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## Midlife career change and women: A phenomenological examination of the process of change

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MIDLIFE CAREER CHANGE AND WOMEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
EXAMINATION OF THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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**Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology**  
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**August 2009**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Midlife Career Change and Women: A Phenomenological Examination of the Process of Change**

by

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Professor of Educational Psychology

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how fourteen women between the ages of thirty-five and fifty years old experienced the essence of making a midlife career change. Of further interest were the unique dimensions of each participant in their experience of this internal process of change. This study was an exploratory and inductive search for common themes and differences that these women shared throughout their experience of making a midlife career change.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and thematic analysis was made by the construction of profile narratives for each participant. Five emerging themes were extracted from the data in accordance with the initial research questions posed within this dissertation.

Results indicate that the overarching theme of timing was consistent amongst all 14 participants of the study. The four sub-themes which include: quality of life, role model

for children and nieces, confidence/empowerment, and self-efficacy were other reasons why women had made a midlife career change. The emerging themes and the results that were concluded from the data enabled the reaching of some conclusions as to why women make midlife career changes and the implications for future research.

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Where does the journey begin and where does it end? For me, I have reached my goal of obtaining a Ph.D. and making a midlife career change. Is that it? Do I stop here? Is my journey one that will continue as I continue to grow as a woman and as a person? I have many people to thank for this journey and my experience with my own midlife career change. For one, I could not have done it without the support and guidance I received from my dissertation committee. My deepest gratitude goes out to Dr. Paul Jones for all your support and guidance throughout this process. I could not have done it without you. Dr. Leann Putney for showing me that I could become an independent researcher and that I knew my topic as well as I knew myself.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Prologue

The glamorous life of a flight attendant was something that I had always envisioned myself doing after I received my education and graduated from college at the University of California at Irvine. I was twenty-one years old, and I had the world at my fingertips. Who needed to think about the future and what it entailed, I had my degree and now it was time to travel around the world. Being a flight attendant would allow me to have lunch in Paris, celebrate carnival in Rio, and fly around the world on a whim without ever looking back. How could I succumb to an office job and work from 9-5 pm, blankly staring at a computer screen?

I was off to flight attendant training with a mission to travel around the world before I was thirty years old. Fast forward to twenty years later and my dream of seeing the world has become a reality except that the job is not as glamorous as I remember it being when I first started flying in 1988. What I thought was the high life turned out to be about airlines' on the verge of bankruptcies, flight attendants clinging for their jobs, and the flying public wanting more and more for less and less. I had to make a career move to a future that offered me more security and stability. It was time to get out of the airline industry and embark on a new life.

I decided to go back to school in 2004 and pursue my Ph.D. in Educational Psychology (Counselor Education). For the first two years, I struggled with trying to let go of a former life that I no longer identified with as I entered my middle years of life with a new sense of self. I wanted something more for myself and going back to school

was the answer that I had longed for as I made my journey to a new destination. I finally said goodbye to my life as a flight attendant after eighteen years of flying in October of 2006. There would be no more walks down the aisles asking passengers if they would care for chicken or beef. I felt like one of the lucky ones because I was finally getting out at the young age of 38. I was starting over with a new life, one that I had envisioned since I turned thirty-five years old.

What is it about the age of thirty-five that makes some women in particular want to make a midlife career change or begin to question where they are during this stage of life? Is it a psychological, sociological, or a developmental process? For me, it was an internal motivation and a belief that I could become something more and leave behind a life that no longer made me happy. I wondered if other women felt the same way and were on their own quest to find happiness, growth and lastly, using this opportunity of a midlife career change as a period of transformation. From my own experience of making a career change, I often thought about how women make a successful transition from one career to a totally unrelated one while remaining psychologically healthy and intact. I wanted to focus my dissertation on what the internal processes and experiences were along with the motivational factors for women during this period of transformation and change.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the lives of fourteen women who have made or are making a midlife career change and what this process of change actually encompassed. Using a phenomenological approach, I examined the essence and

experience of midlife career change and women through an exploratory and inductive search for common themes in their experiences of making this change.

### Statement of the Problem

Midlife is a construct that in recent years has been defined in a variety of ways. Throughout the literature that defines midlife, varying interpretations of what this developmental stage actually encompasses are still being debated. According to Levinson (1996), middle adulthood or midlife is defined as “the period of life from ages 40-65” (p. 20). Midlife is not a new phenomenon but one that has had a resurgence of interest in during the past twenty years. This resurgence can be attributed to the increase of life expectancy rates, which has resulted in adults prolonging their work lives and/or making career changes. However, these impending career changes and transitions for adults are often met with a host of psychological, emotional, cultural, and physical changes that can occur during this process.

According to Brown (1985), “despite the influx of individuals in their mid-thirties and above searching for new occupations, there are few definitive hypotheses about the causes of midlife career change and even fewer models about the most effective means of providing assistance for midlife career change” (p. 370).

To date, the varying definitions of midlife have not always been concrete, and the term is one of the most misunderstood constructs in life span development (Lachman, 2001). The differences in the definition of midlife impact the way that it is examined. For one, the definition of midlife can be described as the chronological age of a person who usually falls somewhere between the ages of 35-60 years old.

Midlife has also been defined as generational for example, the group of individuals who comprise the baby boom generation. The adults who comprise this population were born between the years of 1946-1964. Baby boomers are the largest population of individuals who are currently in the midlife phase of development within the United States. A plethora of research in the literature has focused solely on this age group including the processes of change that these individuals encounter during middle age.

#### Four Prevalent Theories

The research literature to date encompasses several theories on why women at the age of 35-50 make midlife career changes. Four of the prominent theories focus on the development of women through the life cycle, transitional periods, career self-efficacy, and psychological factors, which are inclusive to the decision of making a career change. Development is defined throughout the literature as the life course of an individual from beginning to end. (Levinson 1978/1996, Erikson 1982).

Levinson (1996) defines development as the “evolution of an individual life from beginning to end. Evolution indicates a sequence and flow while life includes the engagement of a person in the world in regards to all aspects of living” (p.3). Many developmental theorists have focused the majority of their research on the study of childhood and a child’s development as it progresses to the stage of adulthood. Adulthood particularly the stage of midlife has not been researched as extensively.

Several developmental researchers have begun to focus their research on midlife and have noted that it is a period of reflection and resurgence for many. These theorists believe that a person begins to question and reevaluate their life choices once they embark upon this stage of life.

Developmental theorists like Levinson (1978/1996), Gilligan (1982), and Borysenko (1996), profess that midlife is an age within the life cycle that one begins to question, who am I? Where am I going? And what is the purpose and meaning of my life thus far? These questions are often times instigated by a crisis or transition that allows one to reevaluate life to determine where one has been and where one is going. Daniel Levinson terms this period of life as the midlife transition (Levinson 1978/1996).

Erikson (1982) defines middle adulthood as the ages between 40-65 years of age. The stage or crisis that an individual works through during this time frame is called generativity vs. stagnation. During this stage, adults are particularly concerned with procreating along with being responsible for the future generations of young adults. Thus, their primary role is to provide leadership and mentoring to these individuals. Moreover, it is also a time for being productive and creative. However, individuals who cannot assume these responsibilities will become stagnant and self-centered resulting in self-absorption. Many women have based their decisions on making a midlife career change with these concepts in mind (Levinson, 1996).

Midlife can also be defined as a period of reflection and growth for many who look to the future for the fulfillment of desires and goals of the past. This period of growth is often associated with a major life crisis or transition. (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Transition Theory was developed as an adult development model for individuals who were at a cross road in their lives resulting in their making life altering transitions. Researchers Nancy Schlossberg, Elinor Waters, and Jane Goodman (1981) recognized in their theory that “adulthood was a period of change and development” (p. 2). This in turn

has caused a resurgence of interest in adulthood by researchers, theorists, and most notably counselors and those in the helping professions.

Hypotheses that psychic growth does in fact extend beyond adolescence invoke researchers to look beyond the adolescent period of life. Transitions and continuous change are a part of the adulthood period thus, people will experience these changes, which can result in establishing new behaviors, new social networks, and new ways of viewing the self. (Schlossberg, et al., 1981).

Transition is defined according to this theory as the “events or nonevents resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles” (Schlossberg, et al., 1995, p. 27). An individual will define transition according to the type of change occurring at a specified time period. This definition will include the type of transition one is making, the context of the transition, and the impact that this transition will make on an individual’s life.

The third theme that is prevalent within the research literature on women and career change is the concept of career self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy was theorized and introduced into career development literature by Betz and Hackett in 1981. Betz and Hackett apply Albert Bandura’s self-efficacy theory to the career development of women. Bandura states (1977), “self-efficacy expectations refer to a person’s beliefs concerning his or her ability to successfully perform a given task behavior. Because self-efficacy expectations are behaviorally specific rather than general, the concept must have a behavioral referent to be meaningful” (p. 2). The four areas of efficacy that are applied to this research are performance accomplishments (enactive mastery experiences), vicarious



learning (modeling), physiological and affective states (emotional arousal), and verbal persuasion (Betz and Hackett, 2006).

During their twenty-six year collaboration, Betz and Hackett can be credited with bringing self-efficacy to the career development of women. The implementation of self-efficacy has generated a deeper understanding of career development theories along with the execution of career and counseling theories specifically devised for women (Betz and Hackett, 2006).

Psychological factors in relation to career change, transition, and women can be defined as the intrapsychic and psychosocial process that individuals experience throughout the transition of separation/individuation within the life cycle (Josselson, 1987). Initially, one begins to form an identity that is separate from one's parents during adolescence. In women's development, this process of identity formation and relational and attachment experiences with others is the core of what makes women unique (Josselson, 1987).

#### Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the unique and complex nature of the lives of fourteen women who had taken the risk of making a career change during midlife. The journey of these women was explored through semi-structured interviews that examined the differences, commonalities, and the complexity of making a decision throughout this process of change.

Research studies that have looked at women, midlife, and career changes have been based on models that primarily focused on men. In studies throughout different fields,

men have been used as the norm while the differences of women have been observed as a deviation to that norm. According to Gilligan (1982):

Psychological theorists implicitly adopted male life as the norm, they have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth. It all goes back, of course, to Adam and Eve- a story which shows, among other things that if you make a woman out of a man, you are bound to get into trouble (p.6).

Borysenko (1996), states that “women’s differences have been seen as deviations from the norm, rather than as essentially different and worthwhile in their own right, in large part by taking men as the benchmark for human development” (p.8).

In career development research, the impetus for career change has been focused on men concerning topics such as job loss, layoffs, crisis, and the necessity to work for financial reasons. Donald Super did not incorporate the complex and dynamic lives of women in his theory until 1996. Developmental researcher Daniel Levinson wrote his pivotal book “The Seasons of a Man’s Life” in 1978 and did not include women in his theory until 1996 when he wrote the “Seasons of a Woman’s Life”.

The importance of my research study was to explore the gap in the literature of women, their development, midlife changes, and the internal processes that occur when they decide to change careers.

#### Approach to Investigation

In this research study, I examined the lives and journeys of fourteen women who have experienced midlife career change. Individual journeys were described in a narrative form resulting in themes that were common to these participants along with those that are different. A phenomenological approach was incorporated within this research study through the interview process about the experience resulting in a profile narrative of each participant.

In the research literature to date, the internal processes of what actually transpires when a woman decides to make a career change during midlife have not been examined extensively. Varying hypotheses and theories have been drawn from why women enter certain careers, why they go back to work, and how they can get vocationally trained when they are in transition. However, the internal processes and experiences that women go through which I have defined as the process of change has been researched less than areas such as gender, occupational choices, career change, and the empty-nest syndrome. Motulsky (2005) states, “ Prominent frameworks on career change establish the importance of development, especially at midlife, in an individual’s career decisions, yet most do not explain women’s experiences of career change as a developmental process. Less research has been conducted on the process of career transition itself or on the lived experiences of the individuals participating in this process” (p 8-9).

The aim of this research study was to explore the phenomenon of midlife career change of women.

#### Research Questions

1. What has the experience been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?
2. What has the process of change been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?

#### Method

The purpose of this section is to describe the methodology that was used to examine and understand the phenomenon of women and midlife career change.

Phenomenology was chosen in order to examine the lived experience of the fourteen women chosen for this study (van Manen, 1990). According to van Manen, phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience.” Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” A qualitative study approach was taken to provide insight into the experiences of these women who are midlife career changers or are in the process of making this change. These women were chosen for this study because of their experience with the phenomenon of midlife career change and also for the very fact that they have journeyed the road to a new sense of self.

Participants for this study were solicited using a list serve at a large, Southwestern urban university through an e-mail message. Once the first participant was solicited, snowball sampling was used where the first individual would recruit an acquaintance to be a future participant of this study. Fourteen women made up the sample of participants who shared their experiences through semi-structured interviews.

#### Significance of Study

This study has several implications for future research in the field of adult and career development for women. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (Women’s Bureau), women over the age of 16 made up 46% of the labor force in 2006. The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) estimates that 330,353 women make up the population of middle age within the United States. This age group consists of females who are between 35-54 years of age. Until recently, midlife or middle age had been virtually ignored in the literature due to the focus of researchers on developmental theories for children, adolescence, and old age. (Lachman, 2001).

The rapidly changing landscape of the world including the impact of the computer and other communication vehicles, global economics and environmental concerns are impacting a large segment of the population entering midlife to rethink their daily lives, retrain for alternative employment and refocus their investment of personal energy for themselves and their families. Single women and women raising families are drawn in a variety of directions.

The resurgence of interest in midlife is attributed to a host of factors. To date, the research on the internal experiences and the process of actually making a change has not been the focus of many studies that look at midlife. No specific model or theory exists that deals primarily with some of the ramifications that a woman could or could not expect with a midlife career change. Researchers like Super, Ginzberg, and Holland did not even address issues that women would face in their career theories. (Zunker, 1998). Their theories focused primarily on White, Anglo-Saxon males. Since the 1990's, Super included women within his theory of career development to analyze the unique and dynamic transformative processes that women could face (Junker, 1998).

This study may enhance the field in this particular area because it incorporated the internal process of change within women as they transition to a different career at midlife and how their self-efficacious beliefs may play a role in the success or non-success of this transition. Furthermore, the age group chosen for this study may bring forth a re-examination and shift of emphasis in the research literature from women who are primarily from the baby boom generation to this younger group of women. With the changing career environments, women at a younger age are exposed to an expanse array

of options that neither their mothers nor women from the baby boom generation may have had.

Another area of importance that has not been thoroughly examined within the research is the developmental process of women and how this process can change over the course of the life span. The true essence of what it means to be a woman in the contemporary world is lost. Women today have many options available to them throughout society that the decisions regarding careers are just as important as the ones regarding motherhood and being a wife. What about single or nontraditional career women? The decisions that these women make should also be included in the research literature.

The definition of midlife and what this age incorporates has not been clearly identified from the current research. The interpretations of researchers have been very subjective in defining this construct so until a universal theory is hypothesized, midlife can range anywhere from the ages of 35-60. Moreover, a theoretical explanation of what actually can happen during midlife career change for women must be formulated. Areas to look at are cultural, social, biological, psychological, and emotional in relation to the process of change. The results will be an addition to the limited body of research, which examines women and midlife, women and careers, and the psychological process of change.

#### Definition of Terms

**Midlife:** Midlife was defined within this study as the age between 35-50 years of age. The parameters set for women who are participants in this study is that they must have

started the “process of change” at the age of 35 or older and have completed this process by the age of 50 resulting in their embarking upon a new career.

**Career Change:** The operational definition of career change is the changing of careers from one field to a totally unrelated one. For example, teacher to lawyer, doctor to accountant.

**Process of Change:** The internal process that motivates one to make a midlife career change in relation to career self-efficacy and risk taking behaviors. The psychological factors that are relevant to the career changing process.

**Career Self-Efficacy:** Based on the model developed by researchers Betz and Hackett as it applies to the career development of women. Betz and Hackett apply Albert Bandura’s self-efficacy theory to career development. Bandura states (1977), “self-efficacy expectations refer to a person’s beliefs concerning his or her ability to successfully perform a given task behavior” (p.2). The four areas of efficacy that are applied to this research are performance accomplishments (enactive mastery experiences), vicarious learning (modeling), physiological and affective states (emotional arousal), and verbal persuasion (Betz and Hackett, 2006).

#### Assumptions of the Study

I began the study with the following assumptions:

1. Women who are in the process of a midlife career change can articulate their experiences and reveal their narrative story about their process of change.
2. All women will be truthful in their narration of their experiences and stories pertaining to midlife career change.

## Summary

In this chapter, I provided the context and background for the current definitions of midlife in the research literature, statement of the problem, purpose of the research study, and the reasons why this study is focused on the experiences of women who are making career changes as opposed to the career changes of men. This chapter provided the context for the definition of key terms to be examined within this dissertation has been provided.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

*Middle-aged is merry, and I love to lead it,  
But there comes a day when your eyes are all right  
But your arm isn't long enough to hold the telephone book  
Where you can read it. (Ogden Nash, 1952, p. 5)*

The purpose of this study was to examine how midlife women experience the phenomenon of changing careers. This study examined four overarching questions:

1. What has the experience been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?
2. What has the process of change been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?

In this chapter, a review of the literature in regards to the construct of midlife and its various definitions was identified. Throughout the research literature to date, the definition of midlife has been interpreted according to the theoretical framework of the researcher. Thus, no definitive definition of what this construct actually encompasses has emerged. Midlife has been defined as the age which is somewhere between childhood and old age (Lachman, 2001). Secondly, four prevalent theories have dominated the literature in regards to women and midlife career change. Theories from researchers in midlife career change include the elements of development, transition, psychological factors, and career self-efficacy

The research studies on development compare and contrast the stages of midlife that differentiates this pivotal time from other stages of development. This differentiation is in regards to early adulthood development. Models of women's development,

psychological development, and the essence of the life cycle were examined.

Developmental theories as they apply to men will also be examined.

Studies on transition theory model will be explored in relation to women and midlife career change. Midlife transitions as a developmental right of passage were examined as well. The period of growth and reflection that correlates to this right of passage were explored in relation to the period of midlife development.

Lastly, studies on psychological factors and career self-efficacy are presented for the reader. Areas such as belief systems, motivation, and the ability to take a risk in changing careers were examined. Psychological factors are presented within the context of the construct of career self- efficacy as the thought processes and belief systems of each midlife woman are differentiated.

#### Introduction: Midlife

Midlife is a construct that in recent years has been defined in a variety of ways. Throughout the literature that defines midlife, are varying interpretations of what this developmental stage actually encompasses. According to the online Webster's English Dictionary, midlife is defined as "the period of life from ages 45-64." Midlife is not a new phenomenon but one that has had a resurgence of interest in during the past twenty years. This resurgence can be attributed to the increase of life expectancy rates, which has resulted in adults prolonging their work lives and/or making career changes. However, these impending career changes and transitions for adults are often met with a host of psychological, emotional, cultural, and physical changes that can occur during this process.

According to Brown (1985), “despite the influx of individuals in their mid-thirties and above searching for new occupations, there are few definitive hypotheses about the causes of midlife career change and even fewer models about the most effective means of providing assistance for midlife career change” (p. 370).

To date, the varying definitions of midlife have not always been concrete, and the term is one of the most misunderstood constructs in life span development. (Erikson 1963/1982, Levinson 1978/1996, Lachman 2001). The differences in the definition of midlife impact the way that it is examined. For one, the definition of midlife can be described as the chronological age of a person who usually falls somewhere between the ages of 35-60 years old. It can also be defined as a period of reflection and growth for many who look to the future for the fulfillment of desires and goals of the past. This period of growth is often associated with a major life crisis or transition. (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

However, a segment of the population, has reached a degree of maturity and reflection regarding their life’s work, which is not instigated by a crisis. The quest to find inner meaning within oneself and finding a career that would bring purpose, joy, and awakening in the second part of life encompasses this group.

Midlife has also been defined as generational for example, the group of individuals who comprise the baby boom generation. The adults who comprise this population were born between the years of 1946-1964. Baby boomers are the largest population of individuals who are currently in the midlife phase of development within the United States.

Another way that midlife has been defined is through the developmental process that an individual will go through during the life span. Erikson (1982) defines middle adulthood as the ages between 40-65 years of age. The stage or crisis that an individual works through during this time frame is called generativity vs. stagnation. During this stage, adults are particularly concerned with procreating along with being responsible for the future generations of young adults. Thus, their primary role is to provide leadership and mentoring to these individuals. Moreover, it is also a time for being productive and creative. However, individuals who cannot assume these responsibilities will become stagnant and self-centered resulting in self-absorption. Many women have based their decisions on making a midlife career change with these concepts in mind. These concepts are the spouse, children, and cultural norms.

