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LIFE PATTERNS OF MIDDLE-AGED, WORKING-CLASS WOMEN: IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Oestreich, Mary Anne

The Ohio State University

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LIFE PATTERNS OF MIDDLE-AGED, WORKING-CLASS WOMEN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ADULT EDUCATION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Mary Anne Oestreich, B.A., M.S.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1984

Reading Committee:
Dr. David Boggs
Dr. William Dowling
Dr. William Moore

Approved By

William Dowling
Adviser
Department of Education
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my family for their pride in me. I also wish to thank my adviser, Dr. William Dowling, for his knowledge and expertise in guiding this research and the other members of my committee, Professors David Boggs and William Moore, for their support and suggestions.

Finally, I am grateful to the women who participated in this study. They show to all those who read it, the strength of the human spirit.
VITA

August 11, 1935 .......... Born - Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1956-1968 . . . . . . . . Teacher, Elementary Grades, Wisconsin
1963. . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A. Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1969. . . . . . . . . . . . . M.S. Education (Guidance and Counseling), University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin
1970. . . . . . . . . . . . . Instructor of Adult Education, Denton, Texas
1971-1975 . . . . . . . . Instructor of Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language (ESL), Columbus, Ohio
1975. . . . . . . . . . . . . Instructor, Ohio Institute of Technology, Columbus, Ohio
1976. . . . . . . . . . . . . Instructor, English as a Second Language, Columbus, Ohio
1978. . . . . . . . . . . . . Doctoral Studies, University of Maryland, College Park
1979- . . . . . . . . . . . . Instructor, Columbus Technical Institute, Columbus, Ohio

FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field of Study: Adult Education

Professors William Dowling and David Boggs
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout his history, man has written about the natural changes he has observed in himself and other men. In the sixth century B.C. the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, described development in the adult years. The Talmud, that body of Jewish civil and religious law, contains fourteen stages of development of a man's life cycle. In Shakespeare's As You Like It, is found "One man in his time plays many parts; his acts being seven ages."

Unfortunately, these writers were not speaking of the development of men as well as women, but were speaking only of the development of men.

Women for the most part have been excluded from the conceptions of the human life cycle, not only by the ancient writers, but by modern theorists as well. Presently, there is an ongoing search for equality between the sexes. Theorists, who formerly were thought to be neutral in their scientific objectivity, are found to be biased toward a masculine point of view (Gilligan, 1982). This results because most major theorists in adult development have been men who used a majority of men in their research samples. Women were excluded, not because of conscious deviousness on the part of male authors,
but because of an interest in their own concerns and development (Levinson, 1978). Women are now taking an interest in the development of their own life cycle.

Feminine psychologists are complaining that the psychology of women has been considered chiefly from the viewpoint of men and, therefore, not represented accurately (Horney, 1967). If women do not fit into existing models of human growth, that is not to say they are inferior, but rather there are errors in the way they have been represented (Gilligan, 1982).

Many of the studies of adult development have been based on middle-class, male subjects and the few studies that have concentrated on the development of women also have a middle-class bias. This may be because most Americans do not consider themselves living in a class system. Also, most people who write books or articles are almost always well-educated and their writings reflect their middle-class lives (Seifer, 1976).

Yet there are differences between women who are considered middle-class, and those who belong to the working-class. Three significant factors generally distinguish one class from the other. These factors are level of education, type of job and amount of income (Seifer, 1976; Howe, 1977). Because of these differences, it is often difficult for those who are middle-class to understand why lower income people live the way they do.
In most cultures a woman's looks are her greatest commodity. As she ages, the demand for that commodity may decrease. The biological and psychological changes which come at midlife can be a threat for many women. However, the current wave of feminism has given women an appreciation of themselves, regardless of age (Rubin, 1979).

Women in midlife may, now more than ever, experience confidence in their abilities. They may recognize the powers of experience which women in their early 20s or 30s do not possess. In fact, observations of unequal maturity between the sexes have been mistaken for sexual differences (de Beauvoir, 1978). Men in their 50s may be confused by the mannerisms of women 30 years their junior, yet this confusion may be caused less by gender differences than by a disparity of maturity.

Despite the fact that the experiences of women have been ignored in adult development theories, the concepts of adulthood are relatively recent. The word itself derives from the Latin *adolescere*, "to grow"; therefore, an adult is literally one who has grown up. This word "adulthood" only came into use in the 1800s and its concept in the psychological sense used today was not prevalent until the early twentieth century (Jordan, 1978).

However, adulthood has never been ignored by those in the cultural arts. Artists have portrayed this period of life with all its stability and turbulence, in all aspects of their particular expression of art: theatre,
music, poetry, novels, and painting. Indeed, it was Freud himself who recognized the incomplete and fragmentary nature of his theories on the psychology of women and admonished his students if they wanted to know more about femininity they should "turn to the poets" (Freud, 1932).

While personality and developmental changes have been mirrored in the cultural arts, there is need for theoretical perspectives and research in adult development. Specifically, there is a pressing need for research on the adult development of the working-class woman in terms of her own experiences. Little research has been done in this area. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to study the life patterns of fifteen, middle-aged, working-class women.

Statement of the Problem

Theoretical perspectives on the development of women are primarily derived from theories concerning the development of men. However, the lives of women cannot necessarily be patterned after those of men. Men define themselves in terms of their own individuation and achievement (Levinson, 1978). Women may not define themselves in this same context. Therefore, the study of women may derive developmental constructs which are different from those of men and in doing so, present a different point of view as to the priorities of human experience (Gilligan, 1982).

The process by which a woman comes to assume a stable self-identity should be of particular interest to adult
educators because of the vast number of women enrolling in post-secondary education. Women aged 25-34 increased their college enrollment 187 percent from 1970 to 1978. Women in the over 35 age group are also interested in higher education; their enrollment increased 68 percent between 1972 and 1976 (Weiser and Arbeiter, 1981).

This study will specifically concentrate on working-class women enrolled in a technical college who are between the ages of 40-50. This is the age when many social scientists believe individuals turn inward and reappraise their lives (Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978). The major research questions are as follows:

A. What are the life adjustments that women in their 40s experience?

B. What are the developmental tasks for a working-class woman in her midlife?

C. How do the concepts of the Dream, Mentor and Special Person of Levinson apply to the working-class woman in midlife?

D. How do the above questions relate to the continuing education of middle-aged, working-class women?

There is a national trend of higher female participation in both the labor force and higher education (Barrett, 1979). Teachers and counselors have the opportunity to provide good vocational guidance for female
students in order that these women receive a significant payoff from their education in the job market and in enriching their lives. To assist in this process, it is expected this research will help to obtain a better understanding of the lives of working-class women in their midlives who returned to an educational institution for additional education.

**Significance of the Study**

Before 1970, the word *adulthood* seemed to sum up whatever happened after adolescence with little concern given to the ways human beings develop differently from each other. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, there has been a surge in the growth of interest in the full spectrum of the human life cycle. This interest has necessitated that psychologists and social scientists scrutinize theories which had previously been written about adult development.

Women have not been included in the theory-building studies of psychological research. It may be that the adult development of women does parallel that of men, but because women have roles as mothers and wives, their development may show complex variations from the development of men.

There is an ever-increasing number of women returning to school. Because of the changing roles of women, many women in their midlives are seeking admission to community and technical colleges desiring an education and career
preparation that was not deemed necessary when they were younger (Baruch, 1983). Thus, an understanding of the life course of women is essential for the development of adult education programs. For it is these programs which will provide the major avenue for improving the employment opportunities of women.

Definition of Terms

1. **Blue-collar worker.** Production, maintenance and service workers, whether they are skilled, semiskilled or unskilled. Craftsmen, foremen, operatives and farm laborers are included in this category (Greenwald, 1973; The Encyclopedia of Sociology, 1981).

2. **Career.** The sequence of occupations in which a person engages. One person may remain in the same occupation throughout his or her life span, while another may have a series of quite different occupations (Tolbert, 1980).

3. **Job.** This refers to a group of similar positions in an industry, business or other place of employment (Tolbert, 1980).

4. **Mid-life.** Ages 40 to approximately 65.

5. **Pink-collar job.** The feminine equivalent of the blue-collar job. These are female-concentrated occupations such as typists, secretaries, hairdressers, waitresses, receptionists, maids.
and telephone operators (Howe, 1977; Toner, 1980).

6. **Working-class.** The people in this category have an income which is above the poverty level and below what is considered a comfortable standard of living. Other factors to be considered are:

   a. **Education.** In general, high school or less

   b. **Type of job.** Blue or pink collar (Seifer, 1976; The Encyclopedia of Sociology, 1981).

**Focus of the Study**

This study specifically focuses on white, American born women between the ages of 40-50. In addition, the subjects are either married, divorced or widowed, and at the time of the study were enrolled in a two-year technical college.

The subjects belong to the working-class. They are considered to be in this category because of their educational level, employment, husbands' employment and their place of residence.

**Summary**

The existing theories of adult development are primarily based on the development of men. There is a scarcity of research which focuses solely on the development of women. What little research there is, frequently
concentrates on young, professional women. Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore the life patterns of middle-aged, working-class women and to relate these patterns to the field of adult education.
Chapter II

A Review of Literature

Introduction

Chapter II contains a summary of the predominant life cycle theories and their relationship to the development of women. It also contains a discussion of the physical and psychological changes which women experience in midlife. In addition, there is a discussion of the characteristics of working-class women.

Adult Development

The study of adult development is a relatively new branch of research. It is based on the theory that adults continually experience changes in their lives which require adaptations and reassessments of self. Yet not much is known about these changes in the life cycle, and how adults respond to these various human events.

For many years, social scientists developed well-documented theories on the physical and psychological changes of childhood and adolescence but neglected the years of early, middle and late adulthood. Gradually, two general approaches of adult development evolved, the "phasic" and "stage" approaches. Those social scientists who adhere to the phasic approach believe that certain aspects of
development occur during relatively fixed periods of adult life. On the other hand, there are those individuals who hold that changes in adulthood are not so much related to age, but rather to a stage or level of development (Lasker and Moore, 1980).

One of the first psychologists to take an interest in personality development beyond childhood and adolescence was Jung (1933). Jung, who might be described as the father of the life cycle theory, conceived adult development in terms of the phasic approach, as an evolving process of individuation which reaches its climax around the late 30s. By individuation, Jung meant the developmental process through which a person becomes a unique individual.

Jung suggested that a resurgence of individuation may begin around 40. He calls this the "noon of life." Jung was the first to recognize that individuation occurs at midlife and beyond when inner growth and self-realization take place.

Perhaps the most widely known work in the phasic approach was done by Erikson in the 1950s and 1960s. His eight stages of ego development outline a theory of the progression of psychosocial tasks and aspects of adult life. According to Erikson, each stage is crucial and must be resolved, or the individual's growth will be impeded.

Erikson's work on the eight stages of man identifies a series of transitions during the life cycle. His first
four stages deal with early and middle childhood. The fifth, \textit{Identity vs. Identity Confusion} covers adolescence and the Early Adult Transition. His last three stages are the stages of adulthood: \textit{Intimacy vs. Isolation} occurs in the 20s, \textit{Generativity vs. Stagnation} arises around 40, and \textit{Integrity vs. Despair} unfolds around 60 (Erikson, 1963).

For a woman, Erikson says the sequence is different. The woman "holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined" (p. 12). Therefore, Erikson believed that for a man identity precedes intimacy and generativity; a woman comes to know herself only after she is known.

Neugarten (1964), who has studied hundreds of men and women in their midlife, has challenged Erikson's linear view of life. "It is particularly inappropriate for women who may be in different role patterns and phases at different times because of changing combinations of children, work, and marriage. . . . Thus the Erikson sequence of autonomy, identity, intimacy and generativity does not hold in quite the same way for women" (Notman, 1979, p. 271).

Although Erikson concedes that the development of women is different from that of men, only the male version is given in his eight stages of ego development. This
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may be just another example of women being considered only from the point of view of men.

Havighurst is another educator and sociologist concerned with the developmental tasks in adulthood. He contends that as individuals grow they go through physical, psychological and sociological changes which demand learning new tasks. The developmental tasks in middle age evolve because of bodily changes, sociological pressures and commitments which individuals take upon themselves. He lists the following tasks as the most important for women in midlife:

A. **Assisting children to become responsible and happy adults.** Women need insight into their own emotional reactions to avoid being oversolicitous or overpunitive with their children.

B. **Achieving adult social and civic responsibility.** While working-class men are usually interested in issues that affect their labor unions and immediate neighborhoods, their wives usually pay little attention to the social-civic life of the community.

C. **Reaching and maintaining satisfactory performance in one's occupational career.** If women return to the labor force during their midlife, they are apt to seek a job that offers
interest, production and financial satisfaction. A working-class woman may be seeking a job rather than a career.

D. Developing adult leisure-time activities. Women may find themselves with more time to devote to their own interests.

E. Relating oneself to one's spouse as a person. With the obligations of motherhood lessening, a woman may need to give new attention to her husband. Havighurst does not adapt this task to the widowed, divorced or never married woman.

F. Adjusting to the physiological changes of middle-age. When women reach menopause the balance of the endocrine system is disturbed causing noticeable physical changes.

G. Adjusting to aging parents. In lower socioeconomic families there appears to be less hostility between generations than in middle-class families (Havighurst, 1974). Havighurst believes these developmental tasks are a constant challenge for adults and are essential to midlife. Different experiences, along with the succession of roles and tasks challenge adults to new growth. This continual growth can continue throughout adults'entire lifespan.

