the women who contributed their voice and experience to this project. I come away from this with a greater sense of resilience that gives me courage and strength as I also march into a uncertain future.

Again thank you so very much for participating in this project for what I hope will be a benefit to women and girls as they deal with life’s challenges.

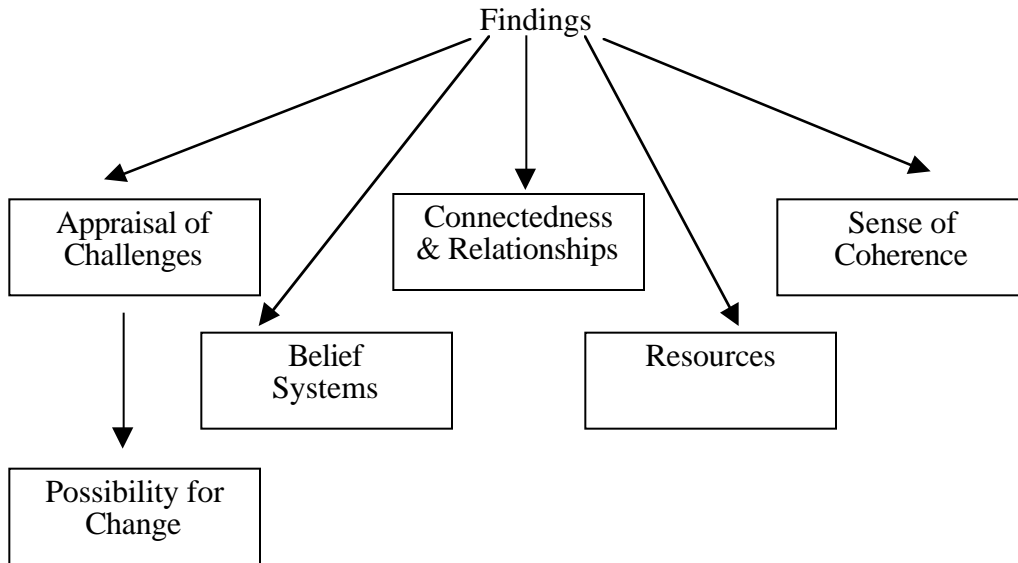
Please contact me with any comments. I have titled the project “Women Recreating their Lives: Challenges and Resilience in Midlife.”