#### Summary

Throughout the research literature that defines midlife, there have been no concrete and agreed upon definitions of this period and what it actually encompasses. From some researchers, the definition is based on a chronological age while other researchers have deemed this period as generational. Moreover, the midlife period has been looked at in a developmental context according to the works of Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson. Is midlife an age range, a generation of Baby boomers, or is it a developmental process that each person must go through? In my research study, I gravitated towards the definition that included a younger generation of women who were thirty-five years old and older. Midlife has been defined as anywhere between the ages of 35-60 years old.

The relevance that this had in my study was that I was not focusing on the Baby Boomer generation instead, I looked at women who were from Generation X. This was

relevant to me in that the research literature had not extensively focused on this age group. I also began to think that the definition of midlife would change due to our changing work environments and the fact that women were making changes at a younger age. My definition of midlife is the ages between thirty-five and fifty years old. This will be presented in my dissertation study in the chapters to follow.

### Women and Midlife Career Change

The review of literature in reference to women and midlife career change has been very limited in nature since the 1960's due to the fact that the majority of studies have focused mainly on men. An underlying difference has been noted between the two populations in defining midlife, which can be best described as a crisis for men and a change for women (Deggs-White, 2006). One often hears the adage of men's midlife crisis and women's menopausal crisis throughout the research literature as well as in advertising. Although my research questions address a gap in the literature, several researchers have tried to address the question of women and midlife career change in their dissertations.

Bovee (2002) completed her dissertation titled "Towards a Grounded Theory Regarding Career, Relationship and Adult Development of Women from a Mid-life Perspective." The purpose of Ms. Bovee's study was to generate a theory from the process of deriving categories out of the data she collected and from the subjects who were involved in the research design (Bovee, 2002). The theoretical perspective formulated in this study was based on a grounded theory with a feminist perspective. Her initial study was based on the feminist theoretical model of Helson, Pals, and Solomon (1997). This model is a functionalist perspective that is based on the differences between

men and women as biological or sociological in origin. Three theoretical constructs of Helson et al. (1997) will be described in order to define this dissertation.

First, a group of relational theories is used where relationships throughout life determine development (Bovee, 2002). For women, these relationships are survival, sense of self, and need to care for the self. Secondly, Helson et al. look at a group of conflict theories that determine the differences in power within our society that is based on gender. The last construct that is used is a theoretical category based on a group of normative theories, which look at how social norms affect one's development.

The age group that Ms. Bovee used within her study was women who are from the baby boom generation and are between the ages of 45-54 years old. The findings of this study were that women make a career change based on several factors. These factors are: "unhappiness in life which can include life circumstances, institutional blocks to pursuit of a career, lack of income, changes in the job market, relational or career crises, and growing dissatisfaction with aspects of one's work" (Bovee, 2002, p.169).

Rogers (1990) submitted a paper at the Thirteenth annual Ohio Student Conference on Aging called "Self-Concept, Existential Reality and Radical Voluntary Mid-Life Career Change: A Theoretical Model." The focus of the model was to look at individuals who were at mid-life as defined by being around the age of 35 or beyond (Rogers, 1990). The main emphasis was to look at different individuals who made a career change voluntarily as opposed to those that made a change based on environmental factors. These factors consisted of "financial necessity and for those individuals whom work represents a salient life role" (Rogers, 1990, p.4). Both men and women comprised the sample used within Rogers's methods section.

The researcher was interested in looking at one's self-concept based on existential theory and principles. "The existential theory of radical mid-life career change is a theory focusing on work salient individuals around the age of 35 and beyond who have previously established a career path and who are in a position to alter that path due to minimal environmental constraints" (Rogers, 1999, p. 10). The theory postulated integrates the work of Super's (1963) Career Development Self-Concept Theory with existential reality where the researcher is looking at the congruence or incongruence of one's self-concept in career change. In conclusion, the researcher hypothesized that the theory was difficult to test due to the absence of an assessment measure which had not been developed to test these constructs.

McQuaid (1987) submitted her dissertation, which was called "A Grounded Theory of Mid-life Career Change." The purpose of the study was to examine mid-life career change from a phenomenological perspective in order to get the essence of mid-life career change by allowing theory to emerge from the actual words of a limited sample of mid-life career changers" (McQuaid, 1987, p.3). The researcher interviewed 20 subjects between the ages of 36 to 54. The twenty subjects consisted of 15 men and 5 women. "Thirteen were purely voluntary career changers; 4 were somewhat involuntary in that they lost their jobs but then chose not to re-enter their original fields; and 3 were purely involuntary, that is they were fired, laid off or forced to quit" (McQuaid, 1987, p. 54). McQuaid's research was based on the theoretical model of Glaser and Strauss, which is based on intensive interviews, or observations of a limited number of subjects of the target population, the number being determined by the theoretical saturation of the topic under investigation. (McQuaid, 1987).

In the article, “Older Women and Their Career Decisions and Compromise” Gerlicher (2002) investigated the decision-making process of a group of women who are in the transitional stages of making a mid-life career change. This study provides an analysis of the experiences of a small group of women who have entered a program sponsored by a community college to “re-examine their skills, learn some new skills, look at occupations, and make a decision about possible new employment” (Gerlicher, 2002, p.1). Gerlicher applied Gottfredson’s career theory to her sample of women to look at how the role of socialization plays a part in the way girls and women choose careers (Gerlicher, 2002). The sample of women used in this study provided a focus on being stay-at-home-mothers who wanted to make a midlife career change into a paid occupation.

Gerlicher hypothesized in the article that the more a woman identifies with the career choices of her mother, the more likely she will be to follow in this career path as well (Gerlicher, 2002). Besides looking at the socialization of women, Gerlicher provides Gottfredson’s definition of one’s self-concept as another determinant in making a career change in mid-life. According to Gottfredson (1985), self-concept can be defined as “all aspects of a person including her view of her abilities, interests, personality, and her place in society” (Gerlicher, 2002, p. 22).

What exactly can this study tell us about midlife career change? The impetus for change in women who are switching careers is a multifaceted area. Gender, socialization, past career history, and mothers as role models are all factors that influence one’s quest to find one’s passion through work. The most important factor that this study reveals is how a woman’s self-concept will affect decisions regarding career, family, and her desire for



change across the life span (Gerlicher, 2002). This study provides an analysis of behavioral traits as well as social influences that determine this decision-making process.

Lastly, in a study relating to midlife career change and women, Phillips and Imoff (1997) look at the vocational experiences of women over the past decade. Five areas are examined in the article, which include: self-concept development, readiness to choose, the choice made, entering the workforce, and experiences at work. Self-concept is defined in this article as “the development of an individual identity, development of educational and occupational aspirations, and ideas about what women can do” (Phillips and Imoff, 1997, p.31). Although many different areas were examined within the article, it was found that when women begin formulating their self-concepts, start to make decisions and plans, and choose to make life-altering changes, they do so in a social and relational context.

The review of the literature in relation to women and midlife career change provides the reader with a variety of theories, constructs, and ideologies for delving into this unique phenomenon. Life span development, career theory, as well as self-concept construction were some of the key elements that were examined within this framework.

### Critique

What can these studies tell us about the midlife period and women? For one, each study presented did provide insight on some of the reasons why women make changes in their work history as well as some of the constructs that make them do so. For example, self-concept and identity were some areas that these researchers looked at throughout these studies. Furthermore, each study used the theoretical constructs of other theorists in

order to posit some of the reasons for midlife career changes. However, the area that is not definitive is the definition of midlife and the age range that it actually encompasses.

In each study, there is a midlife age range anywhere from 35- 54 years old and women have been grouped together according to the same construct, theory, or ideology. There does not seem to be variation in the way that each woman would go about making a career change due to the fact that the researchers used theorists that had already established research in the particular area of study. However, the research generated by these studies have minimized the gap in the literature even further with the constructs, frameworks, theories, and ideologies that were brought forth by each of them.

### Adult Development

Developmental theories and models have focused primarily on childhood development as opposed to adulthood. Childhood development is the period of time when an infant goes through the life cycle and progresses from being a child to an adult. (Levinson, 1996). This life cycle has often been divided into three parts throughout the research literature. Levinson (1996) states, “The life course is divided into three parts:

- 1). An initial segment of about twenty years is usually identified as childhood, or childhood and adolescence, or the formative years prior to adulthood.
- 2). A final segment starting at around 65 is known as old age.
- 3). Between these segments lies an amorphous time vaguely known as adulthood” (p. 14).

Until recently, the research literature ignored the period of development defined as midlife or middle age resulting in adulthood being presented as one stage of the life course. However, Erik Erikson changed this ideology in 1950 when he wrote his pivotal book called, “Childhood and Society”. He is known as the most influential developmental theorist of our time (Levinson, 1996).

Erikson's model was a starting point to look at adult development however; the research literature has often ignored adult development in relation to childhood development. According to Levinson (1996), "most textbooks on human development devote 60 percent or more of their pages to childhood, 20 percent or less to adulthood, and about 20 percent to old age" (p. 17). Levinson and Erikson look at adult development through a life stage theory model, which posits that an individual accomplishes certain tasks at a certain age. In their theories, the male norm was used and applied to females in relation to each particular life stage period.

### Women's Midlife Development

The development of women within the life course is an area that has been relatively unexplored within the context of male development (Levinson, 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Borysenko 1996). According to Gilligan (1982), "psychological theorists implicitly adopted male life as the norm, they have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth. It all goes back, of course, to Adam and Eve- a story which shows, among other things that if you make a woman out of a man, you are bound to get into trouble" (p.6). Borysenko (1996), states that "women's differences have been seen as deviations from the norm, rather than as essentially different and worthwhile in their own right, in large part by taking men as the benchmark for human development" (p.8).

In career development research, the impetus for career change has been focused on men concerning topics such as job loss, layoffs, crisis, and the necessity to work for financial reasons. Donald Super did not incorporate the complex and dynamic lives of women in his theory until 1996. Developmental researcher Daniel Levinson wrote his

pivotal book “The Seasons of a Man’s Life” in 1978 and did not include women in his theory until 1996 when he wrote the “Seasons of a Woman’s Life”.

Distinct differences are evidenced between men and women during the developmental periods of middle age or midlife. According to Neugarten (1968), “women define their age status in terms of timing of events within the family cycle” (p. 95). These events are the raising of children into grown adults and for single career women, the period of middle age is often seen in terms of a family they may have had. Men on the other hand, look within the work setting for differences during middle age than within their families.

The proverbial difference between the sexes is that midlife for men is seen in a biological light while for women it is a time for freedom and change (Neugarten, 1968). Neugarten (1968) states, “men display an increased attention upon health, the decrease in the efficiency of the body; and the death of friends of the same age. “Women sense increased freedom in middle age. Not only is there increased time and energy now available for the self, but also a satisfying change in self-concept. Middle age marks the beginning of a period in which latent talents and capacities can be put to use in new directions” (p. 96). This period of reflection can also be a transitional period for midlife women to pursue career dreams and goals.

### Transition Theory

Transition Theory was developed as an adult development model for individuals who were at a cross road in their lives resulting in their making life altering transitions. Nancy Schlossberg, Elinor Waters, and Jane Goodman (1981) examined in their theory that “adulthood was a period of change and development” (p. 2). This in turn has caused a

resurgence of interest in adulthood by researchers, theorists, and most notably counselors and those in the helping professions.

Hypotheses that psychic growth does in fact extend beyond adolescence invoke researchers to look beyond the adolescent period of life. Transitions and continuous change are a part of the adulthood period thus; people will experience these changes, which can result in establishing new behaviors, new social networks, and new ways of viewing the self. (Schlossberg, et al., 1981).

Transition is defined according to this theory as the “events or nonevents” resulting in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles” (Schlossberg, et al., 1995, p. 27). An individual will define transition according to the type of change occurring at a specified time period. This definition will include the type of transition one is making, the context of the transition, and the impact that this transition will make on an individual’s life.

The Transition Model is comprised of three main parts:

1. Approaching Transitions: Identifying transitions
2. Coping Resources: The 4S system
3. Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources

Transitions can be identified by the type of change that a person experiences during a specified time during the lifecycle. Anticipated transitions are those that are common within the lifespan cycle. For example, interviewing for your first job, getting married, and having a baby are just some of the few. Unanticipated transitions are those events that are not planned or scheduled. A person getting fired, experiencing a divorce, or the death of a spouse are a few examples. Lastly, non-event transitions are those that actually

never happened. A woman never getting married or having a child is a transition that was probably anticipated but in actuality, never transpired.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identified four factors within the transition process that are inclusive to this theory. The 4 S system can be broken down into the situation, self, support, and strategies. The situation refers to the culmination of factors that comprise the transition event. This includes: “the triggers, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, concurrent stress, and assessment of the transition process” (Schlossberg, et al., 1995, p.115).

The self refers to what an individual brings to the situation and the transition at hand. In therapy, the client’s personal demographics are examined, their outlook in reference to psychological functioning, and their self-efficacy beliefs. Support refers to the network of resources (family, friends, and church) that a client has in conjunction with making a transition and adjusting to the change. Strategies are the coping mechanisms that people will use in order to avoid being harmed by the change in their lives. Schlossberg et al., (1995) define coping as the “overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations” (p. 70).

Transitions according to this theory are examined as a process over time. A person may take six months to two years to move fully through a major transition. Brammer (1991) provides a transition framework that the researchers of this theory identified as applicable to the process of change. He looked at changes as either being ordinary or extraordinary that will occur throughout a person’s life. Brammer identifies a transition as a journey to something unknown, which entails courage and the fear. His model looks at the different adaptation levels that concur with transitions: “adaptation, when one

adjusts to change; renewal, when one sets goals; transformation, when one experiences rebirth; and transcendence when one reaches the ultimate level of meaning-making (as cited in Schlossberg, et al., 1995, p. 42).

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) incorporate three premises into their theoretical framework. The first is that adults will experience transitions throughout their lives. Secondly, transitions can be broken down into types, contexts, and the impact that it has on a person's life. Lastly, transitions are not time structured; the process of change includes how an individual "moves in, moves through, and moves out of the experience" (p. 46).

#### Self-Efficacy and Career Self-Efficacy

Career self-efficacy was theorized and introduced into career development literature by Betz and Hackett in 1981. Betz and Hackett apply Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory to the career development of women. Bandura stated (1977), "self-efficacy expectations refer to a person's beliefs concerning his or her ability to successfully perform a given task behavior. Because self-efficacy expectations are behaviorally specific rather than general, the concept must have a behavioral referent to be meaningful" (p. 2). The four areas of efficacy that are applied to this research are performance accomplishments (enactive mastery experiences), vicarious learning (modeling), physiological and affective states (emotional arousal), and verbal persuasion (Betz and Hackett, 2006).

During their twenty-six year collaboration, Betz and Hackett can be credited with bringing the construct of self-efficacy to the career development of women. The implementation of self-efficacy has generated a deeper understanding of career

development theories along with the execution of career and counseling theories specifically devised for women. (Betz and Hackett, 2006).

In relation to the introduction of this construct to career development, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) developed a theory that is based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory along with self-efficacy in the career domain. Lent et al. (1994) "expanded the concept of self-efficacy in the context of a conceptual model in which career development is viewed as a process that incorporates a person's cognitive processes, environment, and contextual factors. Of particular interest within this framework is the construct of career self-efficacy and the influence of contextual variables (e.g., perceived barriers, acculturation, role model) on the formation of self-efficacy beliefs and career considerations" (p.48).

Rivera et al. (2007) examined the influence of acculturation, perceived barriers, and role model influence on self-efficacy and the career considerations of Hispanic women. Two hypotheses were projected within this study; the first being that career self-efficacy for female and male dominated careers would be predictive of Hispanic women's choices of these careers. Secondly, perceived barriers and role models would have a tremendous effect on this population.

The study consisted of surveying one hundred and thirty one female students from an urban community college in the eastern United States. These students answered questions regarding career self-efficacy and career choice. The Occupational Self-Efficacy scale developed by Betz and Hackett was used along with The Career Consideration Scale developed by Byars. The results from this study found some support for the social cognitive framework in finding factors that influenced Hispanic women's career choices.



It was also found that career self-efficacy was predictive in determining if a Hispanic female would choose a female or male dominated career.

Whitmarsh et al. (2007) explored another study in support of career self-efficacy and career change between and within careers for women. Thirty six percent of their sample consisted of women who were in midlife and were between the ages of 35-45 years old. The participants in the study demonstrated two patterns of change, which was either a transition from one career to another in a gender-neutral career, or changing of a position to another position within a female-dominated career.

The study used a qualitative explorative approach and the researchers interviewed each participant to find out how self-efficacy influenced career change. The women who had the highest levels of self-awareness and self-efficacy gained the confidence to embark on a new career.

A group intervention approach to increase women's career self-efficacy was examined in a study conducted by Sullivan and Mahalik (2000). The study examined two groups of women that either were in a career group which was designed to increase self-efficacious beliefs about career decision-making and vocational choices. The second group of women consisted of a control group who received no treatment. Two surveys were used and filled out by each woman who participated in the study. The findings suggested that the women who participated in the career group improved on career decision-making self-efficacy and vocational exploration when compared to the control group. These women had maintained these gains during a six-week follow-up conducted by the researchers.

## Summary

With the implementation of this study, the gap in the literature was examined between how women develop through the midlife period and how self- efficacy can be beneficial for women in their decisions to make a midlife career change. The gap in the literature was examined between how women develop through midlife, how self-efficacy is relevant to the career developmental process, how transition theory is relevant to women at midlife and how these constructs can affect the decision a woman makes in changing careers.

The objectives to incorporate in this study are several:

1. Foundational knowledge about women and midlife career change
2. Examination of the gap in the literature in reference to midlife career change for women who are 35-50 years old.
3. Looking at women's development through the midlife period.
4. The importance of self-efficacy in relation to the career developmental process.
5. How these two constructs can affect the decision a woman makes in changing careers.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology that was used to examine and understand the phenomenon midlife career change of women. In this qualitative research study, I examined the lives and journeys of fourteen women who have experienced midlife career change. Individual journeys were described in a narrative form, and the data was examined to construct themes that were common amongst these participants as well as those that were different. A phenomenological approach was taken to explore the essence of a midlife career change for each participant.

Phenomenology is the methodology most suited for this research study in order to provide the experience and insight of midlife career change through the experiences of fourteen women. Patton (cited in Merriam, 1998) states that phenomenology is a type of research that is based on “the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience.” (p.15). The overarching questions that are incorporated within this study are:

1. What has the experience been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?
2. What has the process of change been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?

#### Rationale for the Methodological Approach

In the research literature to date, the internal processes of what actually transpires when a woman decides to make a career change during midlife had not been examined extensively. Varying hypotheses and theories had been drawn from why women enter certain careers, why they go back to work, and how they can get vocationally trained

when they are in transition. However, the internal processes and experiences that women go through, hereto defined as the process of change has been researched less than areas such as gender, occupational choices, career change, and the empty-nest syndrome.

Motulsky (2005) states, “ Prominent frameworks on career change establish the importance of development, especially at midlife, in an individual’s career decisions, yet most do not explain women’s experiences of career change as a developmental process. There is less research on the process of career transition itself or on the lived experiences of the individuals participating in this process” (p 8-9).

Phenomenology was chosen in order to examine the lived experience of these women chosen for this study. (van Manen, 1990). Lived experience can be defined as the beginning and ending point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology in this study was for me to transform the lived experience of the fourteen participants into a textual expression of the essence of midlife career change. I did so by providing this expression of the essence by the lived experiences of my participants. According to van Manen (1990), “phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience.” Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” (p. 9). This qualitative approach will provided insight into the experiences of these fourteen women as well as provide potential answers to the research questions and purposes of this dissertation.

#### Phenomenology Lived Experiences

Examining the essence of lived experience as described by fourteen midlife career changers between the ages of thirty-five and fifty years was the methodology most suited to answer the researcher’s questions incorporated within this dissertation. Understanding

the meaning of making a career change from one profession to a completely different one was at the core of this research study. What were the internal processes that were experienced when these women decided to make a shift during midlife? This overarching question was at the core of being able to understand the lived essence and phenomenon of midlife career change.

The German mathematician Edward Husserl developed the philosophy of phenomenology in 1913 (Creswell, 1998, van Manen, 1990, Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). According to a phenomenological perspective, “to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. The act of researching-questioning-theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world. Phenomenology calls this inseparable connection to the world the principle of “intentionality.” (van Manen, 1990, p.5).