Gould (1978), while head of the psychiatric outpatient clinic at U.C.L.A., further investigated the phases of adult life. In order to research human behavior and
experience, he conducted two consecutive studies, one with outpatients in group therapy, and the other with men and women in a nearby community. His goal was to investigate and fill in some of the gaps in understanding the process of human development.

Gould found there were remarkable similarities of human behavior between patients and non-patients. Teenagers in both groups were preoccupied with parents. Men and women in their 20s were involved with a choice of vocation or in roles of spouses or parents. When people reached their 30s they felt mired down from the effects of previous choices. In the late 30s and 40s many of Gould's subjects showed evidence of discontent as they went about questioning their lives. They were possessed by a sense of urgency. Whatever they wanted to accomplish in life should be accomplished now.

Gould believed that much of the unfinished business of childhood consciousness was carried into adulthood. It was the work of the individual to challenge the false assumptions that were carried from childhood into adulthood. These false assumptions of the mid-life decade (35-45) are:

1. The illusion of safety can last forever.
2. Death can't happen to me or my loved ones.
3. It is impossible to live without a protector (women).
4. There is no life beyond this family.
5. I am an innocent. (Gould, 1978, p. 219)
Gould holds that women in their mid-lives are at an especially crucial point. For most of their adult lives they have been limited to the roles of wife and mother. Now that they have reached mid-life, they have both the need and opportunity to reach new growth. "Every woman's first project must be her own mind" (p.333).

According to Gould, adulthood is not a plateau but rather a dynamic time. It is a time of deep self renewal when men and women move toward authenticity by realizing their own mortality.

A different aspect of the life cycle is found in Daniel Levinson's *The Season's of a Man's Life* (1978). In order to gain greater insight concerning the transition of mid-life, Levinson assembled a research team, which included three men and two women, and studied 40 men, ages 35-45. The men were categorized by their professions: business executives, industrial workers, biologists and novelists--ten of each. The focus of this study was on work and individuation, and as such, the subjects measured their accomplishments against their expectations. From the analysis of the subjects and their accomplishments emerged a hypothesis which defined the transition at mid-life.

According to Levinson, the life cycle is divided into five overlapping eras:
Late Adulthood ................. 80 - death

Each era is marked by stable periods alternating with transitional ones during which the life structures of an individual change. Levinson believes this sequence of periods is inescapable.

Levinson has identified a set of tasks which he believes is essential to an understanding of adulthood. The tasks associated with forming and modifying various components of the life structure are:

1. **Forming and Modifying a Dream.** In middle adulthood a man has to modify the Dream of his early years. He may recognize that he will never fulfill it, or if he has already fulfilled it, analyze its meaning and place in his middle years.

2. **Forming and Modifying an Occupation.** Forming an occupation occupies the entire early adulthood of a man. By middle adulthood, a man has to become a "senior" in his generation and define his occupation in terms of success or failure.

3. **Strengthening Family Relationships.** A man
in his early 40s may modify his involvement in work and give his family a more central role in his life. He may take more of an interest in his children and also give added support to his wife's need to become her own person outside the home.

4. Forming Mentor Relationship. In early adulthood, a man may receive mentoring from others. Now in his middle years, he will need to contribute to the mentoring needed by others.

5. Forming Mutual Friendships. In American society, a man may have friendly relationships with many men and women, yet a close friendship with a man or woman is rare. What consequences does this deprivation have for adult development?

In Levinson's study, the occupation of a man was the primary choice for sampling. "From a sociological perspective, work is the major vehicle by which a man engages the world; from a psychological perspective, the man's work career is of crucial importance in his adult development" (Kleine, 1979, p. 310). A man frequently realizes his male identity in relation to his work world and a woman in relationships with other people (Erikson, 1963). A woman, therefore, brings to the life cycle a different point of view and orders human experiences in terms of different
priorities. Most theory-building studies of adult development have excluded the feminine experience and, therefore, there is disparity between a woman's experience and the representation of human thought (Gilligan, 1982).

Levinson acknowledges the limitations of choosing for his research a sample consisting only of men. He believes, however, that his approach offers a basis for the study of women, "without the assumption that the two genders develop in either identical or totally different ways" (p. 9).

Recently, Stewart (1976) adapted the theory of Levinson et al. to women. Her specific goal was "to explore the applicability of an existing theory of adult male development to the life course of women" (p. 15). Stewart studied a small group of women in their 30s and her findings support Levinson's premise that for both men and women, the formation of the early adult life structure evolves through age-related, adult developmental periods. Women, however, show greater variability in how these developmental tasks are accomplished. This variability depends on whether or not a woman married in her 20s or remains single during this time.

Development of Women

The classic formulation of feminine psychology has been offered by Freud who admitted that insight into women's development is unsatisfactory, incomplete and unflattering (1932). According to his theory, penis envy
is at the heart of the feminine psyche. Feelings of "castration" may develop into narcissism, passivity and masochism. If a woman shows assertiveness, imagination or intellectual inquisitiveness, she is compensating for what is missing in her anatomy (Person, 1982). What is negative in women's personality is due to feelings of castration; what is positive develops because of envy.

Recently, social scientists are questioning this theory of women's development saying it has been measured by masculine standards. As such, it fails to represent accurately the real nature of women and merely formulates a theory about how women should be (Horney, 1967; Miller, 1976).

de Beauvoir (1978) writes that since patriarchal times women have been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, in many respects comparable with that of racial minorities. This is a result of strong environmental deficiencies of the feminine nature.

Other social scientists assert that women have been socialized to believe that their success as persons rests on their desirability to males (Person, 1982); that women must always concentrate on the needs of others and sublimate their own needs (Miller, 1976); that women are naturally passive and have a need to be dominated (Janssen-Jurreit, 1982). To gain an accurate understanding of women's life and psychology a study of women's experience is needed (Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976).
Stewart (1977) is one of the first researchers to extend to women the theory of development by Levinson and his associates. Her sample consisted of eleven women between the ages of 31-40, and the findings from this sample support the premise of Levinson that women as well as men go through age-related, adult developmental periods. Stewart also reports that in the late teen and early 20s women show greater variability than men in the accomplishment of certain developmental tasks of this period. This variability appears to be related to whether a woman forms a stable marriage and family life in her 20s or remains single and pursues a career. If she pursues a career, her development parallels that of a man.

However, Baruch and Rivers (1983) in their research funded by the National Science Foundation differ with Levinson et al. Their study consisted of 300 women ages 35-55. They reported that while the traditional theories of adult development do not do the job, the "age" and "stage" theories are not applicable to women, either.

These researchers also believe that it is a mistake to see a major crisis at midlife for most people. They found that the "issues and upheavals Levinson describes are, in fact, rare in the lives of women we studied. We found no evidence that these or the anxiety and depression that define the midlife crisis appear around the ages of forty to fifty" (p. 239).
The Dream theory of Levinson, that is, a youthful dream shapes a life course, does not fare much better with Baruch and Rivers. These researchers believe that, for women, the idea of a youthful dream has a shallow ring. The wave of feminism is bringing with it new ideas about the role of women along with increased opportunities for them. Goals and dreams often occur in midlife along with energy to accomplish what is possible.

However, if the women in the study of Baruch and Rivers were not dominated by "youthful dreams," they did lament their lack of education. A persistent theme in the study is the desire by many women for a better education and career preparation.

Currently, Carol Gilligan has provided research on the moral development of women. In her study on adult women facing actual moral dilemmas she defines a sense of caring responsibility for oneself and others. "When women construct the adult domain, the world of relationships emerges and becomes the focus of attention and concern" (p. 167). Thus, she believes women bring to the cycle a different point of view, that of subordinating achievement to care. Because women order their experiences in terms of different priorities there is need for women to delineate in their own terms the experience of their adult lives (1982).

Women have been excluded from many theory-building studies concerning human development. As such, it may
appear that women fail to fit into the models of human growth. In many areas, the development of women may be closely parallel to that of men. However, as many women are wives and mothers, they may bring to the theories of the life cycle a different point of view and ordering of priorities. That is why research concerning the development of women, in their own terms, is an important item. Women in Their Midlife

The years around age 40 have a special meaning in the lives of individuals. Many social scientists believe that during this period men and women turn inward and reappraise their lives (Jung, 1933; Neugarten, 1968; Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978). However, men and women may appraise their midlife from different points of view.

Men perceive middle age by cues from their work environment. They are in full possession of their powers and may be at the height of their careers (Neugarten, 1968).

For women, the picture may be different. Rubin (1979) interviewed 160 women, ages 35-54 with various educational and occupational backgrounds. Her main concern was the various ways in which women cope with the period of middle age. While men are closely connected with their careers, she found that none of the women described themselves in relation to their work. They described themselves in relation to the people in their lives.

Rubin also found that women who had spent most of their adult lives as mothers and wives, may have reached
chronological adulthood, but in many ways showed a great dependency upon their husbands. Many women would not make a serious decision such as whether or not to return to school or take a job without the approval of their husbands.

A study of sex differences in intellectual performance during middle age was conducted by Shanan and Sagiv (1982). Two-hundred and twenty adults, ages 46-65, were tested on their level of verbal performance. The researchers reported that the men in their sample consistently performed more intelligently than the women. Shanan and Sagiv reported that this may be a result of a higher social position of men than women. "The social position of the individual may represent a powerful factor in his intellectual development" (p. 25).

Marital satisfaction was the concern of Pineo (1986) in his study of 400 middle-aged men and women married at least 20 years. He reported that there was a general drop of marital satisfaction, adjustment and intimacy between couples in their later years of marriage.

Neugarten and associates (1968) found social class to be a significant factor in the concern of women about the menopause. The highly educated, upper middle-class women in their study reported little social or psychological importance to menopause. Lesser educated women in the lower socio-economic category placed more significance on this period of their lives.
A common theme running through the current literature concerning women in the midlife is the sense of freedom they experience. For women with children, middle age is closely related to the launching of children into the adult world. It is a time of endings and beginnings. When the children are grown and gone, women have the opportunity to attend to their own needs (Neugarten, 1968; Rubin, 1979).

Summary

Social scientists have shown that around age 40, men and women seem to reappraise their lives. Men may measure their lives against the backdrop of the expectations of their career and their actual accomplishments. Women may reappraise their lives in terms of bodily changes that occur during menopause, or in terms of their husbands and children. If they have been emotionally and financially dependent on their husbands for many years, they may manifest a desire to be independent. If women have spent years of their lives caring for and nurturing children, they may feel they have earned the freedom and opportunity to attend to their own needs when their children are grown.
Working-Class Women

Most of the research on adult development uses white, middle-class men as subjects. Even the studies focusing on women which were inspired by the feminist movement, have a middle-class bias. There is a dearth of research which focuses on the working-class women and, hence, there is a need for such studies.

Married women live in the class and culture of their husbands (Levison, 1974). If a man's occupation is doing blue-collar work, his wife is considered working-class. The stereotypical picture of the working-class woman is one who is voiceless, dependent, ignorant and uninvolved in her own community.

Aware of these attitudes toward working-class women, Seifer (1976) did in-depth interviews with ten women involved in either community action, health services, unionism or politics. In her book, Nobody Speaks for Me, she writes of dynamic women who had the courage and energy to follow their own convictions.

Of all the significant variables that separate the middle-class from the working-class, education, job and income, income is probably the least important. There are plumbers who earn more than college professors and factory workers with more take-home pay than social workers (Seifer, 1976). In general, though, blue-collar workers make approximately 77% of white-collar workers (Levison, 1974).
Type of job is also significant. Working-class jobs are to a great extent low-paying, have little independence and require repetitive labor. With the advent of computers into business, however, the distinctions between certain blue and white collar work have been fading. It is not so between traditional male and female jobs (Howe, 1977).

The majority of American women work in female-concentrated jobs. These jobs are referred to as "pink-collar" and may include such occupations as hairdressers, nursing aides, dental assistants and receptionists. They are relatively low in pay and low in prestige. The majority of the female labor force consists of unskilled or semiskilled workers. And the major difference between the jobs of men and those of women is the almost total absence of a true professional and managerial sector among the women (Levison, 1974).

However, the variable that causes the greatest chasm between classes is education. Class status is closely correlated to level of educational attainment. It is the college degree that is the accepted symbol of higher education, and the possessors of such a degree have numerous options opened to them.

Many working-class women who are now in their 40s or 50s married while they were quite young. Consequently, they may have little education beyond high school. A number of women dropped out of high school and never
obtained a diploma. These women have great needs because of their lack of education (Ferraro, 1982).

Despite this lack of education, working-class women have always been expected to work. In contrast to their middle-class counterparts, working-class women are not working because of a need for satisfaction or fulfillment, but because of economic necessity. "If I had money, I'd quit this job, and go home and stay home for a thousand years" (Coles, 1978, p. 237).

Although more women than ever are presently in the work force, they may have the questionable privilege of performing two jobs in one day. They may leave their homes in the morning to work at one occupation only to return home in the evening to do all the household tasks. Working-class women are not provided help with domestic tasks which may include the care of small or sick children. These duties are performed after a full day's work when a woman finds herself tired and devoid of energy. Yet, these tasks are "women's work" and it is her spurious privilege to perform them (Janeway, 1971).

If there is a pressing need for research on the adult development of women, there is an ever present need to focus on the working-class woman in terms of her own experience. The purpose of this study is to study the life patterns of 15, middle-aged, working-class women.
Summary

Working-class women have been neglected in the studies which focused on the development of women. Their lack of higher education locks them into jobs which offer relatively low pay and prestige. Opportunities taken for granted by middle-class women are not shared by those of the working-class. Therefore, there is a need to focus on working-class women in terms of their own experience. This study is designed to study the lives of 15, middle-aged, working-class women, as they relate their own experience.
Chapter III
Methodology

Introduction

There are three purposes for Chapter III. The first is to present a description of the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis and to provide a rationale for using it in this study. The second is to describe the sample and the procedures used in data collection. Third, a description of the procedures used in data analysis will be given.