Sincerely yours,

Linda

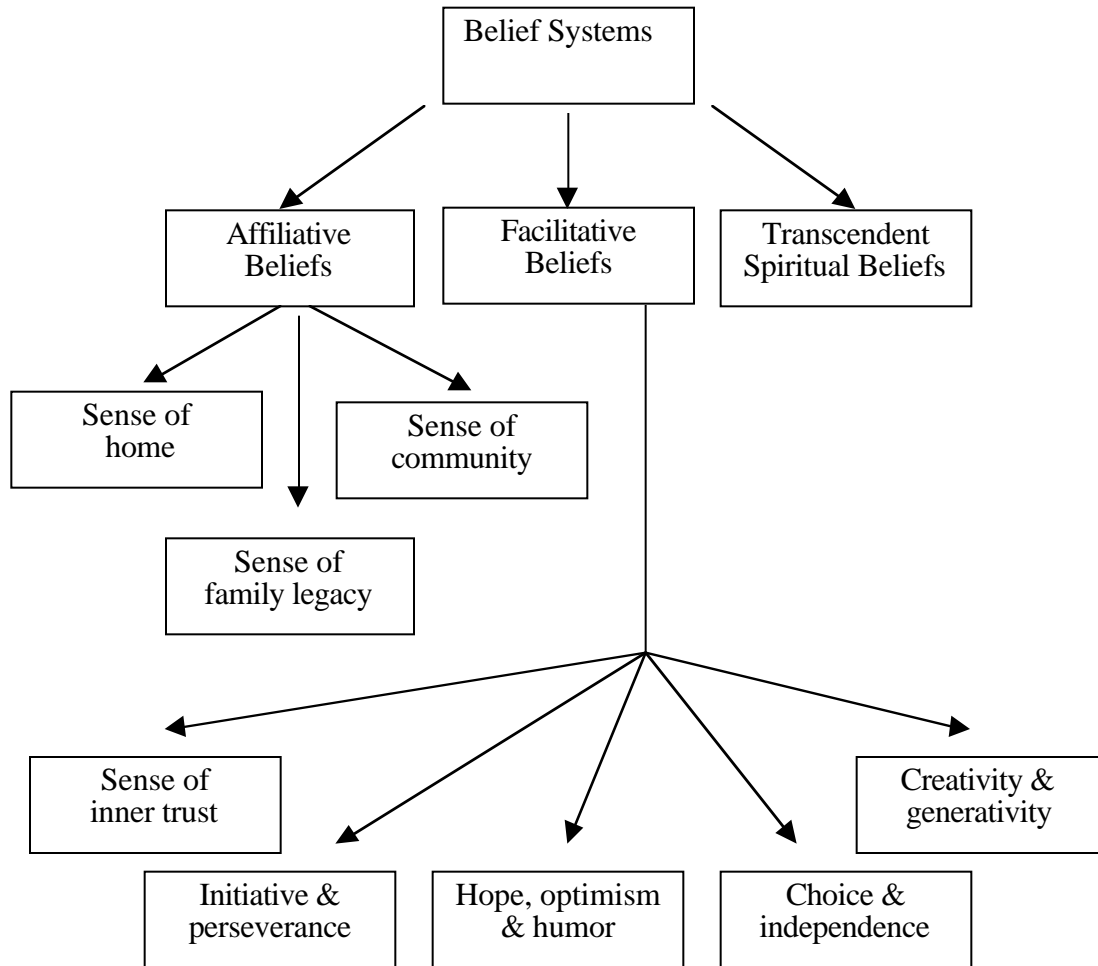
Appendix H

Index tree display of categories as organized in NUD*IST.



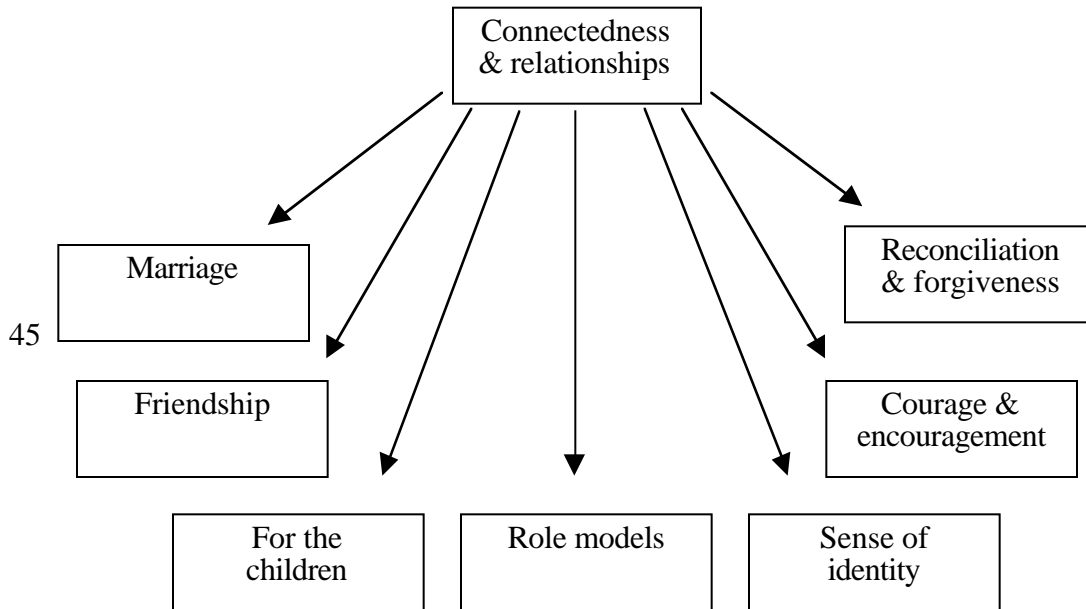
Appendix I

Index tree display of belief system categories as organized in NUD*IST.



Appendix J

Index tree display of relationship categories as organized in NUD*IST.



CURRICULUM VITAE

Linda Peterson Rogers

EDUCATION

Ph.D. 2000, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Major Area: Marriage and Family Therapy.

Dissertation: *Women Recreating their Lives: Challenges and Resilience in Midlife.*

Post Masters, 1980, Department of Marriage and Family Studies, Auburn University.

M.A. 1979, Department of Clinical Psychology, California State University.

Major Area: Child and Adolescent Development.

Thesis: *Twenty Questions: Strategies for Improving Performance.*

B.A. 1977, Department of Clinical Psychology, California State University.

Major Area: Child and Adolescent Development.

R.N. 1966, Nebraska Methodist College of Nursing.