Phenomenology focuses on what a certain experience is like however, it differs from any other science in that “it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). The task of the researcher when conducting phenomenological research is to put aside all biases and assumptions about a particular phenomenon in order to portray the essence or basic structure of an experience. (Merriam, 1998). Husserl described this process as one living in natural everyday life as being “original, pre-reflective, and pre-theoretical in attitude.” (van Manen, 1990).

The concepts and characteristics of phenomenology suited my research study and the overarching questions that I would like to have answered. My role as the researcher was

to suspend all my notions and assumptions that I had about midlife career change due to the fact that I too was making a change. Some of the characteristics of the components of the methodology within a phenomenological study that I identified with include:

1. The study of lived experiences
2. The explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness
3. The study of essences
4. The description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them
5. The human scientific study of phenomena
6. The attentive practice of thoughtfulness
7. Search for what it means to be human
8. A Poetizing activity

(van Manen, 1990, p. 9-12).

The study of lived experiences can be defined as the way in which we experience the world before we reflect or conceptualize its meaning. The explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness is a reflection on the lived experiences that one has lived through. It is a recollection of this process. The study of essences is looking at the nature of a phenomenon; it is the internal meaning of a lived experience. The description of the experiential meanings is to develop meanings as we live them in our everyday life.

The scientific study of phenomena can be best described as the systematic, explicit, and intersubjective steps that a researcher of phenomenology takes in doing research on a phenomenon. Thoughtfulness is best defined as the care that you present to your participants in sharing their lived experience in narrative form. Lastly, the search for what

it means to be human is to fulfill human nature and become the persons that we were meant to be. The poetizing activity that I presented in this dissertation is the presentation of the original experiences of my fourteen participants.

How did I incorporate all of these different stages within my dissertation? For one, all eight elements are included within this dissertation. I constructed the lived experiences of the essence of a midlife career change for all of the women. This entailed the study of their life worlds without any prejudices, judgments, and biases on my part. Their experience was not my experience. I presented each narrative with a reflection on the experience, using thoughtfulness to do so, and presenting the study in a systematic and intersubjective way.

#### Description of the Participants

Primary research participants were recruited from a large, Southwestern urban university. A preliminary e-mail was distributed through a list serve throughout the campus community in search of these research participants. All fourteen participants matched the criteria for the research study; each woman was between the ages of 35-50 years old, they were in the midst of making a midlife career change or had already made one; their career change started by the age of 35 and was completed by 50 years of age. Lastly, their career change must have been from one field of work to an unrelated one.

The research participants encapsulated the diversity found at this large, Southwestern urban university in relation to age and ethnicity. Five of the women had already made a career change, which were Gloria, Ingrid, Jackie, Kuuipo, and Nairobi, while nine of them were in the midst of doing so. These nine women were Alicia, Beverly, Celia, Dominique, Elise, Frances, Harmony, Lesley, and Maile. All nine participants were in

school in the preparation of making their midlife career change while a few were close to graduation. Initially, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each woman for a total of ninety minutes. I conducted a follow-up interview, which was also ninety minutes in length to conduct member checking of the information provided by each participant.

Table 1

*Demographic information on participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Number of Children	Level of Degree
Alicia	35	Caucasian	Divorced	1	Undergraduate
Beverly	42	Caucasian	Married	1	2 <sup>nd</sup> Master's
Celia	47	African-American	Divorced	3	Undergraduate
Dominique	39	Hispanic	Single	0	Undergraduate
Elise	35	Caucasian	Married	0	Master's
Frances	50	Caucasian	Married	3	Undergraduate
Gloria	40	Caucasian	Married	0	Master's *
Harmony	42	Caucasian	Married	0	Undergraduate
Ingrid	44	Caucasian	Married	0	Undergraduate *
Jackie	41	Caucasian	Married	0	Master's *
Kuipo	46	Caucasian	Married	2	Ph.D. *
Lesley	39	Caucasian	Married	2	Master's
Maile	42	Hispanic	Divorced	2	Ph.D.
Nairobi	47	Caucasian	Married	0	Ph.D. *

\* Indicates that these five women currently hold these degrees and have made a midlife career change. For the other 9 women, the mentioned degrees are the ones that they are currently working on.



## Introduction to the Individual Participants

Fourteen women made up the sample of participants who shared their experiences through a semi-structured interview that lasted between two to three hours. This semi-structured interview was based on questions that were elicited throughout the interview with these participants. Moreover, my role as the researcher was to get to the essence of the phenomenon of midlife career change, which entailed more rapport building and getting to know each one of these women.

These participants will remain confidential throughout this study however; each will be described in more detail through their profile narrative in Appendix A. A pseudonym was used for each woman in this dissertation. Their background and who they are as women can be used to describe the rich and narrative essence of this research. Their interviews were recorded using a digital recorder in order to be transcribed.

## Presentation of Results

The journey that each of the fourteen women took will be presented in narrative form through a profile. It is their story and reflection of the essence of the phenomenon of making a midlife career change. According to Seidman (1998), “a profile in the words of the participant is the research product that I think is most consistent with the process of interviewing (p.102).” The process of interviewing is to come to know each participant’s story through his or her own words. (Seidman, 1998). In order for each participant’s story to be shared, the researcher through data analysis constructed a narrative based on the transcript material.

## Data Collection Procedures

This dissertation was a qualitative exploratory/inductive study, which included two in-depth interviews ninety minutes in length. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was implemented for each participant in order for the conversation to be taped and transcribed. The researcher used phenomenological interviewing based on Seidman's three interview series. Interview one consisted of asking the participant to tell me as much as possible about herself with the topic until the present time. I asked each woman to share what her experience was like before she made the decision to make a midlife career change. In essence, this interview consisted of the life history of the participant in that I asked her to describe the events and work history that lead her to make a decision to make a midlife career change.

Interview two, combined with interview one, included the details of the experience, which consisted of the details of the participant's present experience in the area of study. In this interview, I focused on the details of each participant's experience. What was it like to be in school in order to start over with a new career was the prompt that I used in getting them to explain these details. Lastly, the third interview was the reflection on the meaning of the participant's experience. I focused on the future and what each woman had hoped to accomplish in a five-year time span. The prompt that I used here was given what you told me about being a midlife career changer, how do you understand this experience in your life now? This allowed for each participant to really reflect on what this change had actually meant.

In this study, interviews one and two were combined for each participant due to scheduling conflicts and also by the decision that I made based on this fact to conduct

interviews one and two at the same time. I made sure I maintained the structure and integrity of the interviews in accordance to the procedures set forth by the methodology of Seidman. The two interviews were scheduled for a period of ninety minutes each and I met with each woman for the second interview approximately a week to ten days apart from the first.

Initially, an e-mail message was sent to recruit participants for this dissertation using a list serve for the campus community of a large, Southwestern urban university. Eighteen women contacted the researcher within two days of the original e-mail being sent out. Fourteen women were then chosen based on the criteria set forth for this study. The researcher contacted each participant through e-mail messages and telephone conversations to set up the initial interviews. Before the interviews were conducted, each participant signed a designated IRB consent form for their participation in the study. This was done right before the interview commenced.

During the month of March 2009, all fourteen first initial interviews were conducted with each participant at the location of choice made by them. This included coffee shops on campus or those in the surrounding areas of the university. Also, participants met at an undisclosed office on campus as well. The second interviews were concluded by the second week of May 2009. I did not know twelve of the participants however, two of them I had an acquaintance with.

### Data Analysis

A transcriptionist who used F4 software transcribed each initial interview for all fourteen women. After I consulted with my dissertation co-chairs, it was decided that the second interviews were not to be transcribed due to data saturation by the majority of

each participant's response. Interviews one and two were very similar in the responses given by each of the woman. However, a synthesis of what transpired during the second interview has been documented.

### Immersion in the Data

During this phase, I initially read and re-read all fourteen initial interview transcripts which ranged anywhere from 20-35 pages of data material. My task was to mark what was of interest in these transcripts in order to share and display the woman's stories. This was done for a period of two weeks. I analyzed the data by marking individual passages and then grouped these passages into categories. Once the categories were established, I was able to look for thematic connections amongst these categories (Seidman, 1998) I highlighted significant statements made by each participant adding notes, thoughts and memos in the margins. Brackets were also added to the transcript in order to emphasize significant statements being made by each participant. The major themes of each participant were also jotted down in order to compare/contrast the emerging themes that were similar and different for each woman.

In the first phase of analysis, I reduced the data from the twenty-five pages of original transcript material to that of 3-5 pages. This was done in order for me to portray that I was marking passages that I thought were significant within the transcript. This in turn allowed me to analyze, interpret, and make meaning and sense out of what was transcribed and presented. Thus, the profile narrative recommended by Seidman was implemented as either a story or a vignette to express verbatim the midlife career change for each woman (Seidman, 1998).

“The researcher then searches for connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories that might be called themes. In addition, to presenting profiles of individuals, the researcher, as part of her analysis of the material, can then present and comment upon excerpts from interviews thematically organized (Seidman, 1998, p. 107). Searching for themes within the profiles constituted the second phase of analysis.

### Emergent Themes

Once I analyzed and categorized the profile narratives according to the original transcript data, five emerging themes were juxtaposed. These themes were inductive in that they were data driven and pulled from the material. These themes were a result of the similarities that each woman shared in her desire to make a midlife career change. These emerging themes that were constructed were relevant for each research question posed in this dissertation. A description and analysis will be provided in the following chapter.

### Summary

In this chapter, I provided the background information for a qualitative phenomenological research study. Phenomenology was defined as well as an introduction to each of the research participants. The analysis portion of the study was presented as well as the procedures replicated by myself in following the methodology procedures set forth by Irving Seidman.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The goal of this study was to understand the essence of the phenomenon of making a midlife career change for fourteen participants. The overarching questions specifically asked were:

1. What has the experience been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?
2. What has the process of change been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?

The findings of this study will be presented in this chapter in two sections: 1) a profile narrative exemplar will be provided which illustrates the thematic analysis relating to the emergent themes 2) the emergent themes that were elicited from the data in reference to each woman resulting in how these themes are a synthesis of the collective group as a whole.

#### Presentation of Results

The results from each research participant will be presented through a profile narrative of the journey taken by each of the fourteen women (refer to Appendix A). It is their story and reflection of the essence of the phenomenon of making a midlife career change. According to Seidman (1998), “a profile in the words of the participant is the research product that I think is most consistent with the process of interviewing (p.102).” The process of interviewing is to come to know each participant’s story through his or her own words. (Seidman, 1998). In order for each participant’s story to be shared, the researcher through data analysis constructed a narrative based on the original transcript

material. A profile narrative exemplar of Participant B, pseudonym Beverly, will be the model used to illustrate the thematic analysis constructed by the researcher for the emergent themes found within this dissertation. A profile narrative for each participant is provided in Appendix A.

### *Participant Profiles Exemplar*

#### *Beverly - A 42-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

I was born and raised here in Las Vegas and am the sixth of eight children raised by a single mother in a pretty high-risk area of Henderson. I am [currently] 42 years old and [in the process of a midlife career change]. I started coming to this campus in about 3<sup>rd</sup> grade when I was joining the choir to sing here at the Ham Hall. I decided then, I did not know what college was about but I was going to go there. Third grade, what do you know? I was the first girl, in any generation that we know of, to graduate from high school. [I am] the first girl obviously, the first person to go on to get a graduate degree and I've since finished my Master's degree. It has been about ten years now. I can't believe that.

[My Master's degree] is an MBA. Let's go back a little bit, so I came here after high school. I got a scholarship, education scholarship. There was no way my mom was going to be able to afford to pay for college, but I knew I was going to get here somehow so I got scholarships. A music scholarship paid for half of it, and then academic scholarship paid for the rest of it. I was able to get my undergraduate degree in the late eighties.

When I was still going to college here, I had the opportunity that I thought was going to be a summer job out at the Nevada Test Site to do some programming, Cobol Programming. At the end of the summer, they asked me to stay and move to their

Fortran job, so that three-month job turned into a 17-year career. I stayed and I finished my graduate degree here, sorry my undergraduate degree there, and I worked out there at the test site for a longer time until they moved their offices to town. The first several years it was very difficult to go back and get a degree, but then my company divested and laid off about 5000 people in one day and they gave us \$10,000 for our education to go back into school and do something else.

[I worked at this job] for the first seven years [of my career]. I then went and got my MBA with all that money. I went to the University of Phoenix, online and then continued to work out at Yucca Mountain for the next ten years. In that time, I met my husband. He was also a programmer out there. We worked on some project together. We met, did everything in the wrong order. We moved in [together] and then [I] got pregnant and right before delivery, we decided to get married because of the benefit issues and insurance challenges. We have a little boy who is six now. In that time, I guess transitioning into how I've decided to go back and get a different degree and change careers. I really thought that when I started out in this MIS, Management Information Systems during college and I decided that I didn't want to be a starving musician, which was originally my hope to be a musician.

I sang soprano and I realized that wasn't going to be a stable income and I grew up very poor, very poor. I knew what it was like to be hungry and I think that instilled in me fear. A lot of what we do is driven by fear. I think that instilled fear in me that I would not be able to eat. You hear about starving musicians and in that time, in the world there was a lot of downsizing with respect to live music on the strip. I decided to get my business degree instead, and my MIS, Management Information Systems. When I was



going to college, it all seemed like a very progressive career decision because I thought these big companies, would really use an asset like management to really make their decisions. I've since learned that most companies don't know what Management Information Systems is. They do not know how to use it. They're very backward thinking. Most of them are, of course, generations older than me, and don't see the positive aspects. I end up doing grunt, grunt work. I'm a really overpaid secretary in many, many means. I've come to realize that this career, not only is it frustrating because the potential of the career is not where I am right now, and also somewhere along the line, I watched my husband who was a very well-paid software engineer decide that he was following his pocketbook instead of his heart. He had always wanted to be a teacher, so when we got pregnant which was very late in life for us, [he decided to go back to school].

[At the present time], my son is six and my husband is almost 50. He [my husband] said, "You know what, I want to go back to school and get my Ph.D. and teach in a college somewhere, I want to make a difference in children's lives." I've been watching him go back to school and really get the joy out of, he's actually teaching right now and he's teaching remedial math just to get some teaching skills. I've watched that and I've watched my son at the preschool. I went back to work full-time and my husband stopped working five years ago. I put my kid in preschool and I watched the kid, I watched the teachers who had elementary education or how much they loved it or what a difference they made in children's lives. By just being there, I saw them [the teachers] teach them [children] just the fundamentals of making it in this really kind of strange world we live in, and I think all of those things together made me wonder, could I be a good teacher? I

went back one summer and got my [due to my Master's degree], I was able to get a substitute teaching license and for about six months I substituted kindergarten, first, and second grade kind of part-time before I put my child in pre-school full-time and then came back to this thing we'll call my career. I think I realized then that, wow that was just joyous. It was challenging, but joyous. So I really said man, can I make a difference in some kid's lives? Can I go back to school and teach?

[My midlife career change] has actually been a real struggle for me. I think a lot of me is driven by fear, the fear of the unknown, the fear of can I make it, can I do it, can I make a difference, will I like it? I make pretty decent money, I don't make great money with what I am doing, but I have been able to support a family and a guy going on his Ph.D. for five years now so we're not lacking anything we need, and I guess my real fear of can I follow my heart and still make it? I think for me, I'm driven by fear. Also, fear that I'm going to live through my life and not have made a difference in this world. This job that I have, this career that I have, I really originally thought that it would be really good for companies, really good for me and really good for companies to use skills that I have and it has not. It has not. I have not made a difference at all in this society. I don't think I've made any difference in society or business or in so I want to make a difference. I want to, I want to make a difference.

[I think my career change] is because I'm not fulfilled. I'm frustrated. I think I'm still going through that experience of [questioning]. I think that I'm still; I don't think I have confidence, but I don't know. I mean this path was pretty easy, so I've followed the path of least resistance first of all. Confidence? Am I good enough to make a difference in somebody else's life, yes, I think part of that. As a woman, I think that quality of life is

going to make a difference in my son and me. Quality of life in the time that is available for him, this career has required me to be, like many women who work and are mothers, to be at their job long after they should be and to have very limited number of hours to spend with my son. I guess this career path, I think; I hope will give me more time as my son gets older. I've missed many years, so I think if I go into teaching, I mean there are scheduled hours right? So I think maybe for quality of life, maybe I'll have more time with my family if I'm teaching. I'm hoping.

I think for me personally, I can remember kindergarten, I can remember many of my teachers, not only what they fulfilled in me but by their names. I think being able to, not be that person, but to be somebody who helps a child learn how to read, what a difference that is going to make in their lives. Maybe I won't be the one that teaches them to read, but I may be the one who gives them insight that reading is a good thing, so they will go to the next person and they will know how to read. I guess that all goes around with building confidence, having children maybe helping children build confidence that I don't think I got somewhere along the line. I think that education for me as a person has made a difference in my life and so maybe education can make a difference in somebody else's life. I guess again that's making a difference.

[Self-efficacy] I guess I would just have to say plainly yes [it did play a part in my career change]. I think it's a two-sided coin. I'm scared that I can't do this, but yet I know that I've done this first career, like it's gone. I decided that I was going to college, that I decided that I was going to learn computers before other people didn't know what computers were, that I can stand up to my manager and say no, this is what this report means and you asked me the question and I gave you the answer and I'm very clear about

that, so I've been able to establish myself in this career. I have proven to myself that I can do anything, that I'm still on the other side of the coin and I'm scared to death that I can't do this. I think I can. I'm willing to try at this point in my life because I can't do this other thing [current career] anymore but I'm scared to death that I won't make a difference.

The [fear] in this is that I'll get to the end of it and not like it. That it's not really somewhere in my soul, I don't really know what I want to do when I grow up. Confidence, and somewhere in there is confidence but I don't know what confidence is really. I have to do this. Why do I think I can do this, I think it's the other thing. I can't do this other thing [career] anymore. I could continue with this [career] if I had to because I can stick with it but I need to move on. I've applied to graduate school and I will finish someday and I will teach. I don't know when that is, but I will. I can't continue to say this will be what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.

I made this decision [to change careers] when my son was born. I was 36 and I stayed home for a year with him. I was so blessed because I had planned and saved, I worked my rear off. I was one of those people who didn't believe in debt, so I worked without having debt. I saved a bunch of money that year that I found out I was pregnant and my husband decided he was going back to school. He went part-time the first year, he worked part-time and I stayed home the first year. During that time, I decided you can do this for awhile longer, this career that I call my job, but then you need to do something else and you need to make a difference in a child's life or somebody's life even if its not second graders, maybe it will be tenth graders. It has been about 6 years and I knew I was going to have to come back to work when my husband said I can't do this part-time, I

can't go to school part-time and work part-time. I said I would go back to work full-time but I'm not going to do it forever.

I have a real fear that my husband and I, being both teachers, that we're not going to make enough money to support ourselves. I mean we have the potential of making 200k a year, but for the last seven years we have knocked down our income to a fourth of what we were making when we started dating. Even with a Master's degree, Master's plus sixteen or whatever I'm going to make as a teacher, and if he teaches high school math or even if he starts as an assistant professor in some college somewhere, either an R1 research college or community college, I mean its 40k. The reality is we could be struggling, and I was hungry at one point in my life, I don't ever want to be hungry again and I don't want my son to be hungry. The reality is, when I'm hungry we're going to have everything we need, maybe not everything we want. I want to not go back to my childhood and be so fearful that you're going to be hungry because hunger is an amazing manipulator.

[The experience that I had in my first career] was about working really hard and I did work really hard, I put in the hours, I showed my managers and executives the power of what I do, that I would be able to climb this fricken thing they call the corporate ladder. I stopped about ten years ago. I realized the corporate ladder has so few rungs on it for females first of all, and secondly for this little slice of pie I call MIS, there's so few. I guess if you realize the stature of people the actual physical appearances of people, I'm a pretty small person; I'm not going to be selected as a leader. People that are taller than you somehow can't take you seriously right? I think I realized long ago, I'm not going to get anywhere above mid-level, what we call a mid-level manager. No matter how hard I

work and how many hours I put in, no matter how dedicated I am or how many pieces of information that I give my manager so that he can make himself look good, I'm not going to get up above that. I gave that up a long time ago.

My husband has been very supportive throughout [this experience]. He wants me always to tell him first, what do I want. I mean with respect to anything, not just teaching, not what do I want to do with my career. It's what do I want to eat, where do you want to go, because he knows I'm the kind of person, the way I was raised in my family and some pretty hard times growing, that I'm always the person who steps back and lets somebody else say what they want first. He [my husband] wants us to both try and teach our son that "what does he want, not what is easiest, not what is best, not what is going to make the most money, not what other people think he should do, what do we want as people because if we don't follow our heart and use those God-given gifts to follow the path that we should be on then, we are not fulfilling our lives."