The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis

Much of the research in the social sciences has been done to verify hypotheses generated from a priori theory. A more useful approach may be to derive theory not from a priori reasoning but to allow it to evolve from the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). This evolution of theory from the ground up is called "grounded theory." It was originated by Glaser and Strauss and was explained in their book, The Discovery of Grounded Theory, (1967).

The general method of developing grounded theory is called the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. This is a method of data collection and simultaneous analysis, systematically obtained with an
emphasis on generating theory. The researcher collects, codes and analyzes the data and then decides what new data to collect and where to find them. This is done in order to allow the evolution of theory. "The basic criterion governing the selection of comparison groups for discovering theory is their theoretical relevance for furthering the development of emerging categories" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 49).

The basic rule for using this method is that the researcher, while coding an incident for a category, also compares it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category. These "comparison groups" may refer to aggregates or individuals as the equivalent of groups.

This grounded theory method of analysis is well suited for research in the field of adult education, for its purpose is to shed light on some phase of human interaction. Human interaction is the foundation for the process of adult education. Therefore, the behavior of students and potential students, plus their revelations of experience are of prime importance for developing theory (Darkenwald, 1980).

The Setting

This study took place on the campus of a public two-year technical college in Central Ohio. One of the stated goals of the college is to offer technical education
programs which provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for employment. In order to accomplish its objectives, the college has three degree-granting Divisions: Business and Public Administration, Health and Human Services and Engineering Technologies and Mathematics.

The technical college employs approximately 175 full-time faculty, an administrative staff and an additional 150 support staff. It also employs about 300 part-time instructors.

The technical college has an enrollment of almost 9,000 students and is the largest two-year college in Ohio. Women comprise 49.7% of the student body. In any quarter, there are approximately 300-380 women between the ages of 40 to 50 years.

The Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 15 women who were enrolled at the two-year college at the time of the study. It was believed they could offer the most information concerning the development of women.

This age group was selected because according to the theory of Levinson, it is the beginning of middle adulthood. The period of middle adulthood "permits the greatest actualization of one's capabilities and virtues and the greatest contribution to society, despite some decline in youthful strength and energy" (Levinson, 1978, p. 324). Levinson places the era of middle adulthood
from the ages of 40-60. However, for the purposes of this study only women in the first half of this period were chosen because the sample respondents were at the beginning of this era.

The fifteen women comprising the sample considered themselves to be of the working-class. Not all researchers agree as to the definition of "working-class." "Although an adequate specification of class is a matter of some dispute in sociological literature, there is a general agreement that class status is closely correlated to level of educational achievement" (Rubin, 1979, p. 215).

For this reason, only women with little formal education beyond high school were chosen. Within this category were included women who did not graduate from high school, but at some time in their lives returned to school to obtain a GED.

In addition, the subjects of this study were white women. It was assumed that having several races represented would cloud the study with a multiplicity of variables.

All of the women were married or had once been married. All had children. Those who were employed outside the home were occupied in the traditional jobs considered "women's work," or as it is sometimes called, "pink-collar" work. Those who were married had husbands in occupations commonly understood to be "blue collar." The employment of the husbands was a significant factor
### TABLE 2

**Criteria for Selection**

- Female
- White
- Age 40-50
- Enrolled in a two-year technical school
- Working-class as indicated by:
  - education
  - employment
  - employment of husband
  - residence
- Married, Divorced, Separated
because it is traditional that in American society the status of women is determined by the occupations of their husbands (Rubin, 1979).

The women, therefore, were chosen because they were enrolled in a two-year technical college. Other considerations were: race (White), age (40-50), education (high school or GED), occupational status (pink-collar), or the occupational status of their husbands (blue-collar) and place of residence.

Selection of the Sample

The sample was obtained through the research center of the technical college. The Director of the center provided the investigator with a printout of 128 Social Security numbers of women who were white, between the ages of 40-50 and enrolled at the technical college.

From the printout, the investigator obtained a random sample of 40 women.

To obtain the random sample, the printout of Social Security numbers was numbered from 1-128. Using the Statistical Table of Fisher and Yates and following the procedure for the selection of random numbers by Kirk (1978), 40 numbers were drawn. The women corresponding to the 40 numbers composed the sample.

Once the random sample of 40 Social Security numbers was chosen, the investigator used the Data Center to obtain some needed further information. Putting the
Social Security numbers into a computer generated other information such as each student's name, address and phone number.

The investigator then contacted each person by telephone, explained that she was studying women between the ages of 40-50 who were currently enrolled in classes, and asked whether or not the woman would participate in a tape recorded interview. If the woman indicated an interest in participating in the study, the investigator explained it would be necessary to ask her several more questions in order to determine if she fit all the criteria of the study. The following questions were then asked:

- Are you currently enrolled at a technical college?
- Are you between the ages of 40-50?
- Do you have any degree beyond your high school diploma or GED?
- Are you presently working outside the home?
- What is your occupation?
- If you are married, what is your husband's occupation?

Through the answers to these questions it was possible to determine if the person fit all the requirements of the study. If any woman did not fit all the criteria, she was thanked for her time and told she was not representative of the sample the investigator was seeking.

In order to obtain the necessary sample of fifteen women, a random sample of 40 names was chosen.
The investigator was unable to reach 11 of the 40 women because they either had no phone or the listed number was incorrect. Five women were rejected because they lived in affluent areas of Columbus. Four women were not included in the study because they indicated their husbands had professional careers. A total of four women were excluded from the study because they had either a B.A. or M.A. degree. One woman indicated that at that particular time her days were quite hectic, but if the investigator was unable to contact another woman, she would participate in the study. It was not difficult to obtain another person for the project, so the investigator did not find it necessary to contact this person for a second time.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) state that rarely, if ever, can an interview be conducted on the basis of goodwill alone. They hold that because of the time given by the interviewees and the number of personal questions they are asked, there must be a quid pro quo, a kind of trade. Yet this investigator found that not one woman who fit all the criteria refused to participate in the study. As a matter of fact, all 15 women showed a keen interest and willingness to be interviewed. Perhaps the trade-off was the desire to speak of their lives knowing that someone would listen.

As each woman consented to participate in the study, she was assured that the interview would be kept
confidential. It was further explained that the interviewee had the right to refuse to answer any questions. A time and place for the interview was then established. As all of the women were attending classes, most of the interviews were held either before or after a class. Some of the interviews were scheduled in the afternoon while others were after evening classes. Two of the subjects requested that they meet with the investigator in the privacy of their own homes.

Data Collection

Practice Interview

To prepare herself to conduct the study, the investigator engaged in practice interviews with three women who fit all the criteria and were studying at a two-year technical college. The purposes of the pilot study were to gain practice and expertise in clarifying the nature of the study, to test the relevance of the investigator's questions, to determine the length of the interview and to obtain helpful suggestions from the women in the pilot study. The information gleaned from the practice interviews enabled the investigator to be relaxed and confident when conducting the actual interviews.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Number</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at Interview</th>
<th>Hours Interviewed</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Married (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Piccola</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Married (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Dottie</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Married (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Married (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Married (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Mary Ann</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Mary Jo</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Number of Children</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Area of Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>GED Cook</td>
<td>Hospitality Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSG Medical Records Clerk</td>
<td>Medical Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>HSG Cook</td>
<td>Hospitality Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HSG Accounting Clerk</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>GED Hotel Desk Clerk</td>
<td>Hospitality Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>GED Dietary Aide</td>
<td>Dietetics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSD Homemaker</td>
<td>Business Data Processing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSG Homemaker</td>
<td>Medical Secretary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSG Accounting Clerk</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSG Housekeeper</td>
<td>Special Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSG Dental Assistant</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSG Accounting Clerk</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSG Nursing Assistant</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSG Clerical</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSG LP Nurse</td>
<td>Special Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Semistructured Interview

The semistructured interviews were conducted over an eight week period. This amount of time was needed in order to fit the interviews in the schedules of the women, many of whom were working full or part-time, plus attending classes.

The interviews began with the investigator asking each woman if she understood the purpose of the research or if she would like further explanation. After each subject indicated that she understood the nature of the study, she was asked to sign a paper giving consent to the project, and permitting the investigator to discuss certain matters with her advisors (Appendix A). Next, the subject was asked to complete a short questionnaire concerned with personal data (Appendix B). After this, the interviewee was asked to give herself a first-name pseudonym. To assure absolute confidentiality, the subject was then called by that name throughout the interview.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) call interviewing "the backbone of field and naturalistic research and evaluation" (p. 154). Interviews must be conducted at a relaxed, leisurely pace so that the interviewer and respondent can be at ease with each other. Therefore, it was necessary for the investigator to be aware of the emotional state of the respondent. It was understood that if the respondent
came to the interview after a long day's work or after several hours in class, she might need a few minutes to relax in order to be comfortable in the interview. An offer of coffee or a cold drink was helpful. The interviews in respondents' homes were conducted over many cups of coffee.

The interview was semistructured, that is, certain areas of investigation were identified prior to the interview, but the guidelines were modified according to the statements of each subject. The order of questions was not of particular concern; indeed, many of the respondents spoke freely of certain topics without being asked specific questions by the investigator.

The questions were based on Levinson's research (1976) and on the related work by Stewart (1977) who used women as subjects. The general areas and questions are listed below:

**Opening**

Before we begin, do you have any questions about the purpose of this study?
Can you tell me about yourself?
How would you describe yourself?

**Current Life Themes**

What is your life like now?
How do you spend your days?
Do you have, or have you had any major medical problems?
Do you see the menopause as changing your life significantly?
Do other women you know talk much about the menopause?
How do you feel about your age?
How do you picture yourself 30 years from now?
Do you consider yourself sexually attractive?

**Personal Values**
What place does religion have in your life?
Have your religious views changed over the years?
Are you interested in politics at all?
Did your parents have the same religious and political values as you have?

**Family Relationships**
What was your life like when you were growing up?
How do you get along now with your parents, brothers and sisters?
How old were you when you got married?
How has the relationship with your husband changed over the years?
Have you raised your sons and daughters
differently than you were raised?
How would you handle the situation if you knew your husband was having an affair?

Outside Activities
Do you have any hobbies?
What do you do for fun?

Levinson's Theory

The Dream
When you were a young girl, did you ever have a dream or fantasy about the person you would like to be, or something you would like to do?
Did your dream come true?

The Mentor
Did anyone ever encourage you in your dream?
Discourage you?
Was there any person in your life you thought you would like to be like?

Friendship
Do you have any close men or women friends?
Do you think it is possible for a woman to have a close friendship with a man and not get sexually involved with him?
Does your husband have any close women friends?
The Role of Work

How do you feel about yourself or other women working outside the home?
Why do you work?
What kind of jobs have you had?
If you had the choice, would you still work outside the home?

The Role of Education

What plans did you have for yourself after you graduated from high school?
What did most of the girls in your high school do after graduation?
How old were you when you received your GED? (When applicable).
What made you decide to return to school for more education?
How were you treated when you went to the Admissions Office?
Do you remember how it felt on the first day of class?
How do you get along with the younger students in class?
Are you finding many people your own age on campus?
How supportive is your husband?
Would you continue your education if your
husband openly opposed your going to school?  
Who else encourages you in your studies?  
What is your area of study?  
Have you changed much since you started classes?  
How important to you is getting an education?  

Termination of Interview  
As you look back on your life, is there anything you would change if you had it to do over?  
In my interviews with other women, can you offer some suggestions as to what they might like to talk about?  

The subjects were encouraged to talk spontaneously about personal aspects of their lives. The interviews were tape recorded and they lasted on the average between one and one-half to two hours; however, some interviews lasted up to three hours. Because the investigator relied on the subject's memory, it was understood that some responses would be biased in favor of the subject. Also, the subject might select to speak about only certain aspects of a situation and neglect to mention that which was less flattering. Whatever the interviewer as an individual might believe, as far as what was "right" or "wrong", it was important to listen to everything with equal equanimity and accept what was heard at face value (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).
At the close of the interview, the subject was asked if she had any suggestions as to questions that could be asked in succeeding interviews. If she did, the suggestions were incorporated into the following interviews.

Each interview drew to a close when the investigator felt the subject had spoken about her life as much as she cared to. The investigator thanked the subject and expressed her appreciation for the time and thoughts the interviewee had so generously given. The investigator then scheduled a second interview which would be conducted by phone. She explained that the purpose of the second interview was to give the subject a chance to think about the interview and then offer any new insights which might have occurred to her between the initial interview and the follow-up interview.

The Follow-up Interview

Within a week or two after the initial interview, the investigator called each subject at the agreed upon time. The subject was then given the opportunity to freely express her opinions concerning the initial interview. She was asked if there was anything else she would like to add, or if she had any further suggestions for other interviews the investigator would have. The subject was again thanked for the generous giving of her time. The investigator then sent each subject a personal note to express gratitude for the help she gave.
Trustworthiness of Data

Guba and Lincoln (1981) identify four major concerns of scientific inquirers, whether these researchers use quantitative or qualitative methods. These major concerns are truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. In quantitative research, these four concerns have been labeled internal validity, external validity or generalizability, reliability and objectivity. According to Guba and Lincoln, analogous terms more appropriate to the qualitative paradigm should be: credibility for internal validity, fittingness for generalizability, auditability for reliability and confirmability for objectivity (p. 104).