Liberal Arts, 1963, Colorado Woman's College.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Individual, Marriage and Family Therapist/Clinical Supervisor: Alexandria Family Therapy Associates, Alexandria, VA. 1992 – Present.

Individual, Marriage and Family Therapist/Clinical Supervisor: The Hudson Center for Brief Therapy, Omaha, NE. 1986-1989.

Intensive Internship in Strategic Family Therapy: Family Therapy Institute of Washington D.C. 1981-1982.

Individual, Marriage and Family Therapist: Northern Virginia Family Services, Falls Church, VA. 1980-1982.

Family Therapist: Associated Marriage and Family Counselors, Inc. Auburn AL. 1979-1980.

Family Therapist: Project Uplift, Auburn University, Auburn, AL. 1979-1980.

Family Therapist: Family Guidance Center, Montgomery, AL. 1979-1980.

Medical-Surgical Nurse: Chandler Community Hospital, Chandler, AZ. 1967-1968.

Medical-Surgical Nurse: Nebraska Methodist Hospital, Omaha, NE. 1966-1967.

Intensive Care Private Duty Nurse: Douglas County Hospital, Omaha, NE. 1966-1967.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Phi Upsilon Omicron, 2000. Human Resources and Education Honor Society
Kappa Omicron Nu, 1999. Home Economics and Human Resources Honor Society
Outstanding Nurse in Private Practice, 1996. Virginia Nurse's Association, District 8.
Nominated Omaha Volunteer of the Year, YWCA, 1989, Omaha, NE.
Outstanding Women of America, 1979
Psi Chi, 1979. National Psychology Honorary

PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, State of Virginia 1998 –
President-Elect and Legislative Chair Virginia Association for Marriage and Family
Therapy. 1995-1996.
Vice President for Northern Virginia: Virginia Association for Marriage and Family
Therapy. 1993-1995.
Approved Supervisor, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy 1989 -
Clinical Member, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy 1981 -
Clinical Specialist in Adult Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, American Nurses
Credentialing Center 1992 -
Licensed Clinical Nurse Specialist, State of Virginia 1992-
Licensed Registered Nurse, State of Virginia 1972 -

PRESENTATIONS

- Rogers, Linda P. Women's Issues in the 90s. Presentation to Military Spouses
Professional Network, Arlington, VA. 1996.
- Rogers, Linda P. Women's Issues in the 90s. Presentation to Alexandria Professional
Women's Network, Alexandria, VA. 1995.
- Rogers, Linda P. Time and Life Management for Women in the 80s. Presentation to
Senior Staff at Strategic Air Command Headquarters, Omaha, NE. 1989.
- Rogers, Linda P. Stress Management for Women. Presentation to Senior Staff at Strategic
Air Command Headquarters, Omaha, NE. 1988.
- Rogers, Linda P. Continuing workshops given at The Hudson Center for Brief Therapy,
Omaha, NE. 1986-1989.
Marriage Enrichment.
Increasing Self Esteem.
Weight Management.
Smoking Cessation.
- Rogers, Linda P. Communication for Couples. Two workshops presented to First
Congregational Church, Omaha, NE. 1987.
- Rogers, Linda P. Communication for Couples. Four workshops presented to First
Covenant Church, Omaha, NE. 1986.
- Rogers, Linda P. Strategic Family Therapy. Presented to staff of The Hudson Center for
Brief Therapy, Omaha, NE. 1986.

Rogers, Linda P. Strategic Family Therapy. Presented to staff of Northern Virginia Family Services, Falls Church, VA. 1981-1982.

Rogers, Linda P. Parenting Classes. Presented to parents and staff of Country Day School, McLean, VA. 1980-1981.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Board Member: Omaha Symphony Orchestra, Omaha, NE, 1988-1989.

Board Member: Emmy Gifford Children's Theater, Omaha, NE. 1987-1989.

Board Member: Omaha Children's Museum, Omaha, NE. 1986-1988.

Board Member: Noah Project (shelter for abused women and children), Abilene, TX. 1984-1986.

Board Member: Pastoral Care and Counseling, Abilene, TX. 1984-1986.

Board Member: Mental Health Association, Abilene, TX. 1984-1986.

Board Member: Abilene Day Nursery (for disadvantaged children), Abilene, TX. 1984-1986.

Appointment to Mayor's Commission for Mental Health, Abilene, TX. 1984-1985.

Developed and taught parenting classes for new parents: American Red Cross, Minot, ND. 1983-1984.

Volunteer, Suicide Hot Line, Montgomery, AL. 1979-1980.

Linda Peterson Rogers

April 17, 2000