I am very excited about [my midlife career change]. Fearful, again, but I'm very excited that I'm putting that foot forward. I'm not going to let fear completely drive me to stay where I am because I could. I'm one of those people who could do this until the day I die [my career], but I'm not going to. I'm going to choose a different path, and that feels liberating. It's like wow, I decided

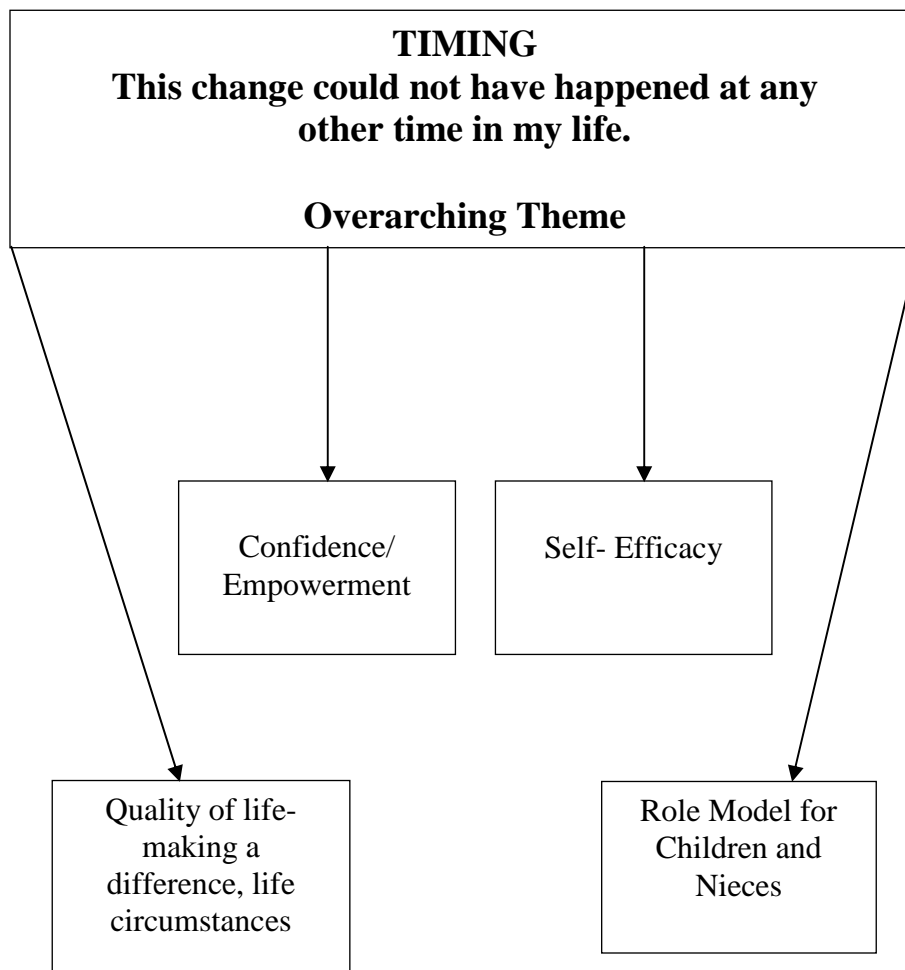
### Emergent Themes

Following the data analysis of the transcription material for each participant, five emerging themes were dominant throughout this research study. These themes will be provided in Figure 1 in accordance to how prevalent they were for each participant and as

a group. Table 2 (see Appendix B) will break down each theme according to the frequency of responses by each participant.

*Figure 1*

Participant responses for the five prevalent themes developed during data analysis



The five major themes depicted in Table 2 (see Appendix B) were the most prolific across all women who were participants in the study. The most salient and overarching

theme gleaned from the analysis of data was the *timing* of the midlife career change.

Fourteen participants stated that their midlife career change could not have happened at any other time in their life.

Timing according to the participants in this study was defined as the life experiences and circumstances that led them to make the decision of making a midlife career change. For some, this included divorce and starting over as a single parent. For others, it was an opportunity to become a role model for their children and establish a new quality of life. Several participants did not feel like their work in their current field made a difference and making a change would allow for growth and satisfaction. Thus, these life experiences and circumstances lead them to their journey of where they are today.

Several women stated:

“I don’t think that I would have gone into [my career] in the earlier years, then I did [until] now. It’s taken me until about this age, to really know who I am and not rely on other people to give me feedback.” (Alicia, interview)

“I still wish I would have started a little earlier [my midlife career change] but would I understand it, would it mean as much, because sometimes I think it takes life experiences to understand what I know now.” (Dominique, interview)

“I think it only happens when it’s going to happen. I mean I do wish I had done it earlier. I wish I had figured it out earlier. I just feel like I’m one of those people who are kind of a late bloomer.” (Elise, interview)

“This time was the one thing that I did in my life that I knew was the right thing and when somebody asks me about going back to school at this age, I just tell them I was not ready to go into college until I was this age. I wouldn’t have made it through because of all the other chaos. I would have never, ever made it through.” (Frances, interview)

“I definitely think that things happen for a reason or whatever the cliché is, but I do feel like all the experiences that I had helped me to be better for where I am right now.” (Gloria, interview)

“In some ways, what seemed catastrophic was actually a blessing in



disguise and it's got me on my current path. All of the threads came together of all these wonderings. I finally feel like I've found what I'm supposed to be doing, but it took a lot of knocking heads." (Kuuipo, interview)

### *Quality of Life*

The next salient theme that was common amongst the majority of participants was the quality of life. Most women were making a midlife career change due to several reasons:

1) wanting a career, 2) life circumstances which includes divorce, abuse, the demise of a relationship, a death in the family, the realization of not having a child, and making a difference in the world. Participants described their quality of life as follows:

"I think what made me want to go back to school was a combination of having a son with a disability and hitting the plateau at work where I wasn't going to be able to do the kind of work that I wanted to do unless I had the degree." (Maile, interview)

"I think that the quality of life is going to make a difference in my son and me. Quality of life in the time that I have available for him, this career has required me to be like many women who work and are mothers, to be at their job long after they should be and to have very limited number of hours to spend with my son." (Beverly, interview)

"There was a little apprehensiveness [for this change] because I was bitter at first because this is not what I thought. Life did not go according to plan and it did not work out like the fairytale, so you are kind of bitter because [of the divorce]. (Celia, interview)

"[The biggest change that I see in myself] is the conscious effort to make decisions and reflect is one part of it, and the other is just how I feel. Do I feel like I am making a difference? If I am planning for something, it's like what do I have to do to make it an experience that it's maybe going to make a difference." (Nairobi, interview)

"So I knew that changing careers, I was going to be taking a major pay cut for life but you know what, it just got to that point where I said, that's not my priority, so I just kind of hit that spot where I said I couldn't do this anymore." (Elise, interview)

"The background of that was, the reason I never aspired to anything because I was one of those kids that was emotionally abused my whole life and I wasn't going to amount to anything, I wasn't worth anything,

and I think that was part of it. I was married to someone who beat me up, and then I got well. I realized at the age of 46 that my mother had abused me my whole life like the movie *Mommy Dearest*.” (Frances, interview)

### *Role Model for Children and Nieces*

The last salient theme that the participants deemed important as elicited through their responses was being a role model for either their children and or nieces. More specifically was being a role model for their daughters and nieces, which was not available for them as they grew up. Throughout the interview process, participants relayed that they did not have female role models while growing up especially women of color.

Participants stated:

“I’ve got two little girls, I want them to see that mom does, because they say, “daddy goes to work and now mommy’s been going to school but mommy does the shopping. It’s like I don’t want them to think that. My mom worked and was a nurse. I want that for my little girls. I want them to see that mom does something important and works and earns money as well. I want that message for them.” (Lesley, interview))

“I would like to be a role model for my nieces and show them that they do not just have to get married and have children like the Latino culture. There is more to life than just being a wife/mother. I am trying to show them that they too can get a higher education and go to college. (Dominique, interview))

“I did not want my daughter to see it as okay to put her hopes and dreams on hold to support her partner because in the long run it just creates more problems. You need to fulfill yourself first and also she needed to know that it was okay to try new things or go back [to school].” (Alicia, interview))

“I would like to be a role model for my daughters.” (Celia, interview)

“I would like to be a role model for my nieces in that they need to go college. Being a Latina, I did not have those role models growing up and wished that I did.” (Maile, interview)

### *Confidence/Empowerment*

The role of confidence and empowerment was a dominant theme in the decisions that affected each woman's desire or ability to make a midlife career change. As a decision was made to make a midlife career change, many of the participants stated that their confidence level rose in their abilities while going back to school. Also, a sense of empowerment to change careers at midlife and to be successful was prevalent. One participant stated:

“[My confidence level rose when I entered the Women's Studies department for my undergraduate degree]. It had everything to do with it. My confidence was already on the rise after my 2 years at CSN just because I felt like I could do the work. I felt incredibly empowered.” (Harmony, interview)

Another woman stated that:

“I think I've always had a reasonable amount of confidence in my academic ability because I always did really well in school.” (Ingrid, interview)

One of the participants described her confidence level due to her daughter being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She states:

“I think it was gradual [my gaining and building confidence]. I don't think there was a eureka moment, but if I were going to pinpoint a pivotal moment then it was when my daughter was diagnosed. I've evolved in my thinking about that too. I try to look more at; well then it was okay I didn't die. I think that things that seem like a tragedy or seem like a crisis often show you how strong you are.” (Kuuipo, interview)

Another participant stated:

“Confidence, and somewhere in there is confidence but I don't know what confidence is really. I have to do this. Why do I think I can do this, I think it's the other thing. I can't do this other thing [career] anymore. I could continue with this [career] if I had to because I can stick with it but I need to move on.” (Beverly, interview)

Several women stated that the accolades and positive reinforcement that they received from professors at school reinforced their confidence level. This in turn, gave them a feeling of empowerment in that they could achieve what they set their mind to.

### *Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy as defined by Albert Bandura (1977), “refers to a person’s beliefs concerning his or her ability to successfully perform a given task behavior. Because self-efficacy expectations are behaviorally specific rather than general, the concept must have a behavioral referent to be meaningful” (p.2). Eleven of the fourteen participants specifically stated that self-efficacy did in fact play a dominant role in their decision to make a midlife career change and in their beliefs and ability to do so.

One participant stated:

“ I think the more [self-efficacy] you have, the more that you will succeed or be successful because you are going to come across all kinds of obstacles always. The more self-efficacy that you have, I think the more you will push yourself out of your comfort zone and I think you will excel the more you have.” (Dominique, interview)

Several participants also explained that it has been self-efficacy, which has increased their belief in themselves to surge forward with their change and to be confident in doing so.

“I have pretty high self-efficacy. I can say that over time when you’re in a position that you don’t like for a long time then your self-efficacy definitely drops. I mean you get to that point where you feel like you aren’t the person you used to be, can I really do this, do I still have it in me, so in terms of affecting the decision, I think it did affect the decision. I knew somewhere in me was the ability to do whatever I wanted and be good at it.” (Elise, interview)

[I believe that I have self-efficacy] to make this career change. It resulted from the changes and the things that I realized that made me have self-worth and self-awareness.” (Frances, interview)

“[I believe that self-efficacy played a role in my career change] I would say absolutely it did. I know what my skill sets are and I know what my skill sets are not. I probably have a strong sense of self and what my capabilities were so I could in fact do quite a lot.” (Ingrid, interview)

“I think I always knew that I was capable of pretty much most things that I would put my mind to. I think I’ve always been quite self-confident in that way that I never kind of doubted that if I put my mind to learning a new career or learning new skills or learning facts and studying, I never doubted that I would be able to do that kind of intellectually.” (Jackie, interview)

“[My level of self-efficacy] only came about in I think the last ten years when I was thirty-six years old. There was a lot of questioning before that. I mean a lot of my belief in myself came from what was reflected in the eyes of others or what others were telling me because otherwise I had a very low sense of self-worth for an extremely long time.” (Kuuipo, interview)

The personal essence of the phenomenon for each of the fourteen women was different as their stories were different. While the overall essence of Coming Full Circle was one that was shared by all, each woman’s individual essence of the phenomenon of midlife career change is provided in the excerpts below.

#### Personal Essence of the Phenomenon

##### *Alicia: Motivated by Making a Career Choice*

[My midlife career change] wasn’t so much of a career change, as it was a career choice because up until now it’s just been taking care of my family and doing whatever kind of work came along that facilitated that. There was no rhyme, there was no reason, and there was really no personal satisfaction. It was just a job; it was just a paycheck, and then it finally got to the point where I put my daughter in school and I said you know what it’s time for me to find a job that I love.

##### *Celia: Motivated by Divorce and Quality of Life*

[If I had to pinpoint my aha moment], it came [to me] on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. My husband decided that he wanted to check out of life, and he wanted to go back out into the world and do drugs. I have never done drugs, that is not my thing, so I’m like you know what he’s not going to get any better and I need to do what I need to do to protect me and my girls. So I told him, “you know what, it’s over.” [I] packed my bags and moved on. It has

been a real struggle but you know it is for the best. I figured that at about 40 [years old], you're supposed to be making a change to say you know what, the next twenty, twenty-five years we'll retire so we need to be doing things and working towards retirement. With my girls graduating from school and things like that. That was not happening [for me] so I decided that I needed to prepare for my girls and me. I [decided] that I needed to go back to school so I can make more money to be able to provide for my girls and I. That was just it.

*Dominique: Motivated by the realization of not having children*

[This change has been hard for me] I think because the time frame of having children. You hope that you're making the right decisions because I can say oh no I don't want but you know your body can only physically have children so there's that. Then I always think if I get to 45 and I do want a kid, go adopt a child or have a bunch of nieces and nephews who are having kids themselves. Start taking care of them, embrace them, and embrace your family. Part of me is kind of like are you serious, you don't physically want to have a child; you're saying that you've made your mind up. Then part of me is like I definitely don't want to bring any kids into this world, so that's kind of hard. The other thing is that I didn't have role models as yourself, women like that. I've had to find mentors throughout my life. I've had to look at other women, and I'd say that's why I want to do and that's what I want to be, or even men.

*Elise: Motivated by an Epiphany*

I said obviously, and that's when I kind of had that epiphany of they are not connected at all because my happiness has nothing to do with how much money I make. It has nothing to do with it, and I always, I think when you're in your twenties and I think just society tells you that, that money equals happiness. So you really have to figure it out for yourself because for some people money probably does equal happiness but not for me. So I knew that changing careers, I was going to be taking a major pay cut for life but you know what, it just got to that point where I said that's not my priority. That can't be my priority, so I just kind of hit that spot where I said I couldn't do this anymore.

*Frances: Motivated by letting go of an Abusive Past*

The background of that was, the reason I never aspired to anything because I was one of those kids that was emotionally abused my whole life and I wasn't going to amount to anything, I wasn't worth anything, and I think that was part of it. I was married to somebody who beat me up, and then I got well. I realized at the age of 46 that my mother had abused me my whole life like the movie Mommy Dearest. Most people will make the right decision, not me. I always chose the wrong way. This time was the one thing that I did in my life that I knew was the right thing and when somebody asks me about going back to school at this age, without getting into the story of why I just tell them I was not ready to go into college until I was this age. I wouldn't have made it through because of all the other chaos. I would have never, ever made it through. I told my husband I feel for once in my life that I'm actually living and not just trying to make it through the day.

*Gloria: Motivated by a Need to Grow*

I got to a point where I was really unhappy with what I was doing, even though I enjoyed it for a long time. It was fun, but it got to a point where it wasn't fun, it wasn't satisfying, I wasn't growing, and I knew there was no potential for growth. Looking at if I stay here doing this, what am I going to be like in ten years, and I would look at a couple of the girls that I work with who were ten years older than me and I looked and thought is this what I want my life to be. Then it was just gradual things that happened, like, well September 11<sup>th</sup>, which kind of shocked me into well wow I might have less time than I think. The world was changing, and I just had this sense that if I want to do something I have to start doing something.

*Harmony: Motivated by the realization that she needed a Bachelor's degree*

[My Aha moment] was a culmination of things actually. I really began to feel the effects, mentally, of that dead-end feeling. I started to get very anxious, and I even went through a very unfortunate period of time but it became a catalyst for me. I had a 3-year period where I was panicking, and I think it was because I felt stuck and I knew that there was potential there to make a change but I just didn't know how. I just began exploring opportunities for jobs, and I found that every time it was going to take a Bachelor's degree or higher to really get my foot in the door in another line of work or to even move on in the line I was in, which I was very ready to leave at that time anyhow.

*Ingrid: Motivated by leaving the Fast Track Career Lifestyle*

It was probably the timing because I had never dreamt of walking away from corporate. You get this degree, it's what you do, and it's who you are. You go to work every day for somebody else and you use your education and you grow and I had a variety of jobs because a lot of seemed to come natural so I got promoted very quickly. I would've never thought about leaving and doing something on my own. During those 15 years I wasn't looking for anything else. I was being fulfilled professionally and I was happy. Why look for something else when you're happy? It was just that I needed a different quality of life. I needed a better quality of life, and I think that just started to slowly layer itself on me and build up. I would've never thought about having my own business.

*Jackie: Motivated by fulfilling Dreams of the Past*

[Another event that prompted me to make a career change] was I had this feeling of regret and kicking myself for all of those years. I think part of it was, the other thing was that I had split up with a boyfriend, a very long-term boyfriend. That had been a couple of years, eighteen months actually, before I signed up for my Bachelor's degree. I kind of in some ways always thought that maybe one day I'll kind of meet someone and get married, and then I'll be able to go to college. There was one day that I just realized that no I'm just going to do it for myself. It's no use sitting around and waiting for something

to happen or putting that responsibility on somebody else. It's something I've got to do for myself. I'd say the Bachelor's degree that was kind of the start of it. That was four years and then it was another two years Master's degree before I eventually said what do I want to do now. That was the beginning of the whole path.

*Kuuipo: Motivated by Coming Full Circle*

This has been the best job I've ever had in my life. I don't know what else to say. I'm forty-six. I think that's true for a lot of women but for me one thing was this whole beauty myth thing. When I was younger it was like you're so beautiful and people would think that you weren't smart because you have good looks, and I got caught up in that a lot too because of my socialization about capitalizing on that. I knew here you need to build this up to, but I think confidence too as you get older and you start seeing other people saying things and you're like why can't I say it. It's kind of nice because it's like everything is coming full circle.

*Lesley: Motivated by Changes of Becoming a Mother*

At some point I'm going to get this degree, and at some point I'm going to get a Ph.D. even if I'm fifty. At some point that will be done, and I have no doubts about that. I know it will happen. It's funny because when I was in my twenties, I never ever thought I'd be a stay-at-home mother. Never in a million years did I think that. I was never like that's what I want to do, but then you have children and it's like oh I'm not putting my six-month old in daycare. Even your one or two-year old you can't. Also circumstances, we moved from here to there to here. There's been a lot of change in our lives and stuff. I want to complete my studies and I definitely want to work.

*Maile: Motivated by Son's Disability*

I think probably what made me want to go back to school was a combination of having my son with a disability and hitting that plateau at work where I wasn't going to be able to do the kind of work that I wanted to do unless I had the degree. That's what made me want to go back to school. I think that was more of my moment to change careers [when my company started to get more political after the birth of my first son] and I think everything and I think everything kind of led up to the eventually getting the Master's. What is funny is that when I married my husband, and he even to this day reminds me, that I refused to marry him unless he would agree to move back to San Francisco so I could finish school. So in the back of my mind, I always had wanted to go back, but just kind of the way things worked out, you get married and have kids. I did finally go back to school later.

*Nairobi: Motivated by a Need to be Happy and Fulfilled*

It took me five years to finally get up the nerve to say the money doesn't matter, if I make you mad then it doesn't matter, if you don't like it then I don't matter and it doesn't matter to me, if my parents think I'm nuts then it doesn't matter to me. It took me five



years to tell myself that it wasn't about what everyone else thought about me. Ultimately that was what it was because then I became a bartender and nobody could believe it. They were like are you nuts, are you crazy, and I said no I just want to be happy. That was that. [I never thought about my quality of life] because I was living the way that I thought I should. You know, you go to school and this is what you do, and you just do it.