**Truth Value (Internal Validity or Credibility)**

The truth value of any study depends on the degree of compatibility between the data and the circumstances to which they relate. "In the area of behavioral studies, those realities exist in the minds of people" (Guba and Lincoln, p. 105). If the field researcher's understanding of the subject is grounded in data and there is no contradiction between this understanding and the actual situation of the subject then the researcher may reasonably be convinced that the study has a strong degree of validity (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

In this study, the investigator used the constant comparative method of analysis in order to ensure that
her understandings were grounded in data and, therefore, valid. The interview process and the research questions were programmed to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the working-class, middle-aged woman.

Applicability (Generalizability or Fittingness)

According to Darkenwald (1980) the purpose of naturalistic inquiry is to develop a working hypothesis in order to shed light on some aspect of human action. It relies on generalized explanations of social phenomena. However, in naturalistic research, the degree of fit between the context that generated the hypothesis and a similar context is more important than generalizing from one situation to another.

With respect to this study, the description of working-class lives comes from women who live those lives. The language of the description is the language of the women themselves. The emphasis of this study is to determine how the circumstances of some working-class, middle-aged women relate with the lives of other women in similar circumstances.

Consistency (Reliability or Auditability)

In discussing the aspect of consistency, Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest the use of the outside audit. A competent judge reviews the data collection and procedures of analysis. The reviewer then can adequately judge the procedures of the study as to whether or not
they are appropriate and performed properly.

The outside observer, with or without the same general framework of the research, might develop a completely different analytic scheme. This selectivity should be taken for granted. But if any analysis does not contradict the original research, it should be regarded as supplementary or complementary (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

How reliable then are the procedures used in this study? The researcher has described in detail the procedures used to gather the data. The language used to gather the data was the language of the women themselves. During the follow-up interviews, which took place two or three weeks after the first interview, the subjects were given the opportunity to confirm or modify what they had originally said. In no case was there observed a substantial departure from the initial data. Upon this basis can the reliability of the study be determined.

Neutrality (Objectivity or Confirmability)

In any study the objectivity of the data is of prime importance. Guba and Lincoln believe there is no intrinsic reason why the data gathered from a qualitative approach should be more doubtful than data gained from quantitative sources. "The issue is not the intrinsic objectivity (in the qualitative sense) of the methods used to generate information or the objectivity of the
investigator, but the confirmability of the information once it is obtained." (pp. 125-126). The burden of proof of confirmability is on the information itself.

With regard to this study, it would be difficult to find any ulterior motives which would influence the interviewees to respond as they did. They were assured of confidentiality. There would be no benefits in making statements just to please the investigator because in all likelihood they would never see the investigator again. In addition, researchers have discovered, as Long (1980) states, that adults are more likely than younger respondents to supply truthful answers.

**Analysis of Data**

After each interview was completed, the audio tapes were transcribed. This was done in order that there might be an accurate account of each interview. The transcriptions of the tapes were the bases from which all the data were analyzed.

The researcher used the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to develop a detailed description of the lives of middle-aged, working-class women. First, the data were color coded to reflect the various conceptual categories. For example, all entries concerned about *Education* would be marked with one color while responses which dealt with *Work History* were given another. The initials of
each woman making a certain response were marked on the entry. It was then possible to sort out all material and assign each entry to a corresponding category. Once the entries were placed in specific categories, they were contrasted and compared in order to analyze similarities, differences and their relationships. From this analysis, other themes such as Changing Values and A Need for Independence began to emerge.

Summary

In Chapter III, the methodology used in the study, along with the rationale for this methodology was given. Next, followed a detailed description of the sample along with an explanation of how the sample was selected. The procedures used to gather the data were presented. Finally, the aspects of research, truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality were addressed, along with the methods used to analyze the data.
Chapter IV

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Introduction

The intention of the researcher in doing this study was to analyze the life patterns of middle-aged, working-class women. Such analysis should offer insights into the adult development of women especially when compared and contrasted with existing adult development theory. Because the women in this study were also students at a technical college, analysis of data will offer implications for adult education.

In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen women who volunteered to participate in the study. In order to remain anonymous, each subject chose her own pseudonym and throughout the interview was referred to by that name. The pseudonym of each subject plus her age and chosen field of study are as follows:

Susie, age 50, Hospitality Management
May, age 41, Nursing
Piccola, age 41, Hospitality Management
Rose, age 42, Accounting
Dottie, age 44, Hospitality Management
Ann, age 45, Dietetics
Angela, age 44, Business Data Processing
Elizabeth, age 40, Medical Secretary
Jane, age 40, Accounting
Mary Ann, age 43, Special Student
Nancy, age 40, Nursing
Barbara, age 46, Business Management
Mary Jo, age 40, Nursing
Carol, age 48, Nursing
Alice, age 48, Special Student

During the interviews, each woman spoke intimately of her personal life and development. She spoke of her need for further education and what motivated her to seek an education in the middle years. In order to analyze the predominant trends characteristic among the experiences of each woman, excerpts illustrating the themes are presented. The result is an analytical description of the life patterns of 15 working-class women between the ages of 40 to 50. These illustrations are rich in meaning because they are told in the language of each individual woman.

Self-Description

In answer to the question, "How would you describe yourself?", there was a wide variety of responses. These ranged from Ann's "That's a heavy question. I've never thought about it; I'm too busy living.", to the recently divorced Mary Ann: "I'm mixed-up and confused, and I feel
like I'm twelve years old again."

Elizabeth said she was happy most of the time and liked to have fun, although her husband "stands in the way." While Elizabeth described herself as "Happy," Nancy said she had suffered from a deep depression for years and there are days when she doesn't want to live. Most of the women took time to mull this question over in their minds as if they wanted to represent an accurate description of themselves and were not quite sure of how to go about it.

Most of the women in this study did not describe themselves in relationship to their husbands or children. Only one woman, May, said she thought of herself in terms of a mother, although Ann and Mary Jo said they liked being homemakers and having a career. Not one woman described herself in terms of being a wife. Jane thought that at one time her whole life revolved around her husband: "Without him I simply, absolutely and positively would not have survived." But circumstances showed Jane that no one is indispensable and she later responded, "You're never too old to learn."

As Rubin (1979) points out, the biological changes in midlife can be a threat for many women because in American culture a woman's looks are her most highly valued commodity. The one physical aspect that most of the women were displeased with was their weight. Whether or not this concern for weight is culturally spawned, most
of the women considered themselves too heavy:

Barbara: If I could just get some weight off of me, I'd feel proud of myself.

Nancy: I don't like my body. I still feel I am overweight. I mess up my body by fasting.

Angela: I'm 25-35 pounds overweight. My doctor would say at least 35 pounds overweight.

Piccola: I got pregnant and I put on weight. I have never felt thin since and I have never really felt attractive since then.

Dottie: I've been 185 pounds and above ever since I was thirteen years old. It gets a little embarrassing when you got flab here and stretch marks there.

Susie: I started gaining a little weight, more; (I was) no longer thin.

Alice: Now that I'm getting up in age I'm not as attractive as I once thought I was ... probably because of weight.

Carol: I'm obsessed with people who are fat. Not that I would not relate to or find pleasant someone who was obese, but for me personally, I don't like fat.

This concern for weight influenced the women's image of themselves and whether or not they considered themselves sexually attractive. In answer to the question, "Do you consider yourself sexually attractive?", six women responded with a definite "No" and this was due partly to their concern for being overweight. Yet, a number of women answered that question in relationship to what others thought of them:

Nancy: Some people have told me that I am, but I still don't like myself.
Mary Ann: My husband never made me feel sexually attractive.

Mary Jo: Oh, yes. I've been asked out.

May: That was something that I had to have proof of. After the hysterectomy, it was not enough to know that my husband still desired me. It was not enough to be told I was attractive or to be flirted with. I needed the proof.

Angela took a middle of the road position with a "Yes and No." She felt that some men would not find her attractive because of her age (44), yet she personally considered herself good-looking: "Yes, I think I am attractive. I think that almost any woman is in her own way. I really do."

Summary

In general, the women in this study did not describe themselves in terms of their roles as wives or mothers, or in terms of their occupation. If there was one theme that influenced their descriptions of self, it was the over-concern for weight. Many women thought they were too heavy and, therefore, sexually unattractive. At the same time, their self-image depended on their perceptions of what other people thought of them.

Current Life Themes

If a woman lacks interests outside her home, she may complicate and multiply her domestic duties just to have something to do (de Beauvoir, 1978). The women in this study certainly did not lack outside interests. All of
the women except one were working full or part-time. This can be compared to the national average of married women in the labor force which is 51 percent; the proportion of divorced women in the labor force is 75 percent (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1983).

In addition, all had responsibilities toward a husband or children and all were attending classes at a technical college either as a full or part-time student. Their days were hectic.

Susie: I'm going to school, taking care of the house, working nights. That's about all (I have time for).

Piccola: On Mondays I have a 2:00 class here (on campus), so it's run home (after work)--sometimes I get time to change, and then I'm here until 10:30 when my last class is over. Then I go home, try to do a little homework, and go to bed so I can get up the next day.

Carol: At this point I have no hobbies. I was into physical exercises and going to Nautilus (Fitness Center) and was jogging. . . . I really couldn't say I do anything in particular except go home and rest once in awhile.

Rose, a divorced woman, summarized many of the other women's feelings: "I'm too busy, and I'm too tired. I'm too tired to even date; it takes energy and time."

Yet, most of the women seemed to thrive on their busy schedules. In answer to the question, "How do you see yourself 30 years from now?" May responded, "Tired. No, not taking it easy. I won't stop until I drop. As long as my health holds up, I'll go." Piccola thought
in 30 years she'd still be going to school and learning. "Maybe not in a formal school, but . . . I want to learn." However, not every woman could picture herself as busy as she presently was. Nancy simply stated: "I feel that I will not be living that much longer."

How does a woman feel about being middle-aged?

de Beauvoir (1978) writes that many women in mid-life feel they are in full possession of their powers and rich in their own experience. Rose put these sentiments in her own words:

I love being 40. I do, and I'll tell you why. It was like one day I woke up and I said to myself I've got something that these kids at 20 and people at 30 or 35 don't have. Because you acquire; it's like a sponge and you soak all this stuff up. It's just like somebody turned a light switch on and I looked around and, hot damn, I had it! It was really great. I love being 40 and I'm content with myself.

Women in mid-life also have the menopause to look forward to. At one time, it was thought that women who went through the menopause would also have a period of psychological depression. Recent research indicates that this is not necessarily so. Many middle-aged women experience little more than mild physical discomfort during the period of menopause (Havighurst, 1972).

Neugarten (1968) writes that the upper-middle-class women she studied reported little social or psychological importance to the menopause, but thought perhaps women of lower social status would be more affected by this
period in their lives. Many male theorists in adult development shun from writing about women in this phase of life because of their unfamiliarity with the topic and because in their opinion, menopause "complicates" the mid-life transition among women (Larsen, 1976). However, for the women in this study, the menopause was just another phase in their lives:

**Susie:** It's just another phase. My mother and them didn't talk about the menopause very much, really. I think it's an individual thing. Some people dread it and some people pass right through it. . . . I never thought too much about it.

**Barbara:** My mother had a rough time with it and both my sisters did. But I guess I don't know quite what to expect except for hot flashes and stuff like that. . . . I really don't know what to expect out of it, so I'm not afraid of it yet.

**Rose:** The only thing we (women in the menopause) compare is the hot flashes. If it's 20 degrees out we'll say, "Oh boy, let's work up a hot flash." So we make jokes about it. But no, none of them that I know of are worried about it. I think most women take age a lot better than men do. I think men have a real hang-up with age. But I think women, the ones that I know anyway, take it okay.

This researcher talked to women whose days were filled with work and school. They had little time to worry about their own menopause.

But what did they do for fun, to relax themselves? Angela, who has an IQ of 150 and is a member of Mensa, is an avid reader. "I read entirely too much. Anything I can get my hands on." However, most of the women
enjoyed themselves with family activities such as bowling, camping, boating and any activities that involved their children. But Mary Ann, hurting from a divorce not two weeks old replied, "The only time when I had fun with my husband was in bed."

**Summary**

Balancing the duties of home, school and work kept the subjects of this study busy, and their days full. Any time not accounted for was spent with family activities. Perhaps that is one reason why they gave little thought or energy to worrying about aging or the approach of menopause. They had no time.

**Personal Values**

For many people, religion is an important aspect of their lives. de Beauvoir (1978) believes that women, if they feel denied human love at the time of their menopause, often become religious. Havighurst (1974) writes that imparting religious and ethical values to the young is one of the fundamental tasks of middle age.

The women in this study spoke freely of their religious upbringing and how they imparted their religious values to their own children. Ann, who described herself as religious but not a church-goer, said she often discussed religious matters with her children:

Ann: We talk about God, and heaven and dying and things like that. . . . I'm not fanatic about church, and I've never tried to shove this
or that down their (her children's) throats. We just sort of discussed religion and the different aspects and beliefs of it. So far they've all stayed in the Baptist belief which is what they were raised in, but if they decided something else for themselves that would be their choice. I guess my belief about religion is that God is there, and we belong to him and I don't question any further than that.

Barbara, too, did not equate religion with church-going, but when she did attend church, it was for her children.

Barbara: My mother's family were all very religious, but we never went to church. . . . And then when I got married, that's when we decided we had to go to church, for our children. We did for many years, and then we sort of phased it out. We stopped going. Now I've started going back again. So religion has never played a very big part in my life.

But religion always was an integral part of Susie's life. She was raised a strict Catholic but left the Church for eight years after she divorced her husband. She was angry with the Church because, "I didn't think they'd done things right to me." Nevertheless, she insisted her children go to church. "I didn't go to church for years. I made sure the kids went, but I didn't."