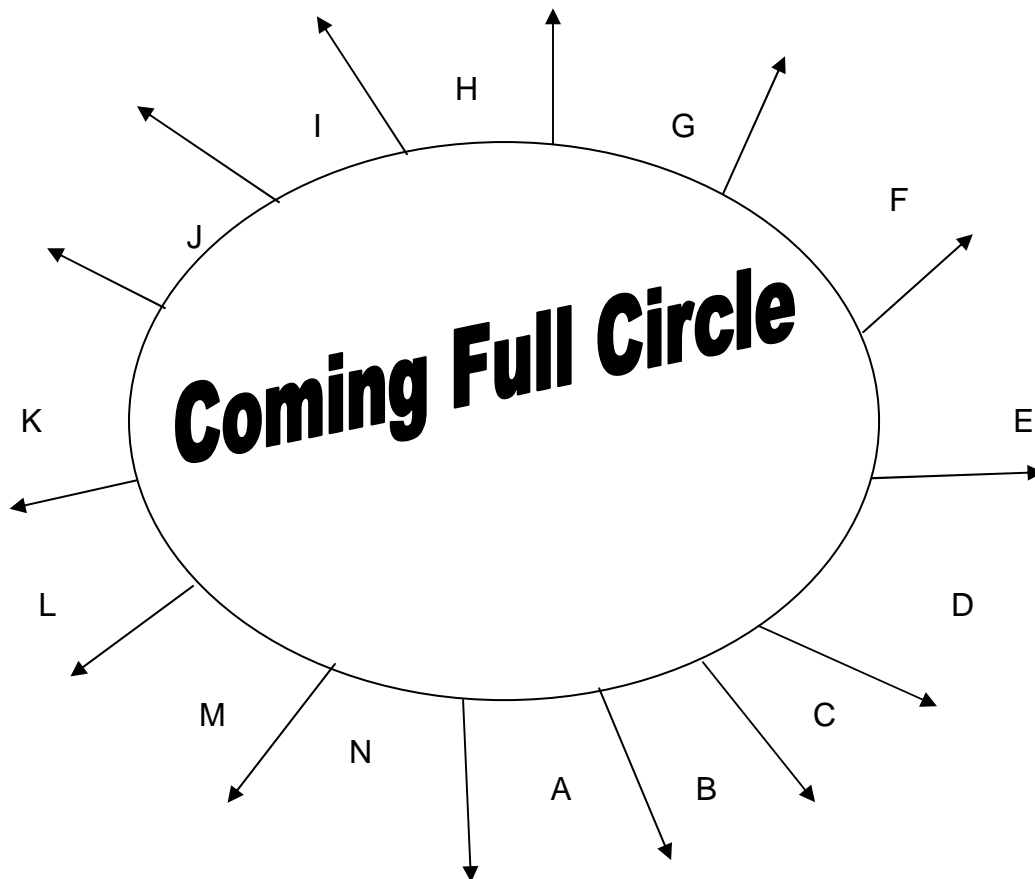
### Overall Essence of the Phenomenon

#### *Circular Journeys; Coming Full-Circle*

The coming full circle ideology is the overall essence of the phenomenon that I have deemed as a pivotal transitional period for the fourteen participants based on their stories told. With each word articulated and each feeling expressed, the one salient theme that came forth which was not included as an emerging theme was one of coming full circle. Some women expressed that this was a new beginning for them, a creation of a new sense of self, and most notably letting go of an identity that they no longer identified with. For the women in their forties, they related how different they were than in their twenties. This had come due to the cards life had dealt them. For some, a marriage that dissolved was not the fairytale they envisioned during their twenties.

For others, having an abusive mother, dealing with the death of a parent, and not having a child were the circumstances that led to this re-evaluation period and a time of reflection during midlife. The experience and process of change can be looked at as a circle and journey of coming back to where you initially started. This meant that for some of the participants, a dream that was put on hold for a ten-twenty year was within reach and a reality more so now than ever. The regrets and should haves, would haves, and could haves of the prevailing past were thrown to the wind resulting in a new emergence of a confident, empowered, and self-efficacious woman who would make strides in the

world. This in essence is what the coming full circle ideology depicts in this research study as well as the circular journey taken by each woman.



*Figure 1.* This figure represents the essence of the phenomenon of midlife career for the fourteen participants that were part of this dissertation study.

As seen from the coming full circle depiction, the major essence of the study was each participant's circular journey in their experience. Each started her journey at a different time, place and circumstance however; the essence of the phenomenon was coming full circle and going to a place that had long been forgotten or one that was on the horizon for a new start and a new beginning. This in essence, was the their story.

### Summary of Data Analysis

The study results described in this chapter emphasize the commonalities and distinct differences amongst the fourteen participants involved in the study. However, this study reinforced that the participant's experiences were similar in nature and that they shared common themes thus formulating their synthesis as a whole. Each woman's story was different as described in her profile however; five emerging themes invoked this synthesis, which portrayed that the participants were more similar than they were different. The themes of timing, quality of life, confidence/empowerment, self-efficacy, and a being role model described these similarities. The sections that addressed these themes of timing, quality of life, confidence/empowerment and being a role model highlight areas that were relevant to the original research questions posed.

The theme of timing relates to the first question asked as each woman stated that it was the timing that was a precursor to the career change. Quality of life and being a role model for children and nieces is the theme that correlates with question number 2. Confidence/empowerment is a theme that was derived from the data and the participants mentioned this construct throughout the interview process. Lastly, career self-efficacy was introduced during the interview and was used as a descriptive measure thus; this concept was not pulled from the data but was theory driven.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The essence and experience of making a midlife career change was explored and described throughout this research study. A phenomenological approach was utilized to get to the essence of this phenomenon by the words of each participant in the stories that they shared in their profile narratives. This chapter will look at the bigger picture of this study in reference to how the responses obtained throughout the interview process correlated with the initial research questions. This section will be divided into two parts: 1) an overview of how the themes of the study answer each research question posed and 2) the limitations of the study and future research.

The two overarching questions of the research study were:

1. What has the experience been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?
2. What has the process of change been like for women who are making midlife career changes between the ages of 35-50 years old?

The five emerging themes that gleaned from data analysis and discussed in Chapter 4 were: 1) timing 2) quality of life 3) being a role model for children and nieces 4) confidence/empowerment and being a 5) self-efficacy. In relation to the two research questions posed, it is imperative to look at the structure of these questions and how these constructs relate to qualitative research as a whole. The two questions that I posed were phenomenological in nature based on the experience of the fourteen participants.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview. It

rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence in shared experiences that can be narrated. The purpose of this type of interviewing is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (p. 112). A full circle discussion will be presented that ties all of the emerging themes and research questions as they relate to one another in the following paragraphs.

## Conclusions

### *Timing*

The timing theme defined the point in each participant’s life where she was making a change. As stated by all fourteen participants, the timing of the change was when it was supposed to happen. There could have been no other time to have made the change until this point in life. For both questions, this succinctly defines the experience and circumstances that were involved for each participant. What was the experience referred to each participant’s words and narratives of the change. Each woman had a different story but the themes that emerged were more similar to one another than they were different.

The developmental constructs that were evidenced with the theme of timing related to the level of maturity that each woman espoused during the situational and contextual aspects of when the change happened during her life. Midlife can be a period of reflection and also a transitional period for women to pursue career dreams and goals (Neugarten, 1968). Personality and social development does change during midlife in that “women define their age status in terms of timing of events within the family cycle” (Neugarten, 1968, p.95). These events are the raising of children into grown adults and for single career women, the period of middle age is often seen in terms of a family they may have

had. As evidenced by the responses of the participants, their decision to make a midlife career change was contingent on their level of maturity, confidence, and personality/social development.

Moreover, the construct of self-efficacy was evidenced in eleven of the fourteen participants. They specifically stated that career self-efficacy did in fact play a pervasive role in their decision to make a midlife career change and in their beliefs and ability to do so. Timing had to do with the confidence level that came with age and also from the positive reinforcement emphasized by professors, family, and colleagues. The participant's belief system in the abilities to achieve what they had set their mind to was contingent on these factors.

#### *Quality of Life*

The quality of life refers to the choice of changing careers for a better tomorrow. This theme can be broken down into several areas: 1) wanting a career, 2) life circumstances which includes divorce, abuse, the demise of a relationship, a death in the family, and the realization of not having a child, 3) making a difference. The participants according to the particular experience they had gone through answered both questions. The quality of life was based on these three factors and was situational specific for each woman.

#### *Role model for Children and Nieces*

This theme correlated in particular to questions one and two of the research study. Six women expressed that being a role model for their daughters and nieces was very important to them and their decision to make a midlife career change. For the women of color, having a role model was crucial in that they did not have a female role model's influence growing up. For two of them, obtaining a higher education and going to college

broke the traditional cultural norms of only being a wife and mother in the Latino population.

### *Confidence/Empowerment*

The theme of confidence/empowerment played a dominant role in the decisions that affected each woman's desire or ability to make a midlife career change. For several participants, what is that experience and process of change was based on their newfound abilities that were brought to life by going back to school. The accolades and positive reinforcement received by professors, colleagues, and family was what made this change feasible. Thus, questions one and two were answered as the overall experience and how confidence/empowerment was contextually relevant to each participant.

The role of self-efficacy and confidence/empowerment coincided together in the responses obtained from the questions. In order for one's belief system to embrace one's abilities, having confidence and a sense of empowerment only aided into making this belief a reality.

### *Career Self-efficacy*

The answers posited from the research participants in relation to career self-efficacy did answer both questions. The experience of making a midlife career change was situational and contextual in nature however, self-efficacy was the common denominator that allowed four women to have made a career change and ten of them in the process of doing so. The beliefs they had in their ability to perform a given task behavior was evident. (Bandura, 1977).

## Limitations of Study

There were several limitations evidenced in this research study. For one, all participants that were recruited were from the same large, Southwestern urban university, which could have impacted the responses due to the geographical location and the reason why, one comes to Las Vegas to make a midlife career change.

Another limitation was that five out of the fourteen women had already made their career change while nine were still in school and making their process of change. This resulted in getting only a snap shot portrait of a period of their life where they were on the way to making a change. It was only one element of the change process and I was not able to see it come to its fruition. It would have been beneficial to see each woman go from the beginning of the process of change to the ending. There were pros and cons for each of them in making a change so it would have been imperative to identify triggers and psychological factors that could impact this change.

If I was able to meet with each participant at the very beginning of the change process and continually throughout, then it would have told a more accurate story within their profile narrative. For some, the decision to get a Master's degree was eminent thus; I was not able to track these changes resulting in not being able to see if a successful career change had been made. It would have been ideal to get a snap shot portrait of each participant at different intervals of time for example, every 2 months or every 2 years instead of the initial two interviews that were conducted.



## Future Research

The following recommendations for research will add to the existing body of knowledge regarding midlife career change and women. It would be necessary to do a longitudinal study with the fourteen participants to see where they have evolved to in a 2-5 year period. As previously discussed, the time period of their change only gave myself a snap shot portrait of where the participants were during a specific time period. For nine women, their midlife career change was only in the beginning stages of the process and they were on their journeys to get there. Were they successful? Or did they make a change or revert back to their old career? These would be some questions to explore in a future research study.

Secondly, a standardized measurement could be developed through a preliminary survey of the participants. In this research study, a self-efficacy survey was utilized as a descriptive measure to gage self-efficacy beliefs. For example, the first statement posed asked the participant how they felt about using power tools. The choices for answers were: very difficult, usually difficult, usually easy or very easy. The statements used in this survey only described having overall self-efficacy beliefs and did not pertain specifically to career items. An example of a survey question could be: the decision in your beliefs to make a midlife career change was very difficult, usually difficult, usually easy, or very easy for you. This standardized measurement can add to the body of knowledge in this area in that the triggers, psychological factors, and belief systems of each participant could be identified.

## Summary

This dissertation study provided five themes that emerged from the data as a result of the original transcript material provided by fourteen participants. In looking at the four prevalent theories in Chapter two, these emergent themes did provide new areas of research to be looked at in the minimization of the gap in the existing literature. For one, new insight was provided looking at the complex lives of women where men were previously used as the norm. The decision to make a midlife career change encompasses many facets in women's lives however, the role of timing, quality of life, role model for children and nieces, confidence/empowerment, and self-efficacy were at the forefront of this study.

The implications for research and Counselor Education is that timing has been the impetus for the change that each of these women embarked on. As counselors, it would be important to utilize this concept in order to get a person to the stage of being ready for a change. Moreover, this study showed how a combination of different areas must be considered in a pivotal transition such as a career change. For men, the relational aspects of making a decision such as this is not incumbent on factors that were provided in this study. The difference for women is that many facets are a part of making a decision to change careers at midlife thus; a counselor needs to be aware of these elements in order to work with these clients.

In addition, the incorporation of mentoring programs at the university and business level was deemed necessary for women in transition in that a support system was crucial in the changing of careers. The participants felt that it was important to have women role models in their lives in order to make this career change an easier transition. As

counselors, it would be important to establish support groups as well as mentors throughout the change process.

### Personal Reflections

At the start of my journey in making a midlife career change at the age of thirty-eight, I had no idea of the world that I was about to embark on when I decided to go back to school and get a Ph.D. At the time of my transition, I could only think about getting out of my airline career which no longer gave me the happiness, confidence, and ability to perform the skills that I knew I had. Who knew what this looked like or what the journey I had lying ahead of me as I made my own midlife career change. I just wanted out because I knew this no longer made me happy and it was my quality of life that was at the forefront of my mind to make a change.

I now fast forward to five years later and the journey has been one of happiness, frustration, and regret at times. Did I do the right thing? Or what about all of the money I use to make to live the life of a poor graduate student? These reverberated through my mind through the course of this journey but I have found that they have become quiet murmurs and not the loud ramblings that they once were.

As I started this study, I wanted to find out if other women were feeling like I was or having a similar experience. To me, my quality of life was so important in that happiness ruled out over money. I believe that the timing could have not happened before the age of 38 because I did not have the confidence that I do now or the self-efficacious behaviors to pull me through. I also know that I have come full circle in my journey and that I am no longer the woman I was at 28 but instead a new and renewed version of the old me. To this midlife career change, I am thankful. Hello world, here I come!

## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

#### *PARTICIPANT A Alicia - A 35- year-old Midlife Career Changer*

[My midlife career change] wasn't so much of a career change, as it was a career choice because up until now it's just been taking care of my family and doing whatever kind of work came along that facilitated that. There was no rhyme, there was no reason, and there was really no personal satisfaction. It was just a job; it was just a paycheck, and then it finally got to the point where I put my daughter in school and I said you know what it's time for me to find a job that I love because I had been supporting my ex-husband in the job that he loved through moving and all kinds of changes and I put all that aside a way back when I got married. I just kind of said you know what it's okay I can wait a year.

[When I first decided to go back to school], it was for a degree in Clinical Laboratory Sciences, and I'm just like that's not who I am anymore. So I had to really sit back and try to identify who I had grown into as a person, and what that meant for me as far as what I really wanted to do for the rest of my life. When I was younger before all of the family came into the picture, I was different. I mean even when it was just my husband and me; there was freedom of choice available that you know it didn't really matter. I didn't have anyone else; I really had to think about. You know, he was an adult and we made a deal, that's fine. There was just spontaneity of high risk, or you know travel or that kind of element to work that I was entertaining all the way up until I started school and I started doing it. Then I'm like wow wait a minute. I'm not willing to take those

risks anymore. I'm not willing to put myself at this level of danger or harm because I do have other things that are in my heart now, you know, my daughter.

I am passionate about teaching and stuff like that, but I also think that I do not want to be 65 years old and working with Ebola and HIV and Herpes in my CLS job. I don't want to be doing that now. And I do it right now. It's like I want to be there and I want [to do the job]. [Although] raising my daughter really showed me how much I love working with kids, and being a tutor on campus really showed me how much I love working with older students. But it's not enough to be a mom. I mean I want to do it in a professional setting.

[I started school at the traditional age] and decide to get married in my sophomore year in school. Due to extenuating circumstances, [my ex-husband] needed an extension on financial aid and marriage would provide that for him. So then my senior year, three classes to graduation, he said, "I'm tired of being in school and I want to start my career" so I quit to support him while he got started with his career with the idea that I would go back a year later. But like I said, a year turned into ten. I always knew in the back of my head that I wanted to go back and finish. I mean three classes; I had to at least finish. But when I finally did, I didn't want to go back for what I started with. So that's when I did the re-evaluation of who I was, what I was looking for.

[This re-evaluation] was a constant chatter that I had in my head. That constant, wiggle in my heart, that kind of just says something is not quite right and are you sure you want to do this, are you going in the right path? [majoring in CLS] When I made the decision to go [from CLS] into education, my whole being just kind of centered and calmed down. So maybe that is an "aha" moment but for me, it was just a focus. There

were no more questions, there were no more doubts, and there was no more uncertainty for me. Whereas going through the Med-tech Program, I was just like oh God no, this is so, there are so many challenges and there is so much at risk. Yes I like it, but do I really like it that much and I do I really want to be doing it for another ten years.

It's still fascinating to me [working in CLS]. I mean none of that has gone away, there is still love; it's just that other than telling people you're positive, I'm not contributing anything to anyone. I mean someone has got to be there to run the test but mainly that's the machines so you just have to know how to run a machine. [I decided to go into teaching] not because I am altruistic, I'm not just going to go I'm teaching for the greater good. I have stupidly consolidated my ex-husband's student loans under my name, and once you've consolidated those, you can't unconsolidated them regardless of death and divorce. It doesn't matter. If you teach at a title one school [the government] will forgive twenty percent of your student loans every year that you teach.

[This process of change has been a long journey] as I sit there on my birthday and go oh crap I'm half way to retirement and I have no clue what I am going to do. It's been a choice, it's not been a smooth process, it's something I have to fight for everyday to continue, to continue my path. There was the financial obligation in applying to school that I had to see how I would do, so I had to apply for financial aid. [Another obstacle] was that no sooner I started school, my husband (ex) decided he did not want to be a husband or a father anymore so my first two years of school were him bouncing in and out and then getting divorced. I have faced [other challenges] like the development of a learning disability due to some medication that I was taking during my second year at UNLV so I had to deal with that and overcome. Not overcome, but learn to live with it.

It's just been a challenge. So there has been several times that I've sat there and questioned should I stay in school because I could work full-time and not be struggling, and not have to worry about going to the grocery store or continue part-time and think of the big picture down the road.

There was that choice of do I want to go back to just doing 9-5 pm and odd things here and there and something that I'm not happy with, or do I want the career? Over and over, I want the career; I want to be who I am and not just an employee. I am almost there. My girlfriends have verbalized the desire to go back, to finish, and to do something with their lives. [I tell them, "I do not want to hear it because if you wanted to you would [go back to school]."] [My answer would be], I wanted to and I did. I have done it through opposition. I mean I've had my husband leave me, my parents tell me to quit, my grandparents tell me to quit. No one was supporting me through this besides my daughter and me. [However], my daughter would be like, "Mom, I really want to have Christmas presents."

[My daughter] has not had a huge impact [on my decision], but she had a lot to do with my decision. I didn't want her to see it as okay to put her hopes and dreams on hold to support her partner because in the long run it just creates more problems. You need to fulfill yourself first, and also she needed to know that it was okay to try new things or to go back [to school]. You know if you didn't succeed at something one time, not to be afraid to try again. So from day one, she was there when I got my acceptance letter, and we were jumping up and down together. Every year she sees me fill out the application for financial aid. I'm like this is what's going to make it possible for me to keep going back to school. We talk about every time we have to make a choice between buying ten

packages of Ramen versus a pound of hamburger. You know this is like a choice now for a better tomorrow. [This is why] we do not go to the Adventure Dome on the weekends.

She [my daughter] understands that we're working to a better life, and we talk about when we, when I 'm done and I have a good job for a while we'll have our home and we can have our pets back. We had to get rid of our pets, so she's like "am I going to have any pet that I want?" I'm like any pet the state will let me have because otherwise I could end up with a horse or something. She kind of, it may not be exactly real for me but she's grasping an idea of you know it takes work but it's for the better. We talk about how things wouldn't be like they are right now, had I finished school the first time, had I gotten a career and really settled doing something. I would probably still be changing now anyway. I don't think that I would have gone into it [my career] in the earlier years, then I did [until] now. It's also taken me until about this age, to really know who I am and not rely on other people to give me that feedback.