The Catholic religion played an important part in Mary Ann's life too, as she had twelve years of Catholic education. At the time of the study she had been divorced for only two weeks, and felt an ever-present guilt because of the divorce. To complicate matters, she was working as a priest's housekeeper.
Mary Ann: God said you are not allowed to get a divorce. It is the whole stinking Church. It is a guilt trip that I have laid on myself, and I don't know how to get rid of it. I need someone to tell me how to get to the place I am going. I can not handle this at the present time. It may be a big cop out. I may need more time, and I'm running out of time.

If Susie and Mary Ann were disturbed by some of the teachings of the Church, Elizabeth turned to the Church for strength and consolation when she was having a difficult time in her life. She did not give her first child much religious instruction, but after her youngest was born her life reached a low ebb. Her oldest child was having a difficult time in school. Her husband was drinking "from morning to night" while she felt stuck in the house with the new baby. And the crushing blow came when she found out her husband was having an affair with another woman.

While her oldest child was in school, Elizabeth took the baby to a neighborhood church and just sat there. "We'd spend our afternoons in the church just to get through it (the family problems). She felt talking to God gave her the strength to handle her problems.

Another woman who thought religion helped her get through a traumatic time was Nancy. When she was a teen-ager and having difficulties she was "a very devout churchgoer." But she reversed her thinking when her father became terminally ill with a brain tumor. As she said,
"There could not be a God. There's no one who could do this to my father. . . . It seems like the better you are the more you get crapped on."

Piccola, however, has kept her religious beliefs despite the fact that her father "thinks the Bible is a fairy tale" and her mother never stressed religious values. She told of when she was two or three years old she had gotten dressed and went to church by herself while her parents frantically searched for her. "As far as I can remember I've always wanted to go to church, and I've always gone to church."

Rose explained that she had a good basic religious background and went for five years to a parochial school. Her father had warned her that when she was in her 20s she'd fall away from the Church but would return later on. She protested: "I'll never fall away; I'm going to be a nun." She remembered her father replying: "If you become a nun or marry a Polack, I'll never talk to you again."

Rose didn't become a nun and did marry outside of her Catholic religion. After her husband and she adopted a child she started going to church regularly for the sake of her daughter. After 15 years of marriage she and her husband obtained a divorce. "Now," she said, "I go to church all the time, and I enjoy it. It's a special time for me. I must admit I guess I bend the rules a lot;
probably 99.9 percent of people in all religions bend the rules. But I still love my Church, and I still believe in God. And we have a pretty good communication going, too."

Carol, however, was raised in a home where religion was not a top priority and it wasn't an important factor in raising her own children. "I didn't force my children to go to church or Sunday school, but we did go to church occasionally and we did go to Church of Christ when we went. . . . But no, it wasn't a major part of own lives."

If religion was not emphasized in Carol's home, politics was:

My parents were definitely Democrats. And it goes back to daddy. He came through the Depression; daddy was a coal-miner and of course Roosevelt was a godsend to the working man at that time. Yes, we had to be Democrats. If we weren't Church of Christ, we had to be Democrats. Oh, that was a lot more important!

Carol raised her family to be interested in politics, to be knowledgeable about current issues. As she stated, "I don't know always what is best, but we are politically concerned."

Another woman who came from a family with strong political convictions was Rose:

My father's Democratic and everybody else in the family better be that, too. Daddy's from the old school, and he worked in the factory all of his life—hard-workers, both of them, and both of my parents are from farms. Daddy worked in this factory that had a union, and I think the unions in their day did a lot of good for the factory people. But I don't think they're doing
such a hot job now. They've outlived themselves. But Dad and I don't discuss that because we'd just get in a big fight and never talk again. He can't see my point. I can see his to a certain extent, but he'll never change, so why even discuss it?

So Rose, although raised to adhere to one political party, changed her allegiance over the years. She preferred not to discuss politics with the family as it would only cause dissension.

Piccola's father was a staunch Republican, and she considered herself the same. "We're very conservative in our political beliefs and very patriotic people." Her mother, however, wasn't that politically concerned. "She didn't seem to be very interested, even though she was a Republican, also. But I think he (her father) had a lot of influence over her."

At one time, Piccola did campaign work. At the time of the study, however, she was employed as a cook for the public schools, and as such was expected to be nonpartisan. "I just signed a paper saying that I will be nonpartisan, and I respect that. So, therefore, I do not campaign for anyone."

The right to vote was a strong issue for Mary Jo, and she had volunteered to take people out to show them how to use the machinery in the booths. "If a person is lacking in education on politics and issues, I feel they should be taught."
Her whole family discussed political issues but Mary Jo had her own strong convictions:

I'm very firm on how I believe and if I don't know an issue, I'll vote on the party itself. My husband is the opposite; he votes on each person as a person. Well, we seldom agree on politics, but he don't try to change me nor I him.

The subject of politics is not universally fascinating, and May and Barbara were not interested in the topic. Both of the women said politics meant very little in their parents' lives and it mattered little to them, also. Barbara phrased it this way:

Politics meant nothing in my parents' lives. It doesn't play much in mine either. I read and I decide what I believe is right and go vote, but as far as being involved in a political association, I don't. I probably never would because it's not that interesting to me.

Summary

For the women in this study, religion was an important factor although being religious was not equated with church-going. Religion performed two important functions in the lives of the women: 1) It offered consolation during times of tremendous stress, and 2) It served as a guide for the moral training of children. Anxiety and guilt were experienced by the women who felt they were not living up to the religious precepts taught to them when they were children.
Politics was important, also, to those women who grew up in families where parents discussed issues. The women who were the most interested in politics mentioned their fathers as the ones who influenced them most. When speaking of politics, they rarely mentioned their mothers. Regardless of whether or not the subjects were interested in politics, they felt it was their duty and responsibility to vote.

**Family Relationships**

All human infants depend on some type of organizational structure to satisfy their needs for food, shelter and safety. They have a "family" to provide for these basic needs and remain connected with that family in many ways throughout their lives. In fact, it is possible for individuals to "belong" to a family even when they have lost all contact with it (Okun & Rappaport). In addition to one's family, there are other areas most likely to be essential in a person's life. Along with the family, Levinson (1978) includes occupation, friendship and peer relationships, ethnicity and religion. When listing the essential of a person's life, Levinson puts occupation first. This does not appear to be the case with the working-class woman. In most instances her own marriage-family and family of origin take precedence over any occupation she might have.
All the women in this study had been married at least once. Nine subjects (60 percent) were separated or divorced from their first husbands. At the time of the interviews, five women (33 percent) were married to their original husbands. One woman had been a widow, but she and four women who had divorced their first husbands (33 percent) had married. The ages of the women at the time of their first marriage ranged from 16 to 25 years. The average age was 19 years.

There are many reasons why women marry. Okun & Rappaport (1980) list eight common motives:

1. Societal expectations
2. Loneliness
3. Parental pressures
4. Romantic literature
5. Economic insecurity
6. Desire for upward mobility
7. Neurosis
8. Escape from family origin or current work or living systems (p. 163).

During the in-depth interviews, the women spoke freely of their motives for marrying. All of the reasons listed by Okun & Rappaport can be found in these interviews. But as family of origin was also important to the 15 subjects, they were candid about their own childhoods and relationships with parents. When raising their own
children, some of the women admitted that they sought to avoid the mistakes they perceived their parents had made with them.

**Family of Origin**

Ann's father was an alcoholic who divided his time between working in the coal mines and preaching the gospel. Religion was a way of fighting his alcoholism and he would fluctuate between preaching and drinking. All this was confusing to Ann because "when he drank, everything was permissive, and then when he didn't, we were under strict rule. There were no rules made; it was just if he decided you didn't do something, you didn't do it. And he would come up with some ridiculous things sometimes. I think that's why I probably fight my husband a lot because he's so much like my father."

Ann left school at 16 to get married because she was bored with school. By the time she was 19 the marriage ended. "I went through that divorce which didn't faze me at all; it just amazed me that it didn't bother me."

Another daughter of a coal-mining family was Jane. She was one of five children and experienced living "day to day." Having little money, her father and mother "did good to raise their family." But Jane was determined not to live as her father and mother had done. "I vowed from the time I was a young girl that I would not live in my home state of West Virginia when I grew up. And
out of high school, I got married; I was 19 when I got married."

Jane kept her vow. By the time she was 21 she had divorced her husband and moved to a small town near Cleveland. She moved to be near her mother who by that time also divorced.

Another product of divorced parents was Dottie. Her mother was an alcoholic and after her parents were divorced she and her two brothers were placed in an orphanage. The time spent there was devastating for Dottie and she developed an attitude of being unworthy of any happiness that came her way. Later in life when she lost everything dear to her, she told herself, "It's no big deal; I didn't deserve it anyway." Through the combination of counseling and success at class work, Dottie began to gain some measure of self-confidence. "It's taken me in the last two years to get over that (lack of confidence) and figure I'm worth something. If I work hard for it, I'll get it."

If Dottie was constantly put down in her childhood, May felt she was "solid gold" to her mother. May's mother, having divorced her first husband, had May after she remarried. She had plans for May, and among those plans was the idea that May should support her if she left her second husband, May's father. So May grew up with a mother and father who loved her but not each other.
When May was 14 she left home to work for another family. She spent her high school years alternating between living at home and living with families for whom she worked. But her mother still had hopes that one day May would be financially able to support her:

She thought I was going to grow up and get a job and support her. I remember going with her to the attorney's office. She was going to divorce my father, and I was going to be her source of support. Well, that didn't work out, so they're still together fighting like cats and dogs just like they always have, and I can't go there for a weekend without her trying to manipulate me.

Rose came from a family of three children and a father who "couldn't control alcohol." His temper sometimes became violent, "and at times he would knock my mother around a little bit." So with this type of family life Rose grew up thinking her parents didn't love her. As she grew older, her attitude changed. "Now, being an adult and looking back, I find out that they loved me very much. My father and I still have a hard time getting along, but it's just his temper against my temper, that's what it is. I love him, and he loves me I'm sure, but we don't get along."

Nancy, however, misses both parents as both had died. During her childhood, her mother was often bedridden and the family lived in poverty. There was little food, no running water and only two beds for six people. Yet, the love she received during her childhood was greater than
that of her present family. "I wish I had them (parents) all of my life. I felt real love from them."

Both of Carol's parents were living and in their 70s, but as she said, "They're beginning to deteriorate."
Both parents worked hard to provide a good home for Carol and her brother. "We had a good home. Mother and Daddy were always there. My brother and I fought as all do, but we had a good home life."

Another woman with pleasant childhood memories was Angela. She had four younger brothers and grew up in Louisville, Kentucky where her father worked in a factory. At the time of the interview, her parents were alive and active in various clubs. She described her family as "normal." "It was just a normal, happy family, very happy."

Marriage - Family

Husband

At the time of the interview, Barbara had been separated from her husband of 23 years for five months. As she explained it, the decision to separate was mutual; she could feel it coming. She wondered if perhaps her husband went through a mid-life crisis:

I guess he doesn't want to get old, and it bothers him that he is getting older. There's not a thing you can do about it. But I think he's looking for somebody younger. And that doesn't hurt me right now if he found somebody younger. It might hurt me. But no, I think he didn't want to be married anymore, and I
didn't want him the way he was. So we both agreed it would be the best thing for us.

Barbara explained that she always felt dependent on her husband "not for morale-type things" but financially. She decided that she never had a chance to be on her own because she went directly from her parent's care to her husband's care. And during the early years of her marriage, Barbara felt inferior to her husband:

I guess I thought he was better than me for the fact that probably he was making more money than me and had a good job. People thought he was smart, listened to what he said, you know, intelligent-type people, people he worked with and for. . . . And I guess I always thought that I was his wife; nobody knew me for myself.

Barbara started to work full time and then began classes at the technical college. She gradually gained some self-confidence. "So it's happened in stages, the confidence thing." Because of the changes in herself, she began to get more enjoyment out of life. "Gee, it's good to be alive. . . . Maybe I'm going to like single life. Every day it changes."

Mary Ann had not quite reached the point of enjoying her single life because at the time of the interview her divorce had been final for just two weeks. She felt she was mixed-up, confused and angry towards her husband. A devout Roman Catholic, she married when she was 17 and remained married to her
husband for 25 years. Mary Ann felt that while she was married she and her husband got along, although there was a crisis in their marriage when he had an affair with an old friend of hers. Mary Ann and her husband never talked about this affair and she felt it was a big mistake. When an affair happened a second time, it ripped the seams of the marriage.

After 25 years of marriage her husband told her he was leaving to live with a 19 year old woman. This news devastated Mary Ann and she said she became suicidal. Professional counseling did not help. "We tried to work it out, but later he told me how much he needed her, and told me that he didn't love me." Mary Ann felt that her husband used his own father as a role model for "his father dumped his mother after 25 years of marriage for a younger woman. This is a set pattern."

When asked why she married her husband, Mary Ann said that at the time the two of them loved each other. But then she added, "I might have married him to escape the problems at home."

Elizabeth is still married to her first husband but planned to leave him when she finished her schooling. Her husband had been having an affair for the past six years and the only way she could handle it was by not thinking about it. "That's the only
way I can handle it for now and get through with what I want to do and keep peace at home."

A few years ago Elizabeth was going to leave her husband but realized without education and a job she had "no place to go." Later she enrolled at a technical college and set a goal for herself. She thought within two years she would complete her education and then "I can do just about whatever I want. I don't have to depend on my husband."

When Piccola was 17 she married a man she thought she could depend upon but she soon discovered he was unfaithful to her. "I assumed that all men were unfaithful. They may be faithful today, but that don't mean they'll be faithful tomorrow." When she was 21 and had two infant children, she divorced her first husband.