[I went] from wife to mother and it never was really just me. So I put my daughter in school and then started thinking about what I want for her and her future. I said wait a minute, what do I want for me, for my future? I've been thinking about so many other people for so long and now it's really time to focus inward. Even then I said, those first few years I was just going back to that initial person who started school, just replaying that. It's just taken this time approaching the end, I'm going what the heck, I just wasted so many years and I'm still going in a direction I'm not happy with. There have been a lot of sacrifices that I've been making for the past four years, but in the long run it's going to be worth it because I know that I am worth it. I would not have probably said that five



years ago. It wasn't about what I was worth; it was about what was needed for my family. I was on the bottom of that list.

When I graduated from high school, I wanted to be a teacher but everyone told me I wouldn't be good at it, that I would suck, that I didn't have the personality or demeanor to be a teacher. I bought into it for 17 years. I bought into it, and even though the first three years of tutoring on this campus, I was like this is just a fluke, this is just easy because it's one-on-one. It really doesn't matter that I enjoy it, or that I show good results, even when I got a position with Gear Up in the schools and tutoring in the classrooms and having teachers say they loved having me there. [The teachers told me] I was very good and also volunteering in my daughter's classroom. The teachers would say, "You should be a teacher." I didn't buy into it. I didn't believe it. I'm like no, no, I've been told that I won't be a good teacher. Then I'm like wait a minute, now I'm being told that I will be a good teacher, who do I believe? It did not matter because it was what I believed.

[This past year] has been a pivotal year for me. This ending year, this senior year, where I am supposed to be finished and know where I want to be, and I had no clue. I'm like oh my God, I'm still letting other people define who I am. I'm 35 years old; I need to stop having people define who I am. I am so tired of being worker bee. I was meant to do something and I didn't know what it was, but I felt it inside. This is my second year, and I'm like this is something new. A new me, what am I going to do now? For the first time, this is really the first year that I have had freedom. Last year was the first year of the divorce but I had to find out who I was. So it took a few years of school and realizing you know what, I was not who I was at eighteen.

*PARTICIPANT C Cecilia - A 47-year-old African-American Midlife Career  
Changer*

In 1987, I moved to Las Vegas to get married. I married my husband who is a native of Las Vegas, so I've been here [Las Vegas] for almost twenty years. I am 47 years old, a single mother with three daughters. I worked for a government contractor, subcontractor for approximately nineteen and a half years. When a new contractor came in, I was let go and I was without employment for nine months. I then got a job at this university so I've been working here for little over a year. I'm in the administrative field for my department. [I decided] two and a half years ago that I would enroll in the Paralegal program so I have a Paralegal certificate. I then decided that I needed to get a degree [and go back to school] so I enrolled at UOP, in their Human Services Management program. In June, I'll walk in their commencement exercise and then in approximately October or November, I will finish with my program.

[If I had to pinpoint my aha moment], it came [to me] on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. My husband decided that he wanted to check out of life, and he wanted to go back out into the world and do drugs. I have never done drugs, that is not my thing, so I'm like you know what he's not going to get any better and I need to do what I need to do to protect me and my girls. So I told him, "you know what, it's over." [I] packed my bags and moved on. It has been a real struggle but you know it is for the best. I figured that at about 40 [years old], you're supposed to be making a change to say you know what, the next twenty, twenty-five years we'll retire so we need to be doing things and working towards retirement. With my girls graduating from school and things like that. That was not happening [for me] so I decided that I needed to prepare for my girls and me. I

[decided] that I needed to go back to school so I can make more money to be able to provide for my girls and I. That was just it.

Well you think about, you say there is more to life than just struggling all the time and you know as we were married for fifteen years and we are not growing together, we're growing apart. Especially if he wants to do drugs and I don't do that. I'm like that's not my thing so I know where I want to go. I want to be able to take vacations and do things with the girls and expose them to other things. He wasn't for that so I am like you know what okay I'm the adult here so I have to provide. I have to be the grown up here.

When I first decided to go back to school, I decided do the paralegal thing. That is something that I wanted to do for a long time, probably like the last fifteen years. My husband was a pastor and we had a church. So he was like, "you know now is not a good time for you to go to school", so I put it on hold. So I'm like you know what, I don't have him in my life anymore, I can do that. I can go fulfill that dream, and that goal that I want to get. I'm like you know what I started school and my brain does work. It's an epiphany and it does work. So I said to myself that I might as well go back to school and get a degree.

Actually, I was ready to go to school. I was ready. I was like, I want to do this and the University of Phoenix says it's a team thing, and I've been fortunate to have some really great team members and so we just made it easy and school has been great. Both my previous employer and my current employer are really great with me going to school. There's no problem. There's no conflict there. I plan on finishing my Bachelor's and then I want to pursue a Master's. I will be working at UNLV a little while longer. I really want to counsel young ladies like between the ages of probably 15, well probably start at 14 to

21. I will try to, if they are on the wrong path, try to see where we can steer them back on the right path and if they are just on the cusp, try to keep them on the right path. That kind of thing, empower them and hopefully motivate them to go to school, make good career choices and life choices.

I got pregnant in college and I dropped out and started a work career so I've always wanted to go back to school and finish my degree. This is twenty plus years later and I am about to realize my dream and you know it is great. I lost my mom last year and I wish she would be here to see this because she would be proud of me. We have those moments where it is like would have, could have, and should have but you know, the time is now [for me]. [I proved to myself] that after I received my paralegal certificate, I said you know what I'm through with that; I can go back to school. My boss said, "okay we'll write you a letter of recommendation to get you in school." The company that I was working for, they helped pay for some of the tuition. I'm like okay I can do this. I think the path of choosing to be a counselor has always been a part of my makeup. I am always the one that friends come to for advice. I'm like; you're older than me. I've always been easy to give sound advice and so I think that is always been kind of like. I kind of tried to go away from that, but I think that it is probably my destiny to do counseling.

[In my experience], the choice is kind of not your choice but it is kind of made for you or you're kind of drug into it. There was a little apprehensiveness [for this change] because I was bitter at first because this is not what I thought. Life did not go according to plan and it did not work out like the fairytale, so you're kind of bitter. I just thought that I would be in my last job until I retired. You're not and you have to make these choices and they are not choices that you made readily on your own. They were not your

choices and they were kind of what you were forced to do. [Divorce came into play for me] and I saw that the marriage was not going anywhere. The female is usually the one that makes a choice. I decided to step away from this because it was not leading to anything positive. I think it takes courage to leave a bad relationship. It's not easy because even women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century know divorce is rapid but when it is you, there is that fear of a stigmatism. Friends do treat you differently.

[These last seven years] have not been easy. I've made that choice that while I am raising my girls I am not dating. I didn't want to bring anyone else into the relationship, or you know into their lives [my daughters]. I'm like; I won't date and just focus my time and energies on them. Going to school has been a real eye opener. You learn a lot of things about being in the field, counseling minorities. I would like to be a role model for my daughters. It has been kind of an up and down thing [my change]. I went from two paychecks to one.

Any woman now, I tell them to make sure that you can make it on your own especially if you have children and you're not going to get child support. Make sure that you can add it up and say that okay I can do this. That is another mistake that a lot of women do. We don't think about financially can I handle everything on my own. You have to pay the electric, pay the power; you've got to pay the babysitters and all that stuff. [Besides the financial burden], it has been an emotional roller coaster. Should I take him back? It's like; you know what I am better off without you. There have been moments when I have struggled financially when it's like okay is it worth it? Is school ever going to get over with? Am I ever going to be in the black? 40 is like your midlife and its like, okay is life going to get better than this? Is this all that there is to life or is

there much more? There is much more and you have to take responsibilities and say you know what I want to live to the best of my abilities. Whoever, and whatever that is in your life that is not adding or contributing to the best of your abilities, then you have to cut them loose.

*PARTICIPANT D Dominique - A 39-year-old Latina Midlife Career Changer*

[My story begins with my parents and family] I kind of had the traditional mom stays home and the husband goes to work. My father had a long-term career that he retired from, and you know that's unheard of now where you stay with one company for 30, 40 years. She [my Mom] stayed at home until I was in high school. So you know she was already, I may have been in junior high, she was about 50 and she went back to work. She raised all of us at home, and so I didn't have that typical my mom was a career woman or that sort of thing. It was like I had that traditional, so I think you know my dad being that we are Latinos he made it a point for us to speak proper English, to learn English. He wouldn't allow us to be barrio or you know he really wanted us to excel and that was a big part of it as how we carried ourselves. He was like you're an American, and he was second generation as well so I'm third generation.

My dad is from California and my mom is from Texas. I think that my experience was a little different because my father was military and so by the time I came around here they had settled already. I wasn't one of those lucky military brats that got to live in Hawaii or Germany or anywhere like that. They were pretty much settled. You know so I got to see a lot of different things and a lot of different religions because I was around a lot of military kids growing up. I think that had a big influence in my standard of living or my expectations, whereas the little town that we were in either Fort Bliss or El Paso

Texas is probably 90% Hispanic or Latinos. I think culturally they have a tendency to have the big families or they stay very traditional. Change happens very slowly in the Hispanic families, and in my case I think that I'm just so influenced by so many different cultures and so many different things that I knew that I would leave this small town and move onto something else. I had that influence [during my childhood].

In my day when I was in school it was kind of a bonus if you took typing because you learned the keyboard. Back then not everybody knew that keyboard and so I went to school to the International Business College because I wanted to get into computers and having that experience of knowing the typewriter and then transitioning into the computer I felt like hey I have an edge here. So I went there and graduated Valedictorian and was president of the Honor's Society and I excelled and went into clerical secretarial and did that. Even though I stayed with that same field it was always different industry or different types of businesses, so I was able to pick up on this and pick up on that. After that I went to California and started working for the public school district and loved it. I worked with for a juvenile crime prevention program, worked with kids that had social problems or economical problems and that sort of thing, and again still in the clerical field but just working with children and I absolutely loved it. That was like one of the most rewarding jobs I've ever had.

I got to California when I was like 25 or 26 and so I did that job for 6 or 7 years. I was there for a long time. The whole time I'm like what do you want to do besides clerical because at this point you start to realize that there's absolutely no point. You can only get so far without a degree, maybe you can go into management but you really need to get some type of degree or some type of certification if you want to move on. So I kind

of did that whole you know what do I like to do, you know get in touch with your inner child, you know what did you do when you were a kid, and that sort of thing. And then I was like I love art, and at this point I was like I still love computers. I've always been into technology and by this point the World Wide Web had come to a beginning and it was like wow what is this. So I started studying graphic design and I studied for two years. So I actually started off first with the small business administration and then went to graphic design once I did all that soul-searching, and I'm like I can be my own boss. I can work from project to project and that sort of thing, as well as be an independent graphic designer.

I did that and then I went to San Diego, and I realized that I didn't have the type of skills that it really took to. I think I gave up too soon, but just seeing everyone's work it seemed mine I was like oh wow what were you thinking, you really need to work on your art. Then I always end up falling back on what I know, which is clerical. There was a pivoting point right there, the reason I had moved to San Diego was because my mom was getting older. My father had passed away already, and she was always ill.

My Mom was living in Texas still because I had left Texas and went to Sacramento, and then I had ended up going to San Diego to live closer to her. She wanted me to move back, but I'm like I can't, not El Paso. I thought what's the next biggest city that I could make a decent living, and I thought well Austin, Houston, something like that but Texas is so big. If you look at how far it is from Texas, I mean Austin or even San Antonio to Houston it's 8 hours from El Paso. I thought well what's 8 hours this way, and 10 was San Diego so I thought you know what I'd rather just stay in California. That's how I made my decision. That was the only way. I mean I didn't know anybody in San Diego. I



took a couple of business trips out there and went and checked it out and thought yeah this is where I'll live. I picked up, moved, U-Hauled it, and went to San Diego. I'm a free spirit. I've moved many times.

I've started over so many times, and so what happened is that when I got there is one I couldn't find work. They were looking for BA's, people with BA's, or somebody that had more experience, that sort of thing. Then my mom passed away, and it was like wow. With the stress of that and my mom passing away, I was like ugh. My oldest sister was in El Paso, and I would go almost every weekend. I was driving back and forth, and she told me what are you doing out there. She's like just come home, and I was like you know I really need to be around my family right now so I did. I thought I have a lot of money saved up; I'll go get a job there no problem. I get there and you start to realize that wow I can't get a job paying more than ten dollars an hour.

By this point I'm in my thirties, and I want to say I'm like 32, 33, 34 now. Then I was there for a couple of years, and I was like I've got to get out of here. Money went quick. I tried to go back to school because I'm like I need that degree. I got into a long-term relationship and that gentleman actually had family here in Las Vegas. So we ended up moving here and as soon as I got here I applied to UNLV and I got in. It's so funny because I always say I ended up going back to working with kids. They're still kids to me whether they're 21, 22. Anybody under 30 is still a kid to me.

Now I'm working with Alumni in the fund-raising or external relations, which is building the relationship between the industry, casinos and hospitality industry, with UNLV. So I'm like you better hurry up and finish this. I started looking at it again. I was like you know you could finish this Art degree, you can now learn Math the right way

and get a tutor if that's what you want to do. I did some more soul-searching, and what do I want to do? Now with my mom passed away, I could live anywhere in the world. What do you want to do you now? The more I think about it, I'm just like you know I really enjoy either counseling kids or working with the underprivileged. So basically that's it. I went from kind of clerical or whatever to trying a bunch of different things and I always come back to Academia or working with someone, counseling or in-service basically.

I'm actually trying to finish up my general education classes, but I'm in the Bachelor's of Social Work program now. I'm starting to take my classes then I'll switch over to the dual program, hopefully. That's the bigger picture, but we never know and tomorrow's never promised. I love change. I know some people don't, are not as comfortable, but I embrace it. I absolutely love it and I think that it's an opportunity to reinvent yourself. Now I'm like 39, and I'm going well I don't know do I really need to have kids or will I really be missing out. It's not just the change of geographically or changing industries, it's big changes like will you follow a career or will you follow family. Part of me is like I feel the guilt of my culture, you know in our culture you follow your husband around. Whatever his job is, that's most important. I'm going against cultural and I'm going against a lot of things, but it just seems so natural to me that it didn't really have that much of an effect on me to say no.

[I have always been different] as far as my culture and the way that women are supposed to be. My Mom totally got me, and I think that's why it was so hard when she passed because when I was in San Diego that whole guilt feeling like you left her there and you pursued your own life. I went to counseling to kind of deal with that but what I learned was she made her choices, so that was okay and I let go of that feeling. I would

offer, I'd say come out here, and she'd say no because she knew everybody within a 5 mile radius of her whole house. The Hispanic cultures or Latino cultures that's not heard of, so for me change has always been I embrace it and I look forward to it. If I don't like things I start making changes. Life is too short.

[This change has been hard for me] I think because the time frame of having children. You hope that you're making the right decisions because I can say oh no I don't want but you know your body can only physically have children so there's that. Then I always think if I get to 45 and I do want a kid, go adopt a child or have a bunch of nieces and nephews who are having kids themselves. Start taking care of them, embrace them, and embrace your family. Part of me is kind of like are you serious, you don't physically want to have a child; you're saying that you've made your mind up. Then part of me is like I definitely don't want to bring any kids into this world, so that's kind of hard. The other thing is that I didn't have role models as yourself, women like that. I've had to find mentors throughout my life. I've had to look at other women, and I'd say that's why I want to do and that's what I want to be, or even men.

I think the only thing that had me a little nervous when I started school here was I that I've always gone to JC so this was the first time at a university at a university level. The first five weeks I took major notes. I was writing everything he was saying, you know. When we took our first exam, half the stuff wasn't even on there. I was sharing this with a young gentleman, he's a grad assistant, and so he's 20 something. I was like I took 9 pages of notes and he was like why, and then I said I don't know I guess because I wasn't sure if I could handle it on the university level. He was like why, he was just kind of like huh, and I was like well I've always gone to Junior College and this is my first time at a

university and I don't know if I can handle it. He's like you can handle it, and I'm like oh yeah I can totally handle it.

I think the more [self-efficacy] you have, the more that you will succeed or be successful because you're going to come across all kinds of obstacles always. Life is difficult, the more confidence you have or the more of whatever that strength is... The e [self-efficacy] thing. The more of that you have, I think the more that you'll push yourself out of your comfort zones and yeah I think you'll excel the more you have. What I mean by that is I've always known that I'm smart, I'm funny, I can be successful, I'm confident, and I can make hard decisions. I still wish I would've started a little earlier [the midlife career change], but would I understand it, would it mean as much, because sometimes I think it takes life experiences to understand what I know now. Could I have been that focused or would it be you want your law degree because of status and money?

Now I'm seeing it as it's really going to help me when I represent the underprivileged to know this, so that somebody doesn't say something to me and I go oh okay. It's like no I know better, or I know a different way around and you don't take it as face value.

*PARTICIPANT E Elise – A 35-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

Well first I'm going to start with, cause I've actually made a couple career changes before this even and so I know that doesn't really count because I wasn't the right age at that point but you can see kind of the reasons why I've made these changes. First of all my undergraduate degree I got at the University of Chico State University in Northern California. That was kind of like, you know I'm just trying to get out of college at that point so I picked something that I liked because I just wanted to be able to enjoy my

curriculum. I picked, after a bunch of majors; I ended up as Geography major, which I loved.

So I actually started doing, it's called GIS, Geographical Information Systems is what I started doing after I graduated and I did that for about four years and that's all very computer intense technical stuff. I started out kind of as a tech or technical person, but I would also do, part of that aspect was also a little bit artistic like making maps and stuff like that. I ended up moving to Las Vegas because of one of those jobs. I worked for the Bureau of Land Management, and did their entire computer mapping for them. This basically that was a term position and when it was ending it was very hard to find those GIS jobs. They're very specialized, they're like city, county, that type of thing which I don't know if you know anything about that but someone has to die before someone gets out of the city or the county.

I found through a friend of a friend, kind of randomly, I found a position at a commercial real estate company in their Marketing Department. They were looking for someone to do all of this competition mapping of, for instance, commercial real estate company might represent a CVS Pharmacy and that was one of our clients. So that was the type of stuff that I was doing. I was there for four years and during that time our Marketing Director was fired.

I kind of started doing some of her duties, just to fill in and I ended up being the full-blown Marketing Director because I really ended up liking that a lot. Getting out of the more technical stuff and into more interacting with people and getting out and showing my face and that kind of that, and that's when I kind of started realizing that I never thought I liked that type of thing. I always thought I was more of a logical, technical-

minded person, but then I realized I am more social and I can actually do that for a living. It's actually kind of social, so that's how I got into Marketing. After being there four years, I moved over. I was probably 26 or 27.

I had been there for a while and I kind of hit my peak in terms of learning curve so I started looking around and I ended up still kind of doing Marketing but also integrating some of the GIS in some of the really small real estate firms, with guys who all they did was buy land. I basically did all of that kind of stuff for them, like went out and mapped all their stuff and also did some of the Marketing and all that. But about when I started all that, I realized I really didn't like what I was doing. I had just kind of been doing, I basically liked my environment more than the job is what happened. I really liked the people I worked with, and I started to realize that I really didn't like the whole thought of working really hard and working long hours just so someone else could make money.

It wasn't that I wanted to make more money; it was just that I didn't feel that was fulfilling. That was right about the time after I turned 30. I turned 30 and this is when I started this other job, and right about then I started questioning more what's the meaning of what I'm doing. Is this building to anything, is this helping anybody in anyway, you know I just started to feel more, not just about okay I'm taking home a paycheck and not worrying about it afterwards. That's when I really kind of went into a, I would say a professional funk, like I wasn't depressed for myself I would just go to work and hate it. I think for a lot of people you have to really get to that point where you're just, you hit that low, 'til you hit your kind of capacity for that low until you are really ready to do something about it.

Work came into focus, like I really don't like what I'm doing and I don't like the environment. That equals being miserable, and the ironic thing was that I was making way more money than I've ever made at the time. I remember my parents telling me you're crazy, you're making the best money in your life and your miserable. I said obviously, and that's when I kind of had that epiphany of they are not connected at all because my happiness has nothing to do with how much money I make. It has nothing to do with it, and I always, I think when you're in your twenties and I think just society tells you that, that money equals happiness. So you really have to figure it out for yourself because for some people money probably does equal happiness but not for me. So I knew that changing careers, I was going to be taking a major pay cut for life but you know what, it just got to that point where I said that's not my priority. That can't be my priority, so I just kind of hit that spot where I said I couldn't do this anymore.

I did find another job, it was still Marketing, but it was back to a bigger company. It was still in a Real Estate field. It was basically a company that bought apartment complexes and converted them to condos, and they did a lot of intense marketing. So I'm like this will be really fun, it will be a little different; it will be a team environment. The first week there, it hit me so hard in the face that I hate this. I hate this so much, and so because I had just started at this place I didn't feel like I was letting anyone down and so I literally worked a week. I called that Friday and I said this will be my last day, and I just quit. I mean it was the most insane thing I've ever done in my life, and I just quit. My fiancé at the time was like; he was begging me to quit this other job for a long time. At this point I'm probably 32 when I quit and decided to go back to school.

I was really into nutrition and I actually really wanted to be a dietician but that wasn't offered at UNLV, so I had to really kind of figure out and make a leap of faith. I'm going to do something health related, I don't really know what but I'm going to pick a major and hopefully I get into the Master's program and I'll figure it out after that. So that's kind of what I did, I just said I'm going back to school and I'm going to figure it out. I'm going to get a part-time job and I'm not going to worry about what people think.

I think the biggest thing for me, I actually read this book its called "Finding Your Own North Star" by Martha Beck. In the book she recommends, she talks about your barriers to making a change so why aren't you making this change. She said a lot of people will say, people quote unquote people, will think x, y, z of this and people will think x, y, z if I quit my job or if I don't make a certain amount of money. She's like first of all I challenge you to list these quote unquote people. She said sit down and write a list of the people who are going to judge you for quitting your job for going back to school, for not making as much money. She said who are these people, who are the people who are going to judge you and who are the people who will support you.

I literally sat down and made a list and I was like, I realized everyone I know would be in the support column. There's no one that would judge me, maybe I wrote down two people that I really didn't care about at all, so that's when I realized it was all me putting up my own barriers. It was not about anyone around me, and when it came down to it when I quit and I went back to school everyone was actually like that's amazing that took a lot of courage and that's awesome that you're doing that. I mean everyone was so supportive that I'm like why didn't I do this a long time ago, it was all me, it was all my stupid pride that was stopping me from doing it.



I think it only happens when it's going to happen. I mean I do wish I had done it earlier. I wish I had figured it out earlier. I just feel like I'm one of those people who are kind of a late bloomer. I just got married last year at 34, which I guess is older than most people. I haven't had any kids yet. I want to do it. I was reading this book because I really needed something like that to tell me that it was okay, but there's a little exercise that she has her clients to and she writes about it in the book. She has this thing that's called a body scan and you sit there with your eyes closed, and trust me I'm not one of those people who does this type of stuff normally. I mean I totally support anyone who does things like this, but she has you sit there, close your eyes, and scan your body. I was like okay shoulders tell me what's going on, and I just started crying. I realized in that moment that I, and most women, try to shoulder all this responsibility that's completely fabricated. And I realized that I'm carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, like not letting myself do what I want because I feel like I have to do all these other things. It's somehow built into my being.

My parents are very conservative. My dad's always been about save your money, save your money, always put money aside. That's why it was so hard to quit my job because I'm like I'm going to have to tell my parents about this, and they're going to be so disappointed. My dad was military and you just don't do that. You just don't go I'm quitting my job because I have no responsibility. As soon as I felt like I realized that I'm carrying all this weight on my shoulders and there's no need to, and it sounds really corny but for me that was a big epiphany.

I started the Master's program [Health Promotions] at UNLV. I'm actually almost finished. I finish in May. I've been working on my graduate project, which is almost

done. It's been a total nightmare, but it's almost done and I've been working at the Nevada Cancer Institute for two and a half years. I think I was able to get that position because of my background in Marketing because I do outreach. I go out and basically talk to people and I do presentations and go and connect with other groups in town, like health related groups that have a similar, you know basically we want to get the message out about cancer screening. So yeah it's kind of related to marketing actually. It gets to be fun; it's for the benefit of people instead of money. The Master's program has been great. I've actually been in it for three years because I worked full-time the whole time. Well my first semester I wasn't full time, and then I went full-time. So now I've been working full-time and doing school full-time, so it's took a little bit longer than I would've liked but it's almost done.

I have pretty high self-efficacy. I can say that over time when you're in a position that you don't like for a long time then your self-efficacy definitely drops. I mean you get to that point where you feel like you aren't the person you used to be, can I really do this, do I still have it in me, so in terms of affecting the decision I think it did affect the decision. I knew somewhere in me was the ability to do whatever I wanted and be good at it. I can say that after the decision was made and I started on my new path, self-efficacy went up exponentially. As I started taking on new challenges and realizing that I could overcome them, it's really built up that ability to know that I can do anything that I set my mind to but it definitely played a huge role in making that decision and feeling like I could handle this. I have the ability to do whatever I set my mind to.

I know so many people who are just in these positions that they just don't like, and I try to tell them you can create your own reality. They just don't, luckily most of my

friends are pretty empowered women, but I definitely know of a lot of people and you know people you work with. You see people who are going through the motions everyday and they're miserable, and they're just miserable people. I'm like you can't be miserable. You're not allowed to be miserable because you have choices. This is the US of A, whatever, you can make other choices. You can go to the University of Phoenix online at night. I just feel like it's so important for people to realize that they hold their own power, so don't sit there and tell me you're miserable in this position that you're doing because you have options.

*PARTICIPANT F Frances - A 50-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

I'm 50 years old, soon to be 51 in June. Actually growing up, I never really wanted to go to college. It wasn't really something that I had planned on. I didn't even know what I wanted to do, but like some kids back in the seventies I found myself in trouble. I had my first at 16, and was going to go back and get, I didn't even get a high school diploma. I was going to do that, and I call the school and I had too many credits. There was no way, I didn't have anybody to baby-sit that I could be gone that long so I just got my GED.

I got my GED. I did get my GED right away like within a year. That I'm glad for because if I would have let a long time go by, I might not have passed that, but I got my GED. I proceeded to have 2 more kids. I had 4 pregnancies by the time that I was 20. I have 3 children, and I just you know raised my kids. Then they started going to college because we always impressed upon them how you're going to have to go to college. They would throw it in our face because their dad and I never did. They'd be like you guys have great jobs but it was because we were lucky. We just happened to have jobs that

paid very well, but we told them that's a one in a million chance. You might not have that chance and you won't have the education. All of my kids went to college.

I worked in the mortgage business. I started out answering phones, and I worked my way all the way up to Loan Officer, which now you have to have a degree in finance to even do that. I happened to be there so long, and worked my way up so that's what I did while my kids were growing up. When the last one graduated in 2004 from college, at first it was kind of a joke I said oh now that you've all graduated maybe I should go to college but I guess it had been on my mind because I kept thinking about it. I finally said I think I am. It was right at the time when it was the last minute to register for that semester, and I ran to the community college and did that. That was how going to college came about.

The background of that was, the reason I never aspired to anything because I was one of those kids that was emotionally abused my whole life and I wasn't going to amount to anything, I wasn't worth anything, and I think that was part of it. I was married to somebody who beat me up, and then I got well. I realized at the age of 46 that my mother had abused me my whole life like the movie Mommy Dearest.

I went to community college in Michigan, and I was doing really well. One of the things that she [my mother] did was she was in competition all the time, always, and I would just happen to say what I got on something. I always had to listen to when she went to college and what grades she got and how she graduated Summa Cum Laude and all this other stuff. Well it wasn't really college that she graduated that way, she graduated high school Summa Cum Laude and she only went for her 2-year degree when

she was 50 or 54. She was upset that all of her daughters made more money than her and she had been in the workforce so long, and that's why she went back to school.

I went back to school. I was still doing Loan Officer, still going to counseling, but I had gotten down to hardly any loans and I wasn't really soliciting. I just told my husband that I'm not going to do it anymore, I can't do it, and you have no idea what the job does to me. It was like I'd cringe getting up in the morning, and I thought it was the job but it was my mother. It was just the thought of having to listen to her again. We [my husband and I] decided we were going to move to Las Vegas, and Las Vegas we picked because my husband had worked 25 years for GM and he got laid off. For somebody that works in the factory, there's not much that he can do. During the time he was laid off, he worked for a casino in Michigan.

This was the only thing that made sense because they had a program for social work, which is what I wanted to do, and he could work at a casino. Actually I didn't start out wanting social work; I wanted psychology. One of my professors said, "did you know you could be a clinical social worker in less time than it takes to be a psychologist." That's why I switched to social work, so I could do clinical work. The further I got in school, the more I started thinking that I'd like to eventually teach and that when I got out of school I would go into the field and work in the field and part-time work at a college teaching it.

Eventually I would get out of working in the field and hopefully get taken on somewhere full-time, and then I could basically work for a long, long time. That's why I opted from doing the Master's to now just wanting to go straight through because while

my husband is working and willing to work to help support us while I go to school, I'm just going to get it done with.

In December of 2006, my mom died so at that time I lost not only my mother but also my whole family because at that point because my sisters were brought up the way they were where I was the scapegoat and I was always in trouble, they just believed that. They blamed me for my mother's death in the fact that I had not visited her in over a week and she passed away while at home. [My epiphany] to make this career change came about because it was mommy dearest. My whole life and all the things, all the stupid mistakes that I did, all of being with somebody that beat me up, because that's how I thought about myself.

I get my Bachelor's degree in May. I was supposed to have it in December and I flunked a statistics class, so I'll get that in May. I haven't heard yet, but I've applied to the MSW program. The reason I decided to quit my job, I said earlier was because it was just one more thing that my mother hassled me about. I hadn't really figured out anything at that point, and I don't even know when it was. It was just before I got my two-year degree there. Actually it was when she left, it was during that time that she came up with she was going to get her own apartment, somewhere in there is when I finally figured it out what she was or what she did to me. Then I screamed at her finally, and I never cussed at her or screamed at her, and that time I told her look I said to get the F out of my house and it was the first time I ever said it to my mother.

I was taking psychology classes there because I wanted to help any kids that I could to change before they were 46 years old. If they had this in their life, then they didn't have to go 46 years before they figured it out what was happening to them. That was my

whole purpose until one the professors said well you know you have to have a Doctorate, and they said well you know you can get Clinical Social Work and do the same thing as the Doctorate in Psychology.

Well as a social worker, they say you need to be over your problems before you become one. I feel like I've gotten to that point. I mean I actually almost felt like that once I made the comment and realized it, but I think that it's been since 2006 so 3 years that I've had in healing that. I know it was mostly my un-healing person, that could never figure out why I was so terrible or why people thought I was so terrible when I knew I really wasn't and how could I ever get that across because nobody ever thinks anything good of me. And I don't care anymore. I've gotten this 'I don't care' attitude. That's something I've always done in my life, if somebody says you can't do it, I'm going to prove him or her wrong. That's what I did.

[I believe that I have self-efficacy] to make this career change. It resulted from the changes and the things that I realized that made me have self-worth and self-awareness. Even though I may have done it sporadically here and there where I would insist on proving somebody wrong, but I never really believed in myself. I would say I was going to do that and usually if I set my mind to something, I'll do it, but I never had that belief in myself. After I realized what had been causing the problems in my life, I was able to stop the behavior that put me in those situations that caused chaos in my life.

I used to think why is my life so chaotic, everybody that I know; nobody has a life like mine. It was that idea that I was the one that created it because if I didn't have it in my life then I made it. So by either making the wrong decision and having something happen and so I finally knew that I could do this and there wouldn't have to be chaos or

there wouldn't be problems with it because now I know who's creating it. It was never an option when I went and started back to school. It was never could I do this. It was I'm going to do this, and I will get done and do what I want to do.

It was very easy at the time that it happened [my process of change]. There have been times in my life that I was searching for that, but didn't understand. Once I understood why I had never done what I wanted to do or had any beliefs in myself or always thought nobody else believed in me, it was very difficult. That's why I never made any changes. I mean I knew, you have those moments where it's like should I do this or shouldn't I, but you really know you shouldn't but you do.

Most people will make the right decision, not me. I always chose the wrong way. This time was the one thing that I did in my life that I knew was the right thing and when somebody asks me about going back to school at this age, without getting into the story of why I just tell them I was not ready to go into college until I was this age. I wouldn't have made it through because of all the other chaos. I would have never, ever made it through. I told my husband I feel for once in my life that I'm actually living and not just trying to make it through the day.

*PARTICIPANT G Gloria - A 40-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

The experience of making the change [midlife career] was, it was scary. It was something that was really scary, and it was also gradual because what I was doing before for 15 years. Even though it was a departure from where I originally started, you know I had always been brought up like you're going to go to college and you're going to be in the professional world. That was very much emphasized and then I ended up with a



Bachelor's degree, but doing a job that was definitely 180 degrees from that where I was service industry where people would assume that I was not educated or intelligent.

Even though I had come from a background where it was like you're smart and you're going to do this, I had been in this world for so long that I was like wow can I really do this and go back into an academic type of setting. That was intimidating. I was really unhappy.

I got to a point where I was really unhappy with what I was doing, even though I enjoyed it for a long time. It was fun, but it got to a point where it wasn't fun, it wasn't satisfying, I wasn't growing, and I knew there was no potential for growth. Looking at if I stay here doing this, what am I going to be like in ten years, and I would look at a couple of the girls that I work with who were ten years older than me and I looked and thought is this what I want my life to be. Then it was just gradual things that happened, like, well September 11<sup>th</sup>, which kind of shocked me into well wow I might have less time than I think. The world was changing, and I just had this sense that if I want to do something I have to start doing something.

I think that was probably about 1997, 1998, around there. How old was I then? I guess 30. I turned 30 in '98, so yeah right when I turned 30 I got married that year and I started to look at things differently I guess. I had quit smoking. I quit smoking right after that, and that might sound silly but that was a huge change. It was kind of empowering because everyone I worked with smoked, and when I quit it gave me a confidence like other people think it's hard and I did it, what else can I do kind of thing.

Then I started training in Martial Arts, shortly after that, which was really empowering. It was very goal-oriented, and I think that's what made the difference for

me as far as giving me the confidence and the shift because it's very goal-oriented. There's always another goal, and you're always working on the next belt, technique, or perfecting what you have. It's always, always, always moving towards something. That was what really made me make the decision to go back to school and get back into it, like those people aren't so much smarter than me. Then I still, the first step was still not going straight into the graduate program because I had been out of school. Well plus the department didn't even exist. The Counseling Department when I had got my Bachelor's degree in '94, that department wasn't even there.

[My Bachelor's degree] is in Education, Secondary Education and English. I was originally a Psychology major. That was my first interest. In fact, my school counselor was the one that kind of influenced me, or planted the seed or whatever, with the whole Counseling, Psychology/whatever. That had a big impact on me. I was seeing my school counselor when I was like 14, 15, and going through some teenage stuff and that always stuck with me. She'd made a big difference, and I always thought I'd like to make that kind of difference for other people.

[I never wanted to teach] I hated it. I barely made it through student teacher. I despised it. I mean I thought someday I might teach, like at the college level or something like that. It was secondary, so I thought, and I was pretty young at the time, and I thought if I get seniors or something for my student teaching it's going to be more intimidating. I got the lowest I could get, which was middle school. It was like 6<sup>th</sup> graders, but still it was a terrible, terrible experience. It was horrible. I knew I didn't want to be a teacher, but I did think that when I thought about making this change that well I already have this

and it would be easy to go back and take my exams, fill in whatever I need to, and then be teaching within a year.

I looked at the UNLV website and I was reading about the Counseling Department, and I thought wow that sounds perfect because in the meantime with all the bartending I had become interested in addictions and people who were hurting themselves with drinking which was bad but the gambling was worse. I saw so much with just people saying well you're never going to see me again I'm done, and then they'd be back the next day going back and forth between the ATM. They'd have their wife or husband calling, and they're like tell them I'm not here and lying. I was seeing marriages fall apart because it was a local place where I worked, so I saw the same people over and over. I really got to see the effects on their lives.

When I read about, at the time it was the Community Counseling Program before it had switched over, I had thought that really sounded like something that fit with what I was going for and what I wanted to do. But it was weird, like I had APA that I had never heard of. I'm really glad that I did it that way, and plus you know I needed letters of recommendation and this and that and I didn't really know anybody. My bar manager, am I going to get a recommendation from him, what does that mean? Fortunately it was Dr. Burnham; I ended up getting a letter from him for the program.

The 117 class was being taught by a student in the Marriage and Family Program who was really cool and ended up helping me a lot, and also wrote me a letter and helped me. I was like oh the GRE, I'm so scared, and he helped me a lot with getting prepared with that. So it worked out great because there were 2 of my 3 letters, and it ended up building my confidence. It opened my eyes to some of the things that had changed, like APA

style. That was a long process, just doing the application process to taking the GRE and writing all of the essays and what not. Getting all that together, that probably took a good 6 months.

In the meantime I was still working in the bar, and it was getting harder and harder. It was that feeling like God I can't go back and do that another day. Also, the bar where I worked at had gotten bought out, I don't know exactly what that time period was, but I had worked for the same person. In fact, the last bar I worked at, I worked there for like 11 years but the guy who owned it he also owned the very first bar I worked at.

[I was a bartender for fifteen years] so there was all this transition stuff going on and who knew what was going to happen with that. That was another thing that made me think that whoa this is not, you know who knows what's going to happen and I might not have this job and here I am in my late thirties. I don't want to be out looking for bartending jobs, and it didn't sound like a fun place to be. Then I had to continue to work while going to school and stuff, which was a challenge. It was very, it didn't leave much time, you know working full-time, full-time classes, and then when the internship starts the second semester of the program.

Luckily they [my boss/bar] allowed me to tweak my schedule a little bit, so I was going in at 7 o'clock in the morning. They switched the shifts, so I was really lucky. I got to work like 7 to 3 and be able to do stuff in the afternoon, and they switched my days off for me so I could. When I was doing internship in community counseling, I was able to do Saturdays over there, so I was able to get Fridays and Saturdays off. It was hard. It was hard. It was a lot of hours, but it was just knowing that there's that goal-oriented thing again. Okay I have this goal and all I have to do is get through to this period of

time, and so it was totally worth it. It was stressful and it was challenging, but that was the good thing about it. It feels great to do something that's, to do things that are scary and do things that are hard.

I always felt like I don't belong here [bartending]. Maybe I always felt somewhere, even if I was having a good time and I was and I was drinking a lot for a time and I was smoking a lot of weed, and it was comfortable and easy but maybe part of me was always like this is not where you belong. The money was a big factor too. Not so much at the end because the bar industry and the whole local bar scene, I was not making the kind of money I was making in the beginning. That's for sure.

[My Master's degree] is in Community Mental Health and I work at the University of Nevada School of Medicine. It's mostly on the phone, but we do have groups. There are groups twice a week, which I get to do and sometimes people will walk in and you get to do face-to-face which I great. It also made me interested in distance counseling just like Dr. Dale has a certification as a distance counselor. I want to get that so bad. I think that is awesome, and also Larry Ashley is doing a project with the kids in Ely. I think that is such an incredible opportunity because of the type of technology.

[During the process of change], I think I let fear hold me back a lot. I was always afraid, afraid of I don't know what, failure or being judge or I don't know what. I think I did let fear hold me back a lot. Well luckily my husband made a big difference too because here I was making this change and there's going to be a money difference here, and if he had not been supportive and taken a different way like you know we can't really afford to do that right now, that would have been an extra challenge so he made it a lot easier. He helped to give me confidence to get past that fear.

[My change could not have happened at any other time], I definitely think that things happen for a reason or whatever cliché that it is, but I do feel that way like all the experiences that I had helped me to be better for where I am right now. If I had gone straight out of high school, college, boom, boom, boom, and then I'd get into the field with no life experience. I have this belief that everyone has this ability and it is, it's all about the self-efficacy. It's all about what you tell yourself. You either say yeah I can do this or no I can't. If you tell yourself no I can't do that or no I'm not good at that, whatever it is, like I've never been athletic so I can't be an athlete.

Of course if you keep saying that then that's the way it's going to be. It's the self-fulfilling prophecy. If you have this belief that she can do this so maybe I can do it, then whatever it takes to get to that belief in yourself and the belief that it's possible, I think that makes all the difference, all the difference in the world.

*PARTICIPANT H Harmony – A 42-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

I'm 42-years-old. I'm in school full-time in the Master's Program at the School of Public Health. Hopefully I have two more semesters to go. The way classes are going, it's indeed two semesters. I came to college when I was 36-years-old. I started my undergrad when I was 36, and it was the best decision I ever made. Up until that time I had been working full-time since I was 17, mostly in Health Insurance Administration. It was customer service for the first 10 years of that. It was high-demand, very low control and fairly low wages, type of situation. There was a lot of stress for not a lot of compensation, but that's the training I had and that's the type of jobs I was able to get basically.

During that time, I watched most of my friends go to college, graduate, move on to other jobs, and I just didn't financially have the means to go. I really didn't have the time.

I worked about 50 hours a week, so it just wasn't sort of in my sight at that time. Fast forward to age 35, well about 34, I decided that's it, I won't go any further in this particular area or really many others that I was looking into job-wise without a formal education.