Four years later she remarried. "I looked for different qualities in a man the second time. The first one had dark hair and an olive complexion, what every woman wants at 17. Then the other one, he had workworn hands and was dependable."

Events in life necessitated that Piccola not only depend on her husband, but on herself as well. She married and divorced while quite young, and for four years, before her remarriage, had full responsibility for her children. Her second husband was
an over-the road truckdriver, and while he was on the road Piccola had the responsibility for raising not only her two children, but two children from a previous marriage of her husband, and one child of their own.

When Piccola's husband was 41 he had a serious heart attack and nearly died. The following five years his activities were severely limited and he was completely dependent on his wife. Her husband, whom Piccola described as a "goer and doer," gone on the road from Sunday night until Friday night, was now home for 24 hours a day. The adjustment was difficult for Piccola. "That first summer he was sick, I just thought I'd go bonkers."

Because of her husband's serious illness, she realized she'd have to depend upon herself totally in the future. Piccola went from a woman expecting a man to provide for her to a woman who understood the importance of depending upon herself. "A woman needs to be independent. . . . I don't feel that you have to depend upon a man; you can be your own person and make it in this world."

Another woman who felt she made it on her own was Susie. She was married at 19, had two children and when the youngest child was three, her husband started "running around." Susie told him to "either
straighten up or move out, so he moved out." Her husband left the State and never made any attempt to support Susie or the two children. Susie never remarried, so the care and raising of the children were totally her responsibility.

Mary Jo, who had been married to the same man for over 20 years felt her husband had more than adequately provided for their family of three children. But her husband had a history of past affairs, the first when he was in his 30s and dated an 18 year old woman. At that time the hurt was devastating for Mary Jo, and it had not entirely disappeared:

I don't have my life all twirled around my husband. In fact, my children I enjoy to a great extent, and my husband comes down the line quite a distance. I love my husband as much as I'm capable of loving him at this point from the hurt. I've never hurt him like he has hurt me. At that time it really was a hurt.

For Mary Jo, this was not the last hurt: "Then he went and done it again." But Mary Jo explained she never put strings on her husband. He could walk out if he wanted to. "If my husband would decide that he would want to leave, I want to have enough confidence to know fine, I can make it."

Dottie had to "make it" not only after her divorce but even more so during her 20 years of marriage. During that entire time her husband abused her both physically and mentally. Because of his
drinking problem, he intimidated Dottie and their two daughters. When he'd go off with another woman, it was a relief for Dottie.

"It was sort of a relief when he'd go find himself another woman. He wasn't satisfied with me. I mean, the man would take five minutes. And all the time we had sex, he never once kissed me. Never told me how he cared. Nothing. But it was a relief for him to go have somebody else; it took the pressure off of me. But then I would worry about him coming home drunk and doing something to me or the kids."

What finally forced Dottie to leave her husband was when he had an incestual relationship with their daughter. This incident gave her the strength to dissolve the marriage. "That's what got me out of it. Probably if it hadn't been for that, I'd still be with him or dead, one of the two."

Children

Women who are middle-aged during the 1980s have gone through many transitions in their lives. Because of the changes in society and in themselves they raised their own children differently from the manner in which they were raised. They talked about these differences.

Alice was raised with three brothers and the women in the family were expected to wait on the men. She was determined not to let that happen when she had her own family. It was not easy because her husband "believes this is the wife's duty." But
she tried to train her son differently because "he would sit down and say, 'Oh, Mom, get me a glass of water,' and I'd reply, 'You can get your own water.' And he would have me polishing the bottom of his shoes if I would."

Alice's oldest child, a daughter, was in college and Alice felt she had trained her to be independent. "In her lifetime, it's going to be different. I think she's going to be in the two-family income--two wage earners--so therefore, I think her lifestyle is going to be different."

Besides having her own income the new breed of woman, Alice felt, would marry later, in her early 30s. Husbands would share more of the housework. This was not the case in her own home because housework, "Is not my husband's bag."

Jane admitted that she, too, taught her daughter to be independent and perhaps did "too good of a job on her." Jane felt that as she herself was growing up, she was totally dependent on her parents, and then later, on her husband. As her daughter grew up she instilled in her the need for her to be able to think and do for herself. "And I did it too much because she is independent as I would have liked to have been but she's too independent." Nevertheless, Jane was proud of her daughter's intention not to
marry until she was in her middle 20s, because "there's more to life than getting grown and getting married."

Among Carol's peers, it was the norm to get married after graduation from high school or perhaps not even complete high school. The attitude was, "Get married and let someone else take care of you." But with her own daughter she expected something different. She didn't want her to marry soon after high school:

I hoped she wouldn't. Probably because I did. I wanted her to do the things I didn't do: go to school, complete her education, get out in the world and see a few things, do things, go places and eventually meet the man who's going to sweep you off your feet.

Her daughter did complete college and at the time of the study was taking classes with her mother. Nevertheless, old habits of female dependence were hard to put to rest for Carol said: "I'm trying to tell my daughter to find a rich man."

Susie, who raised her two children by herself, said she got along just fine with them. She would have wanted her daughter not to marry so soon after high school. Her daughter married at 19 although she did obtain a license to be a barber. Her son had worked part time and graduated from The Ohio State University when he was 28 years old.
"They're two really great kids," was the way Barbara described her two daughters. She taught them to "stand on their own two feet" and encouraged them to get extra training after high school. One daughter was attending class full time and the other had taken a year off to work to get the money to return to school. Barbara was the one who had encouraged attendance at school for she said, "Neither one of them like school; it's just that I've preached to them that they need it."

The education was needed so the girls would have some measure of independence. Barbara did not want her daughters to repeat her mistakes:

I hope that they don't ever have to feel like they have to stay married to somebody when they're unhappy just because they fear they can't make it on their own. And I think that's what I did for several years.

Angela admitted that she stayed in an unhappy marriage because she doubted if she could make it on her own: "Maybe I was just scared." So she tried to help her only daughter become independent but this daughter married when in her teens. She once remarked to her mother, "You know, if anything ever happened to ____, I'd just find me another man to take care of me. I'm not about to go out and work." Angela, ever the mother, commented: "But my daughter is adorable and beautiful. I don't
think she'd have too much trouble finding some man to take care of her."

When asked if she raised her children differently from the way she was raised, Piccola just laughed. She explained that her own father had strict rules about men and women's work: "Women do not paint or repair the dishwasher or whatever. That was a man's job."

Yet Piccola's daughter was always "interested in tinkering." She took home repair courses in junior high school. In senior high she took a course in heating and air-conditioning. Piccola's frail little daughter went into heating and air-conditioning having to have a pocket knife and combat boots for this course. Piccola reiterated, "A woman needs to be independent."

Summary

A woman has strong bonds which unite her to the family in which she was raised and the family she has helped create. The working-class women in this study were influenced by their parents, parental care or lack of such care. The happiness they experienced in their childhoods was something they wanted to build on and give as an inheritance to their own children. The turbulence, chaos and disorder they experienced were situations they wanted to avoid.
Frequently, this was not the case. Choosing a husband when the women themselves were immature, caused many marriages to end in divorce. Some of the women, lacking employable skills and, thus, not having any means to support themselves, stayed in marriages for no other reason than to have their husband's support. This was one reason the women wanted their own daughters to receive an education and have some marketable skills; they did not want their daughters to remain in unhappy marriages simply because they had no means to support themselves.

Levinson's Theory

An important aspect of Levinson's (1978) theory of adult development is his concept of the Dream, a vision of imagined possibility that generates enthusiasm and excitement in a person's life. In order to fulfill this Dream one needs the help of a Mentor who as teacher, guide or role model offers support when it is needed. Levinson contends that most adults give and receive little mentoring, and that women, in general, receive less than men.

Levinson also believes that most American men do not have an intimate, nonsexual relationship with a woman. Many men have women as colleagues or casual dating partners, but few men have a woman as a close friend. In order to relate this aspect of Friendship, as well as the other areas of the Dream and the Mentor to the lives of the working class woman, the subjects of this study were asked


to comment about these topics.

The Dream

Angela could not remember ever having a youthful
dream of wanting to do something special in her life, or
of wanting to be like someone else. She responded, "I
don't think so; I can't recall a dream like that." It
was the expected thing for women of her age to marry:

It was just that getting married was not the
end of the world or that it's the ultimate,
even though it was the customary thing to do.
It was just like things happened, and you just
went along with the flow as much as anything.

Alice never dreamed of being rich or famous, although
she kept in her heart the desire to be a nurse. She knew
she was expected to be successful wife and mother.
"Careers were not really talked about much. You just
worked until you got married, and you got married and
that was it."

Barbara's family was very poor, and her mother and
father did not even expect her to finish high school. Her
mother told her, "You'll just get married, so what's the
use of going to school?" But Barbara had some idea of what
she wanted to do after high school so she took typing to
help prepare herself for a job appropriate to her education
and background.

Having a happy marriage and strong family life were
the dreams of Mary Jo, Elizabeth and Rose. When Rose
divorced her husband, her dream was shattered. "I think
my biggest and only want I ever had crumbled when I had my divorce." Although Mary Jo and Elizabeth had not divorced their husbands, Mary Jo was separated from hers for a time and Elizabeth spoke frankly of leaving her husband when she completed her education. Their youthful dreams of a happy marriage were not satisfied.

Jane had a different "dream." When she was three years old she cut her leg severely and for many years had to have repeated surgery performed on one leg. Her goal was to be normal "like everybody else." Dottie, however, had no dreams. She felt her years in the orphanage deprived her of dreams. "When I was a kid, I never felt like I deserved much."

Becoming someone special was the dream of Piccola and Susie. Piccola loved baseball and had a dream that someday she would be a sportscaster. "But then of course ladies did not do anything like that. Ladies went to school and got married and became mothers." Piccola married immediately after graduating from high school when she was 17.

When Susie was a young girl she wanted to be a nun. She thought about this and mentioned it to her family, but that was as far as the dream went. She married soon after graduation from high school at the age of 19.

May had a dream, a fantasy that someday she would meet a handsome, wonderful man from a foreign country.
When she was 40 she met such a man who was "charming and very sweet and very sexy, and it wasn't very long until I was going up to his place." The affair did not last for a long period of time, but for May her dream came true. "I had fun and I'm not sorry."

Looking back to the days when she was a young woman, Carol could understand that her options at that time were few. She, like most women at that time had few opportunities. She explained:

When I was going to high school, you didn’t have too many selections. You worked in an office or you were a nurse or a teacher. That was probably the spectrum of the job market for women at that point. You didn't think about going out and being an engineer or driving a truck. So I wouldn't say that I had a dream particularly; I mean I wasn't consumed with this.

The Mentor

Few of the women in this study spoke of a person who served as a guide to them when they were younger, or even of a person who was a role model. Susie, who wanted to be a nun, saw her ideal in the person of Sister Marie, her fourth grade teacher. She admired her and one day hoped to see her former teacher once more.

A strange type of role model for Nancy was her aunt. This aunt was a nurse and took care of Nancy's mother when her mother was bedridden. Nancy admired her aunt for her nursing skills but hated her for what Nancy perceived as harshness and cruelty. Nancy wanted to be a better nurse than her aunt as a type of "pay back."
Friendship

Most of the women in this study agreed that men and women could be close personal friends with one another and not become sexually involved. Many talked of their own male friends but admitted that their husbands might be threatened by these friendships. A few of the women said their husbands had female friends and most of these relationships were strictly platonic.

Jane said she had a close friend who is "like a brother to me." Her husband never objected if she went with him and several other workers for lunch, but Jane thought he might object if just the two of them went out. As far as her husband going out with a female friend, Jane thought she would not tolerate it "if it were outside of working hours."

Most of the women felt they could have a close male friend. So to the question, "Do you think you could have a close male friend and not become sexually involved?", they responded:

Dottie: Oh, yeah. I have several good male friends. One guy, he's 12 years younger than I am, and he and I are just like that, but it's like a brother-sister relationship. ... I used to think that if a man hung around a woman, he was only there for one thing, and once he got it, that was it. I don't feel that way so much anymore.

Rose: I think you can have a friend, a male friend. And I have one at work as a matter of fact. This man is 56, and he invited me to dinner one night and I accepted. ... It was strictly a nice time.
Anne: Oh, yes. I have one as a matter of fact. . . . We could go out dancing together and talk. I enjoy his company. It was a new thing for me to do that, and I find that I'm able to do that.

Susie: Oh, yeah. I only wish sometimes that I had somebody.

Piccola: Yes. Now, I don't have one because I'm not that keen on men.

Elizabeth: It's possible. I have boy friends in school. Just friends.

Nancy: Definitely. I had one during my separation. He was in my group therapy, and we would call each other. Sometimes we would meet for lunch. We are the best of friends.

Carol was quite emphatic about the possibility of having male friends. In fact, she thought men made the best friends:

I think that men make the best friends in the world. Women are not good friends. . . . Women are catty, always suspicious of anything. Men tend to accept whatever you do or don't do. Women say, "Why do you want to do that?" or "Why didn't you do that?" Maybe I'm limited in my experience with people, but you can have conversations with men that cover more than having a baby or an operation which I find is what most women talk about in a corner together. . . . With men, you can talk about sports, politics, religion. You get a little loud and argue a little, but that's all.

Summary

Levinson's theory of a Dream, a vision of youthful possibilities that shapes one's life, appeared in the lives of these women in the form of dreaming of a happy marriage and family life. Many of the women grew up in families in which there was constant quarreling. Many had parents
who were alcoholic. As young women, they had dreams that their own marriages would be different.

The notion that a young woman should have a career and be able to support herself was not prevalent when these women graduated from high school. The widespread understanding was that a woman should find a man to support her. The women who did entertain thoughts of working after high school, did so in terms of working in traditional female occupations such as that of a nurse or typist.

No woman gave evidence of having a Mentor or guide or even counselor that she would turn to when such a person was needed. The person who came nearest to the meaning of mentor was a favorite teacher in elementary school. In this respect, the findings of this study are related to Levinson's conclusion that mentoring for women, in general, is rare. For the middle-aged, working-class woman, it appeared to be non-existent.

Friendship with people of either sex does not appear to be as rare in this study as Levinson reports in his study of men. In fact, most of the women reported that they had close male friends and the relationship was not sexual. Those who had no close male friend, expressed the desire to have such a friend.
The Role of Work

Most working-class women have done some work outside their homes. Even those who stayed at home while their children were young, occasionally did part-time work outside the home. The jobs were the traditional female type: factory worker, secretary or nurse's aide.

Baruch (1983) found that most working-class women rated high in frustration because they had a heavy load of work at home plus that on the job. Perhaps age makes a difference. The women in this study were from 40 to 50 years old. Their children were on the road to independence, and this enabled the women to work outside the home. The women indicated they enjoyed their work because of the independence it gave them.

Types of Jobs

Even when her children were young, Carol worked outside the home. She may have taken a year or two off when she was needed at home, but for the most part she did outside work. Working for the government or for private industry, Carol did mostly secretarial work.

Elizabeth was also a typist. When her first child was born she left work at her husband's insistence and did not seek any outside employment for the following 16 years.

For 25 years Alice had worked as a nurse's aide. When her children were young she worked part-time while her grandmother watched the children. Despite the fact
that Alice worked throughout her married life, her husband would have preferred it if she had stayed at home.

Piccola alternated between factory work and staying home while her children were young. When her youngest started high school she returned to work as a cook for the public school system. At the time of the study she was still working as a cook.

Working had always been part of Susie's life, and she too worked as a cook. Her job demanded long and tedious hours, and she would have preferred another type of work. Her lack of education stymied her job possibilities for she said, "Sometimes I'd like to do something else, but I don't know what."

Ann had done waitress work for most of her adult life, and even worked part-time when her children were young. She enjoyed the work but began to think that life should have more to offer. "There's just more to life than waiting tables. You can't do that for ever; it's hard work. Gradually, as you approach your 30s . . . it gets more difficult. I noticed I was slowing down." It was then that Ann went to work for a private company.

In order to support her son, Angela had a variety of jobs. She did every type of job a factory could offer: production, supervision, training. In addition, she took part-time jobs that were available such as census taking or sales work. Angela worked solely for the money because
she found none of the jobs interesting or challenging.

Ever since she was 14, Dottie had to work. She did factory and restaurant work and performed various jobs in the hotel-motel field. Unlike Angela who found her jobs uninteresting, Dottie found her jobs, especially in the hotel-motel field, challenging.

After her children started school, Barbara found housework boring. She got a job doing inventories for a sales company and discovered she enjoyed adult company after being at home with the children for so many years. Although money was a factor, she enjoyed her work because of the social aspects.

Purpose of Work

Throughout their lives, these women worked at various types of jobs. Some worked solely for the financial benefits. Others found that a paying job gave them a sense of fulfillment. In their own words they spoke about the purpose of work in their lives:

Barbara: I guess just getting out of the house and the fact that I would be bringing in a little money. . . . I always hated to ask my husband for money.

May: I work because I need the money. Actually, that's the major reason, but I suppose like a lot of other people, I'd like to find fulfillment in it.

Jane: Work fills a certain need that I have. It gives me a sense of accomplishment. I hate housework; I was never meant to be a housewife. I guess I have to say independence, because I was always an independent person to begin with.
Angela: I had to work because I had to support myself and my son. So it's always been just for the money.

Dottie: Work gives me something to look forward to every day. I don't do much of anything else but work.

Alice: I enjoy work. I enjoy it on a part-time basis. And for the money.

Piccola: (I work) to find fulfillment. You stay home and they take you for granted, and you go out and you're serving a purpose. You're meeting a need, and you're important for a few hours. . . . But the money has always been the least of why I worked.

Carol: I enjoyed it I suppose. You like the extra income of course, and you get into the habit of doing it. At this point, I wouldn't know anything else to do. Right now it's the main focus of my life.

Susie: I never did want to work; I always had to. I did it because I had to work.

Summary

Most of the working-class women in this study had a long work history. The work they did was "pink-collar" work, in the traditional female type occupations: typist, salesperson, waitress, cook or nurse's aide. Those women who had another source of income, enjoyed having earned their own money, but also received a certain amount of fulfillment from their jobs. Women who had little financial support other than what they themselves earned, worked chiefly for the financial benefits.
The Role of Education

The majority of women today hold jobs which are traditionally female and provide little opportunities for advancement. In 1955, the government began keeping records on the ratio of the salaries of women to those of men. Women, on the average, earned about six dollars for every ten earned by men. That ratio has not changed much over the years (Foner, 1980).

In order to up-grade their skills or to obtain new ones, many women have felt the need to obtain additional education. Two-year technical colleges have provided the means for men and women to receive additional training. By their open-door policy, two-year institutions have allowed those who interrupted their education for a number of years, to be able to continue it. In this way the two-year colleges have contributed to the death of the tight linear educational program which had people enter at age five, continue on through high school or college and then leave school forever (Carbone, 1982).

Why did the subjects in this study decide to return to school? What was the impetus which impelled them to register for classes? How did they feel being in class with much younger students? The women responded to these questions.
The Decision

After Rose was divorced she took a job as an accounting clerk. Most of her duties came rather easily to her, but one aspect of the job seemed overwhelming. She felt if she had some additional training she would have a better understanding of what she was expected to do.

Rose talked to her co-workers and supervisor and they all gave her encouragement and incentive to continue her education. After she made her decision to return to school, things just fell in place. For Rose, the most difficult aspect of returning to school was finding parking: "The most difficult thing was trying to find a parking space when you don't know where to go."

"If I'm working, I ought to enjoy what I'm doing," was the philosophy of Angela when she realized she didn't enjoy her work. At that time employers were demanding computer programers, so Angela decided to change directions and get some training in the data processing field.

Making the decision to return to school was not difficult; Angela knew what she wanted. She was a bit uneasy for the first two weeks because of the younger students but soon found that most of the students were older in night classes, "If you are going nights, the age group varies considerably. It's unusual to find young people under 20 in night classes."
For Jane, the importance of continuing education was stressed at work. Whenever a new position opened, the person with the most education filled it. Jane finally came home from work one day and announced to the family, "Well, I guess it's time to go back to school." Jane was not overly enthusiastic about returning to school; she knew it was imperative if she wanted a promotion on the job. As she explained, "At this point, it's more a chore than anything else."

Getting a job was important to Elizabeth. She had been taking care of the home and her children for 16 years. She did not want to remain financially dependent on her husband and realized the only way she would become independent would be to get a job.

Elizabeth was intimidated by the thought of going to the main campus for classes, so she decided to take her courses at an off-campus branch near her home. It was a good decision. She obtained more self-confidence and knew that if she ever had to enroll in class on campus, she could handle it.

Alice worked part-time as a nurse's aide and also did volunteer work. Eventually she tired of volunteer work because she was given too much to do. Feeling dissatisfied, she asked herself why she didn't do something different. "At that time, they were really playing up adult education, and I thought, 'Well I'll just try that.'"
I decided that I really liked it, but I realized I have to do it on a limited time." Alice was not sure what technology she wanted to study, but took courses in gerontology because "that's a good field."

When Anne was 16 years old she left school and at the age of 45 decided to return. It was a difficult decision for her but she felt more comfortable when she took night classes and discovered many women her age on campus. She also discovered that the younger people had much to offer and that the students accepted one another. She remarked, "There's no ostracizing, young or old, women or men."

The decision to return to school was not difficult for Barbara because she always wanted to go back to school. After the separation from her husband, she decided to enroll in some business management courses. Her employer paid her tuition and because of the emotional turmoil of the separation she knew the time was right for her.

The Younger Students

For 21 years Nancy had been out of school and when she returned she made the mistake of taking too heavy a load. She struggled through some of her classes and found that this setback was a great "leveler" between her and the younger students in class. These students helped her with assignments, took her "under their wings" and eventually she became friends with many of them.
As Ann rubbed shoulders with the younger students, she was forced to deal with parts of herself that she had neglected. She felt she learned how to accept what was right for herself regardless if others objected, and that this came from the younger students in class:

They are so much freer and independent than we ever were. They don't ask you to approve of everything they do, and I think that's great. I accept them for what they are. If they're gay or beardy, or if their hair is long, that's just them. I think they do that, too, (accept others) which in turn makes you more acceptable of yourself, your faults and weaknesses. You try to work on the ones you can and improve them.

While Ann enjoyed the "freedom to be me" attitude of some students, Carol was less impressed. She was trained from her youth to look her best whenever she left home so found the dress and mannerisms of the younger students somewhat distressing. This was true not only of the students but also of some of the instructors whom she described as "dowdy."

Ann also felt that under pressure some of the students would not hesitate to cheat. "The younger students don't think too much of cheating... Cheating is rather prevalent I would say." Ann did not want to be judgmental towards other students and thought a different attitude prevailed when she was younger.

Mary Ann felt she complicated the situation of being with younger students when she began dating one. He was in one of her classes and she did go out with him several
times. Soon she realized this was creating problems and eventually stopped seeing him.

The Support System

Balancing a busy life of work, family and school demands a great deal of energy and determination. To whom did these women turn when they felt tired and discouraged? Some considered their husbands and families were their greatest supporters. Others felt their husbands were the greatest source of discouragement.

Mary Jo knew her husband was her greatest supporter. He worked in a precarious job and wanted Mary Jo to be able to support herself and their three children if anything happened to him. Mary Jo felt fortunate that her husband never complained about a messy house or late meals. In fact, she said, sometimes he had to get his own meals.

The husband of Piccola was almost too supportive. He decided she should go to school, came to the school she was to attend, obtained the admissions forms and enrolled her. Piccola complained that at times he would treat her as a child for he threatened, "If you don't make good grades, I'm going to ground you." But now that Piccola has attended classes she said she planned to continue because "I usually go along with whatever he says."
When May decided to enroll in class, her husband openly opposed the idea. Her employer offered a school reimbursement program and she knew this was her chance to get the education she had always wanted. But her husband responded, "Absolutely not!" and used the excuse that the children needed their mother at home.

May persisted, however, because she felt that this was her last chance to get an education. She explained to her husband that she was going to school. She knew she had made the right choice for she said, "I tell you, the day I paid my money and registered, that was a bigger high than the day I started (classes). I gained my wings."

After Elizabeth told her husband she wanted to enroll in classes so that eventually she could get a job, he told her she was insane. He was threatened because she was getting out of the house and he openly objected to her attending class. Elizabeth felt she got the most support from her mother and oldest child.

Throughout her marriage, Nancy received little emotional support from her husband. It was no exception when she told him she planned to return to school. Nancy was seeing a therapist at the time of the interview, and it was this woman who encouraged Nancy the most.

A close woman friend who took Dottie in as one of her family, gave Dottie the emotional support she needed. Dottie felt accepted by this friend and counted on her to offer encouragement.
Ten years after Susie obtained her GED she enrolled in a technical college to work for an Associate's degree in Hospitality Management. Her son encouraged her to continue her education. After his graduation from The Ohio State University he told his mother that now it was her turn. And Susie was determined to get her degree: "I don't care how long it takes me, even if I don't get to use it much."

Summary

Despite various obstacles in their way, these women were determined to obtain further education. For some it was a tremendous opportunity; for others it was a needed chore.

Attending classes with students half their age presented difficulties to some subjects. However, the discovery of many older students, both men and women, in class, dissipated the anxiety of those who felt their age made them conspicuous.

At one time or another, every one of the women felt discouraged in her efforts to obtain an education. Some of the discouragement arose from class work, busy schedules or family pressures. To obtain needed emotional support, some women turned to their families. Those women whose families caused the discouragement, looked to trusted friends or counselors for support.
Termination of the Interview

The women interviewed for this study had reached an age when they could look at the years behind them with introspection. As they thought about their lives, would they change anything, if it were in the realm of possibility to change an event? To terminate the interview, each woman was asked if there were anything in her life she would change if she had the ability. The responses were varied.

Nancy felt she received little love and support from her husband and children. She remembered what it was to feel love and protection from parents who loved her. If she could change anything, it would be to have her parents alive. She was lonely and wanted to be loved by her parents for she replied: "I felt real love from them."

What Dottie would have changed was the listless attitude of her children. She saw her daughters going from day to day, without enthusiasm for anything. Dottie hoped her daughters would discover for themselves the exciting things that life has to offer.

Height and weight were on the minds of Piccola and Barbara. Although Piccola was satisfied with her life, she would have liked to be taller and thinner. Barbara also would have wanted to be thinner: "I would have been a thin me. I think I would have been much happier if I'd have been thin."
Jane and May answered that they would not change anything; they wanted to accept their lives just as they were. As May saw it, her life would have no gain if it did not also have pain. "I think that people shouldn't hold back so much. They should allow themselves to experience the full range of emotions, and that includes pain, sadness and loss."

The answer was not difficult for Angela. She replied that if she could change anything it would be the length of her first marriage. She wished she would have divorced her first husband much sooner than she did. Rose, too, would have made some change, but whatever it was, it was quite personal to her and she indicated she did not want to talk about it.

The most frequent responses given concerned education. Without hesitation, a number of women indicated they wished they would have gotten their education sooner:

Alice: I would probably get a degree first. . . . As I look back, that's probably one of the things I would change.

Anne: If I could go back and change it, I would change the fact that I dropped out of school so young. I would have stayed in there, and I would have tried to use the opportunity to go to college at that time.

Carol: I would have gotten an education, I think. In looking back at the time, I thought it was impossible, but people always find a way, and I could have found a way.
Mary Ann: I would have had a degree of some sort before I got married.

Mary Jo: I wouldn't have gotten married as young as I did and I would have gone to college then instead of now. But I might not have appreciated college as much as I do today.

Summary

The answers to the question, "As you look back upon your life, is there any one thing you would change?" had a wide variety. Some concerned physical changes, others related to family matters. Two women replied that they would accept their lives just as they had been so far.

However, a number of women responded that if they could make one change, it would be to have received an education before they married. They perceived education as an opportunity and a privilege. Perhaps their lives would have been much different if that opportunity were taken when they were young women instead of middle-aged.
Chapter V

Summary of the Study, Findings, Implications and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to concentrate on the adult development of working-class women in their mid-lives. As many women in this category have been or will be enrolled in community or technical colleges, an understanding of their life course is essential for the development of adult education programs. It is these programs which will provide the major avenue for improving the employment opportunities of women.

Theoretical perspectives on the development of women have been derived from theories concerning the development of men. However, the life of women cannot necessarily be patterned after those of men. While men define themselves in terms of their own individuation and achievement, women may envisage themselves in a different context because of their roles as mothers and wives. This distinct vision presents another dimension to the total human experience.

A recent study concerning adult development was conducted by Daniel Levinson and associates. Their subjects were mostly men in the professions. Levinson
began with the premise that there may be systematic age-related changes in human lives, and he proposed that individuals live through stages of relatively universal, age-linked developmental periods. Realizing that he based his conclusions on an all-male sample, Levinson recommended that there be additional research using women as subjects.

A review of the literature revealed that the development of women has largely been neglected by the social scientists. Those studies which did focus on the development of women shied away from working-class women. Therefore, a need was presented to focus a study on working-class women in mid-life in terms of their own experience. The major research questions were as follows: (1) What are the life adjustments that women in their 40s experience? (2) What are the developmental tasks for working-class women in their mid-lives? (3) How do the concepts of the Dream, Mentor and Special Person of Levinson apply to working-class women in mid-life? (4) How do the above questions relate to the continuing education of middle-aged, working-class women who have returned to school?

The sample for this study consisted of 15 women who were enrolled at a technical college in central Ohio. The women were between the ages of 40 to 50 and considered themselves to be of the working-class. They were randomly selected from a printout of 128 Social Security numbers
of women who were white, between the ages of 40-50 and enrolled at a technical college.

The data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 women. Each interview was tape-recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed according to the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis proposed by Glaser and Strauss. Through contrast and comparison, there emerged similarities, differences and relationships. One limitation to this method was that the researcher relied on data which may or may not have been biased in favor of the subjects. Despite this limitation, the interview method can contribute to theory and practice when the data is used not only to describe but also to explain (Darkenwald, 1980).

The Findings

The findings presented below resulted from a careful analysis of the data received through 15 in-depth interviews with middle-aged working-class women enrolled in a two-year technical college. The researcher believed the conclusions were justified on the basis that all information was given voluntarily and willingly by the subjects. The subjects received no benefits for revealing what, in many cases, was private and personal.

Levinson (1978) wrote that men experience a transition in mid-life, a time when they come to terms with their past and prepare for the future. He placed this
transition sometime between the ages of 38 and 43. Levinson doubted that there could be any mid-life transition after age 43. However, with women this transition appeared to be related less to age than to life circumstances. Women in mid-life have children who are becoming independent and, therefore, place fewer demands on their mothers. Having more time for themselves, women can prepare for the future. Often preparation includes returning to school to learn a job skill.

Other women find themselves in the situation of an unhappy marriage. If women have been married for 20 years or more, and have remained in that marriage for financial security, they may find by age 40 or 45 that with job training it would be possible for them to be self-supporting. Some of the subjects openly admitted that they intended to leave their husbands after they received some job training and could be employable.

Another life circumstance that forced some of the women who worked to make changes, was their lack of progress on the job scene. Despite the fact that they may have worked on a job for 15 or 20 years, it was the people with the most education who were getting the promotions. The possibility of obtaining a better job or of receiving a promotion was the motivation for some women to make some positive changes in their lives and return to school.
So it appears that the changes of mid-life are not as age-linked with women as they are with men. For women, the catalysts for transition appear to be linked to life's situations rather than to the women's age.

Levinson also found that men in mid-life were concerned about the legacy they would leave to their children or even younger employees. The findings in this study did not indicate the same case for women. They had little material possessions to hand down to children. Their legacy was a lifetime of nurturing and care that had already been given.

On the contrary, the findings indicated the women did not mention death or endings at all. They spoke hopefully of the new directions their lives were taking them. They were concerned with beginnings.

Few of the subjects had any Dream in their youth in the sense that Levinson's men did. The women followed the traditional expectations of the times which were to get married, bear children, be a help-mate to a husband and be financially supported by him. A Dream came in mid-life when the women realized they had many years ahead of them and there were still possibilities of fulfilling a Dream.

The findings of the study also indicated that the concept of a Mentor in the manner visualized by Levinson, was practically non-existent for women. A mentor is frequently related to a career. The working-class women
in this study held jobs for the financial support they would provide for their families, and not for the expectation of career building. It is not possible to build a career when women leave the work force for years at a time to care for families.

While men in the study by Levinson indicated that they had few personal friends of either sex, the data of this study indicated that women experienced many types of friendships. Many had close, personal friendships with men and these friendships were platonic. Some women had male friends who were younger than they; others had friends who were much older. Friendships were important, and the women had the abilities to sustain them.

Thus, the data suggest that the development of women during mid-life is not identical to what Levinson described for men. There were some similarities in the coming to terms with the past, but for men this took the form of analyzing what they failed to accomplish. For women this was the motivation to accomplish something in the future.

The findings also suggest that the women had strong religious values which were part of their own upbringing. Their religious beliefs were not centered so much in church attendance as in the faith of divine guidance throughout their lives. It was this belief in Providence which enabled the women to accept the tragedies of their
lives. They believed that everything happened for a purpose, both good and bad, and it was their responsibility to make the best out of it.

If the women had strong political beliefs it was because they came from homes where politics were discussed and argued. Their fathers seemed to be the chief political influence. Those women who came from families where the mother and father were divorced, or where the father had little interest in politics, showed little interest in the topic.

The data also suggest that women in mid-life are still concerned with their weight. This was of interest to the researcher for not one woman whom she interviewed appeared to be unusually heavy. Many looked quite trim and yet considered themselves over-weight.

Another theme that can be found in the data is the desire for women to be financially independent. They did not want to rely wholly on their husbands' support. Those women who were working outside the home admitted that earning their own money gave them a sense of independence and they never wanted to return to the condition of having money doled out to them.

One additional finding that must be noted is the cooperation and enthusiasm of each woman who was interviewed. The women agreed to be interviewed even though they had long days in class as well as work. They were
conscientious in keeping the appointments. Many times they spoke of extremely personal matters and admitted they hadn't told such things to their closest friends. Knowing that in all likelihood they would never see the interviewer again may have ignited such spontaneity. However, it does not completely explain the openness of women when speaking of their own development.

Listed below are the summarized findings of this research which have emerged.

1. For women in mid-life changes were related to life's circumstances. Transitions did not appear to be as age-linked with women as they are with men.

2. Leaving a material legacy to their children was not a prime concern for women. Women were more concerned with their own opportunities than their demise.

3. There was little evidence of a youthful Dream for most women. The expectation of a Dream and its fulfillment came in mid-life.

4. The concept of a Mentor as visualized by men was practically non-existent for women.

5. The women had close personal friendships with other men and women. This bond of friendship could be between persons of various ages.

6. Strong religious values were part of the women's upbringing. Being religious was not equated with church attendance.
7. Women with strong political beliefs came from families where politics were discussed and argued. Fathers appeared to be the chief political influence.

8. The women in mid-life were concerned about their weight. Thinness was related to physical attractiveness.

9. The menopause did not appear to be a great problem with middle-aged, working-class women. In this respect they seemed to differ from their own mothers.

10. Financial independence was a high priority among the women. For this reason, they were seeking job training which would eventually lead to a well-paying job.

11. The women demonstrated a willingness to speak of their own lives. As a matter of fact, they appeared to be grateful that someone was interested in their development.

12. The fact that they did not continue their education after high school was regretted by the women. They chose to marry instead, and frequently these early marriages led to divorce.

Implications for Adult Education

The findings of this study proffer suggestions for the field of Adult Education. Research such as this, and all others concerning adult education, will enable programs to change and develop along with their diversified clientele. The suggestions are as follows:
1. When women who have been out of the classroom situation for a number of years return to school, they frequently choose a two-year community or technical college. Because of the smaller campus, such institutions offer a less threatening atmosphere than the larger four-year college or university. It would benefit such two-year institutions to have well-developed adult education programs, both credit and non-credit.

2. Many older women are worried and anxious about becoming a student after a number of years. Their first contact with the school is of great importance. Admission officers and faculty both on and off the main campus need training to recognize the symptoms of anxiety and develop methods of alleviating tension.

3. Older students come from a variety of backgrounds and may have a wider range of experience than their younger instructors. This experience should be recognized and older students should be given opportunities to share their experiences.

4. Faculty need to be aware of the basic principles of adult education. Adult learners bring to the classroom their past experiences, present uncertainties and future goals to which instructors should be sensitive. As two-year institutions employ many part-time faculty, both full and
part-time instructors should be included in such training.

5. Two-year institutions should actively recruit the older students. The recruitment officer would need to be a person of maturity and experience.

6. Many older students could benefit from physical fitness programs. Opportunities to participate in such programs should be available for both day and evening students.

7. A recent divorce or separation may impel women to return to school to obtain job training. Support groups of women in like circumstances would enable women to help each other.

8. Most student activities at two-year colleges are directed toward the traditionally-aged students. Yet, there is an increasing number of older students enrolled at such institutions who would benefit from social activities aimed at their interests. Numerous activities could be initiated with the older student in mind.

9. Student cafeterias frequently have loud music playing which can be uncomfortable for persons interested in conversation. A place could be provided where older students could socialize and still hear one another.
10. Older students should be represented on student councils. However, as some students may be reticent to seek a position of leadership, faculty and staff can actively encourage older students to become involved in group leadership. In this way, the needs of non-traditional students can be expressed.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This study has identified certain life patterns of the middle-aged, working-class woman in order to foster the development of adult education. There are other aspects of this subject which could be beneficial for both the field of adult education and the two-year institutions if these subjects were investigated.

For example, a study could be undertaken to determine what happened to women in mid-life after they graduated from a two-year college. How many did actually complete a technical program? What were their job possibilities? Could they obtain jobs? Were they discriminated against because of their age? If they obtained a job, did that success hurt or harm their marriage?

This study touched upon but did not go into great detail about the actual causes of women returning to school. Why did they return for further education? For how long had they been thinking about returning? Why did they not return sooner? Did any one person encourage them?
Getting a clearer picture of why older people return to school will aid all those who work with older students.

One of the findings of the study indicated that middle-age women were overly concerned with their weight. What causes this preoccupation with weight? Is their current weight a drastic change from when they were younger? Do they understand the natural body changes that come with age? Are they actively involved in a weight reduction program? What differences will it make in their personality if they are thinner?

This study concerned itself with middle-aged working-class women, but it could be duplicated using men as subjects. If so, would one expect to find differences or similarities? What would be the impetus for working-class men to change job directions in middle-age? What would be the effects on their families?

This research obtained a few insights into the lives of working-class women in mid-life, but society and the people who comprise it are constantly changing. The women in this study were all born between the middle 1930s and the middle 1940s. Those born in the decade following may have different life circumstances. Will their life patterns be different?
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Appendix A

Letter Sent to Vice-President of Academic Affairs

Adult Education Studies
Room 160
Ramseyer Hall
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Dr. Harold Brown
Vice-President of Academic Affairs
Columbus Technical Institute

June 13, 1983

Dear Dr. Brown:

Presently, I am a part-time faculty member here at Columbus Technical Institute as well as a doctoral candidate at the Ohio State University. I plan to undertake a study to investigate the life patterns of women who have returned to school or are exploring the possibility of returning to school. The experiences of such women have direct implications for adult education.

The subjects of this study will be fifteen, middle-aged, working-class women. Data will be collected through personal interviews which will last approximately two hours each. Written consent to use quotes from her interview will be obtained from each woman involved in the research. All such quotes will be treated anonymously.

I request your permission to contact students/subjects here on campus and to seek referrals from the Office of Admissions for possible subjects in order to conduct this research.

Sincerely,

Mary Anne Oestreich
Instructor
Appendix B

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

Subject Number ____________________________
Pseudonym ________________________________
Age _________________
Area of Residence _______________________________________
Marital Status: Married____ Single____ Divorced______ Widow_____ 
Number of Children ____________________________
Ages of Children _______________________________________
Education: High school dropout ________________ 
GED _________________________________
High school graduate__________________________
Number of quarters at a Technical School _______________
Employment:
Are you employed? Yes____ No____
Number of hours per week __________________________ 
Job description ____________________________________
Appendix C

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in this research.
Mary Anne Oestreich has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me. The information obtained from me will remain confidential unless I specifically agree otherwise by placing my initials here ________.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________________ Signed: ________________