In 2003, I came to school full-time. I started at CSN for the first 2 years, and I absolutely fell in love with academia. I really didn't expect that I'd be able to make such a change, so I was involved in a couple of internships and I'm involved in one now. I work at the Jean Nidetch Women's Center here on campus. They do wonderful things for people, especially non-traditional older students, in terms of re-entry services. I'm just thrilled to be, and my hope is to make a change job-wise into the nonprofit world. I'd love to end up at a place like Jean Nidetch or somewhere that's serving the community in that way. My concentration is Environmental and Occupational Health. I really am focusing on Occupational Health because of my personal situation with work and realizing early on that when you have very little control over your career, it absolutely can affect you in a variety of ways, psychology, physically. That's what I'm studying in the School of Public Health.

[One of the reasons for me not coming back to school] was financial but it was absolutely about confidence. I'm the first person in my family to go to college, so I didn't really have that push. It was more of a focus in my family to get out of high school and get a good job. That's what I tried to do, but I really didn't think I could do it. There was something in me that thought it's just not for me. I kind of hit the proverbial ceiling in my area for earning and potential for growth work-wise. I really just had to change my mind about school and why not me, why wouldn't I belong in an academic atmosphere?

When I came to school, I had wonderful instructors. I was immediately immersed in the class environment. Much to my surprise, with each semester came more confidence, more of a realization that I could not only go to school but I could also find other opportunities for employment, and that I wasn't stuck just because of my resume read for the last 15 years or so, the same type of job.

[My Aha moment] was a culmination of things actually. I really began to feel the effects, mentally, of that dead-end feeling. I started to get very anxious, and I even went through a very unfortunate period of time but it became a catalyst for me. I had a 3-year period where I was panicking, and I think it was because I felt stuck and I knew that there was potential there to make a change but I just didn't know how. I just began exploring opportunities for jobs, and I found that every time it was going to take a Bachelor's degree or higher to really get my foot in the door in another line of work or to even move on in the line I was in, which I was very ready to leave at that time anyhow.

I felt, almost immediately after starting school, that it was the right time for me and all of that waiting and experience and frustration, and there was good obviously that came along with that as well, I learned a lot and I met a lot of great people, but I really felt that this was the time. This was the right time for me that I had come from some experiences that made me appreciate it more than I ever could have. I knew that I had to make it happen, so the better I did and the more connected I felt to my instructors and my subjects, the more I was encouraged to press on.

I think that's interesting too that we have ideas and I think this is a very Western thing. We have ideas of when things should happen in our lives, oh I should be here by this age and I should be there by that age. I think that is to our detriment sometimes



because things will come when it's time for them to come, if we're prepared and ready for them. I really, really was.

[My career change] was mostly positive. There were times, in terms of school, when I felt like I wasn't certain that I belonged here. I thought maybe it wasn't for me, maybe I should just go back to work because we revert back to those old ideas that we have and those old messages that we've told ourselves for so long or that maybe someone along the line told us that you should be focused on making money. It felt frivolous sometimes to be trying to make a change, at almost mid-life when I started the process.

[Another catalyst that pushed me to change] was a relationship that I was in for 11 years, from 19 to 31, and it was really, really good and very positive. In the 10<sup>th</sup> year, I married him though I didn't feel that I wanted to necessarily get married. Everything was going along fine, we had bought our home and we were doing well, going along just fine. After 6 months of getting married, I knew that it was not going to work out. I made a decision to, after we were married a year, to divorce him. That was huge for me.

That was right around the time that the panic was sort of happening, those episodes, and it was getting serious. I was seeing a doctor, and I thought that something was really going on here that I'm not looking at. It made me realize what I absolutely require, not just from a relationship romantically, but from all of my relationships including the one with myself. I really started to look at what I need, what I have to offer, which was a lot more than I was giving myself credit for, and so that sort of began the change in my confidence.

I gained so much more than I ever lost. It was a real catalyst for going to school and looking at other work opportunities and life opportunities in general. You know how they

say you need to prune the trees so that they will continue to bloom and grow, and there was a lot of pruning in those years. [Now that I am 42 years old], I see a woman who is confident. I really see in myself what I have to offer the world, what I have to offer not just as an employee but also just as a person. I have, within myself, the power to make positive changes in peoples' lives. I've now come to a place where I understand how I can make that happen and how it works to get to those places where we want to get to. Before I was sort of at a loss, and I thought what's the way out of a dead-end job or feeling like you have no control over your circumstances in your life or work or both. I think it's all about confidence, I really do. That's the big change is that I feel like a confident person and I feel my own worth. That's huge for me.

Because the experience was so positive, getting my Bachelor's degree, that I was encouraged by so many people, my family, my husband, my professors, the folks that were former professors like during the first 2 years of my undergrad who became friends, they said you absolutely have to go and get a Master's degree and you can't stop here. I felt like that was the next, natural step, and I'm just so thrilled that I was able to do it. I just loved it so much.

[My confidence level rose when I entered the Women's Studies department for my undergraduate degree]. It had everything to do with it. My confidence was already on the rise after my 2 years at CSN, just because I felt like I could do the work. When I came to Women's Studies, I understood just naturally what was being talked about, the ideas about challenging social expectations, gender roles and expectations, that was not a problem for me. Those were things that were already a part of my thinking and my worldview anyway. I felt incredibly empowered. The longer I was there, the more

support I got, the more people I met. It was such a supportive environment, especially for someone older.

That's one thing I've learned, if you see an opportunity, grab it. Even if I'm unsure about certain things, I just found myself raising my hand for projects whether or not I felt entirely comfortable. Sometimes I felt really uncomfortable, but they've been the most rewarding experiences. You just put yourself out there and see what happens. It's been really positive and very empowering.

In the beginning, because it's what I knew, I do not think I had [self-efficacy]. I sort of believed that it was the best I could do, and that's a really tough thing to get out of. I had to really change my mind about my own abilities and my own self-worth. Why not, why can't I branch out and move into other types of work? I really had this idea that I had been doing it for so long that that's the only type of job that I could apply for or if I applied for other jobs I wasn't always going to get called back for them because of my lack of experience in other areas. Unfortunately for a long time in the beginning, I had an idea that that's sort of my lot in life. I really had it in my mind that it was going to take formal education to get me to the next place. I think in terms of finding out that I could learn new things, which were first and foremost what I really got out of my first year or two of school, just the idea that I could learn new things.

I'm going to say around the time that I finished my Bachelor's [was the time that I developed confidence in my abilities]. That was huge for me. I mean I became so identified, and obviously I still am because I keep bringing it up, as a student. I'm very identified right now as a student, but that's not the only thing. It's not like I replaced my identity as this sort of cog in a machine in the corporate world to being a student, but it

really has opened my eyes to all of the things that I can do and I finally understand that wow I am very flexible and I can learn a lot of different things and understand them. I can sort of deconstruct things, and question a lot of things that I maybe didn't before.

*PARTICIPANT I Ingrid – A 44- year- old Midlife Career Changer*

My first profession job was in health care, on the management side of health care, not doctor's offices or hospitals. It was very natural to me, so I got promoted very quickly. I really enjoyed what I did. I had a good career, and then Company X came in to buy the company that I was working for. It was a public company at the time, and they wanted to buy it. It was a much larger company and a lot of onus on the stockholders, every penny. Decisions were made that were hard sometimes because in my position, while I didn't affect patient care, I could with the quality of provider's that went into patient care and I wasn't willing to negotiate down for cheaper people.

Some of that became struggles because it was kind of too corporate for dealing with patients' lives. So while I very much enjoyed what I did, I never got out of voice, a lot of out of voice from administration but I got a lot of out voice from the physicians that I worked with. It was very fulfilling on that end, and I actually left at the top of my game. I was doing very well, but I was just stressed all the time, all the time.

Dan [my husband] and I would come home around the same time, and I just found myself asking him for some space and some quiet time. I just needed to detox because I was so stressed out. I noticed that after a pattern of doing that, I didn't like that. You know, you want to come home to your sanctuary and your safe place and the person you love, and who wants to come home to somebody who puts their arm out going I need

some space right now. It was becoming consistent, and I really suffered from migraines which we found out later were stressed induced migraines.

As much as I enjoyed my job, as much as I enjoyed the service I provided and the fulfillment I got, it frightened me to belong to a corporate structure for the rest of my life and never have control over my life and to always, always answer to somebody else. At that same time, my parents were getting older and my dad was 12 years older than my mom, so I thought I was starting to get stressed out and get unhappy and I wasn't the happy me at home because I would bring it home and then I'd just be a vegetable until late.

I am forty-four years old and for about fifteen years, I was in corporate health care. I stepped away from that, and a friend of mine used to run the Meadows Mall and she had had late in life 2 children and didn't want to be the Meadows Mall manager and try to be a mom. That was a hard struggle for her, so she stepped down and became a Mary Kay sales director and she shared with me the opportunity. I thought well okay I couldn't do the consultant thing for long because that would just bore me to tears. It was a great product. I used the product and loved the product. All the while, still being discontented because it wasn't my calling.

It wasn't a natural fit for me, but it was a great opportunity. If that fits your personality and your drive, but it never really fit. My dad passed away and my mom got settled in. She had Polio, so she had leg issues and can't drive. She's had surgeries and I need ultimate flexibility to take care of her. She had major work done for a whole year after my father passed. After she was up and around and pretty mobile, as mobile as mom can get, I thought okay I'm discontented here, I'm discontented. I thought I need to do

something that uses my skill level and things that I enjoy, so long story short, I opened up another business. It's called HJW Business Solutions, after my father's initials.

I dedicate my services to nonprofits and I believe it. If I don't believe in your nonprofit then I'm not going to be part of it. As a Christian, I want to further God's kingdom so every nonprofit client that I have, they're all about that in some form or another. Some are taking care of disadvantaged children, at risk children, family therapy counseling, doing mission trips in Mexico, and they're all just doing wonderful things that are so opposite of the corporate mentality I came from. I'm thriving under that. I love that. It's like I don't even care how much I make. [My goal is to open a non-profit of my own] for assisted living for seniors, and for the intellectually disabled. I have a huge passion for those two people groups. I would love to do that, so I've been working on that project too.

My 'aha' might have been my husband in my ear all the time. He knew I had a passion for elderly people. That's always been my passion, and he always said, we were friends for a long time before we got married, you need to open a nursing home and you need to do something with old people because you're not using your passion and you're not using your gifts. We've been married over 12 years and I think I've just now started to listen to him because he's right more than he's wrong. It might've just been him saying for the hundredth time, "why don't you, this can't be worth it and no paycheck is worth that kind of stress and it's just not worth it so why don't you do something with old people?"

The day I resigned is the only night I cried because I was walking away from everything I knew, my comfort zone, not knowing what my future would look like,

knowing I was, well not taken away from God but that I had my future in my hands. It was under my control. How was I going to steer this little boat now? I think it was just a timing thing. I don't think I woke up and had a huge 'aha'. I can tell you now that this big corporate wheel does not influence me, that I have a lot of little 'aha' moments and new ideas excite me.

[I was able to make this change because] I have an incredible husband who said I'd support you no matter what you do, whatever you want to do. When I came home and said I think I want to walk away, he's like I'm behind you whatever you want to do, remember we set ourselves up so if one of us wanted to exercise an option then we could do that. I realized that's a blessing that not a lot of women have. I don't take that for granted.

I was always very independent spirited, I didn't get married until I was 31 and in high school I didn't have one of those cute little Hope-Chests, I didn't have my wedding planned. I knew I'd go to school, I'd get a career, and then marriage would happen later if it happened. I didn't need it to happen. I figure a man's got to be an enhancement; he can't take anything away because I've got a good thing here. What's happened is that once I exercised that option and was allowed to figure out who I am kind of in a new world, I never liked to define myself by what I did. In fact I never I rarely told people, unless they pressed, what I did because people will just make assumptions based on what you do for a living a lot of times. I didn't want that.

I wanted to be appreciated in life for who I was, but I found myself becoming a little homier. I've actually become this softer woman. I learned to nest a little bit more. I learned to be quiet and still a little bit more and spend more time with me. So the woman

in me likes who she is today because I think I'm more balanced and well rounded than I was part of the corporate wheel.

[In my old career], I was making a six-figure package, and I'm just so glad that he [my husband] wasn't all about the money. I mean he makes a great income himself, he really does. [This process of change] was rather difficult because when you're driven to be out of the house at 7 in the morning you have a very driven schedule. It was hard trying to figure out how disciplined am I going to be. What time do I get up, what do I do when I get up, do I take a shower when I get up or do I wait until later, those little things are huge. Do I clean one room in the house a week or everyday a different room? That process was hard, trying to figure out balance. I was in my late thirties when I quit my healthcare profession. I was a sales director for five years, and I've been doing this for a couple. I resigned as a director, but I still have a couple hundred couples so I just mail their stuff everyday.

[I believe that self-efficacy played a role in my career change] I would say absolutely it did. I know what my skills sets are and I know what my skills sets are not. You know what I mean? I don't think I could go out there and just do anything because I'm not skilled in everything nor would I be natural or good at everything. I know that God has given us certain abilities and I know that school, education, our up-bringing, gives us abilities and so I probably have a strong sense of self and what my capabilities were so I could in fact do quite a lot. It was just what that looked like, I wasn't sure.

[My husband knew I was discontented when I was working for Mary Kay], he said, "this isn't you and this isn't for you, why aren't you focusing on serving old people?" He's like "that's your passion, you light up when you talk about old people, why aren't you



doing that.” I could not walk away from the sisterhood. I’d never had girlfriend time before. When you’re working with the boys all the time, I never had girlfriend time.

It was probably the timing because I had never dreamt of walking away from corporate. You get this degree, it’s what you do, and it’s who you are. You go to work every day for somebody else and you use your education and you grow and I had a variety of jobs because a lot of seemed to come natural so I got promoted very quickly. I would’ve never thought about leaving and doing something on my own. During those 15 years I wasn’t looking for anything else. I was being fulfilled professionally and I was happy. Why look for something else when you’re happy? It was just that I needed a different quality of life. I needed a better quality of life, and I think that just started to slowly layer itself on me and build up. I would’ve never thought about having my own business.

[My next evolution] It would be to completely match my own nonprofit at a level that would not allow me to service my current nonprofits. So everything that I’m doing for them now, I’m always keeping in mind how do I easily transition this to somebody else? My next evolution is to run my own nonprofit and provide assisted living and care for elderly and the developmentally disabled. I just want my own baby. I want my own nonprofit. I’ve decided to get there, I’m just a little fearful on what that looks like. I’m putting too much energy into what if’s or what’s going on with the economy, what’s going on with the budgets, what’s going on with spending and grants, and I’ve allowed that to set me back. I have changed and I’m much more relaxed and kind of free flowing. It’s evident that I enjoy life more instead of being part of that machine. I did not know it at the time, but I had to get out of it to recognize it. Life is very good. It’s very balanced.

*PARTICIPANT J Jackie - A 41-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

I'm forty-one now. Okay so going way back when I was eighteen and left high school, I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. I had a place at the university to study Spanish and Linguistics at Bachelor's level, but I went off traveling for a year. When I came back, I was just fed up with studying and decided I didn't want to do that anymore. I just wanted to work for a while. I ended up, first I tried to get into Journalism and worked as trainee reporter for two years and absolutely hated it. Then I just ended up doing secretarial and bilingual secretarial work just because I had the skills I had learned typing in shorthand while I was doing my Journalism training. I had those skills, and I need the money to pay the rent basically.

I always felt like a square peg in a round hole, and I never intended to do it forever. I just kind of ended up carrying on just because I needed the money and couldn't quite work out how I was going to make a change doing something else. I did this secretarial work right up until I think my late twenties, like twenty-six or twenty-seven. I always felt like I hadn't achieved my potential at all, like I was working for people who I had as bosses and I'd be typing and just thinking I could do a better job than you. I was really frustrated because I felt like the job I was doing didn't say anything about me as a person and it wasn't what I had chosen. It was just something that I had fallen into.

I was so bored. I was bored stupid with what I was doing. I did a lot of long-term, temporary assignments just because I wanted the freedom to be able to travel whenever I wanted to. Basically I was just working in order to make the money to pay the rent and finance my traveling and stuff like that. Things that I thought, I knew I had to go back to college and get a degree basically because I had looked into all kinds of jobs and

everything that I thought would be vaguely interesting to me needed at least a Bachelor's degree. I felt like I had missed the opportunity to get an education when I had the chance. I thought of how to go back to college and how to finance it. Those were the difficulties for me. So there was a lot of regret. I felt like I had made stupid decisions and really messed up my future at that time.

[The college system in the United Kingdom is very different than it is here in the United States], the last two years of high school which are optional years, some people leave at sixteen, but if you stay 'til you're eighteen then you have to do what are called A-Levels. Most people do anywhere between two and four subjects and basically you spend those two years just studying those subjects. I did Spanish and French, and that's all I studied for two years. It's really a lot more specialized and when you graduate at eighteen then you have to have achieved certain grades in your A-Levels to get offered a place from the university. [When I turned eighteen], I opted not to go to the university and wanted to travel instead.

[When I decided to go back to the university at the age of twenty seven], it was surprisingly easy because I had got quite good grades in my A-Levels, and although that had been a few years previously, the college that I eventually ended up going to I had to do a couple of tests and interview in Spanish to test that my Spanish skills were still up to scratch. I had to write an essay piece in Spanish, and we had to write an essay on Linguistics in English. Then obviously I had two interviews, one in Spanish and one in English. They ended up on the basis of the interviews and the tests and my grades from high school, and I got a place.

The college itself, I was really lucky because it turned out it was through a really good friend of mine who knew that I was really frustrated and really wanted to go back and do something but couldn't really afford to. She found out, she was studying Pharmacy as a mature student and the college next door to her did a special program for mature students where all of the classes were held in the evenings, which is quite unusual in the U.K. I actually know that it's more common here. This college specialized in doing that, so all of the classes were in the evening so you could still keep your day job and attend classes.

I signed up for my Bachelor's degree, and I would go to work then leave work and make the hour and a half to two hour journey into London, two or three evenings a week to go to my classes. My classes ran from six in the evening until about nine. I would get home between eleven thirty and midnight, and then have to get up at six in the morning to go to work. I did that for four years. I was just so grateful because I kind of, up until that point, felt like I had completely missed the boat and had really had very little chance of achieving what I wanted to achieve. I just saw that as such a wonderful way to get my degree. I put up with being very, very tired all the time.

[Another event that prompted me to make a career change] was I had this feeling of regret and kicking myself for all of those years. I think part of it was, the other thing was that I had split up with a boyfriend, a very long-term boyfriend. That had been a couple of years, eighteen months actually, before I signed up for my Bachelor's degree. I kind of in some ways always thought that maybe one day I'll kind of meet someone and get married, and then I'll be able to go to college. There was one day that I just realized that no I'm just going to do it for myself. It's no use sitting around and waiting for something to happen or putting that responsibility on somebody else. It's something I've got to do

for myself. I'd say the Bachelor's degree that was kind of the start of it. That was four years and then it was another two years Master's degree before I eventually said what do I want to do now. That was the beginning of the whole path.

I did that for four years [going to the university] and it was really hard with all the traveling. I absolutely loved the studying. At the end of it, I did a lot better than I thought I would do. I ended up getting a First Class Honors, which is like how you guys have some weird Latin term for it here {Magnum Cum Laude}. I didn't know at that point quite what I wanted to do. I thought about teaching and I was also thinking about Speech and Language Pathology because I had done a course on Neuropsychology and Neurophysiology as part of my Linguistics course, which I had absolutely loved.

I actually spent a year just after I had got my Bachelor's degree, carrying on with my job at the Police and looking around trying to get information about different careers. A friend of mine who had been on my Bachelor's degree with me, she was also interested in Speech Therapy. She arranged for a couple of the national hospitals around where we lived used to do introductory days for people who were thinking about medical-related careers. I went to a couple of those with her, and that's when I decided that speech therapy was what I wanted to do. I actually also went to a couple of introductory days about teaching, and didn't really feel like I liked that as much. I kind of, throughout that year, I took that year as like a break from studying but also just to gradually think about what I wanted to do and make that decision. During that year I applied for Speech Therapy and for the Master's in Speech Therapy it's extremely competitive.

If you get the place then you also get all of your fees paid. You also get a bursary that also pays for your living expenses too. That's why everyone wants to do that. I mean I

went for interviews at the two colleges that I applied for and I got a place. When I applied I had still been kind of undecided and I thought well I'd apply and see what happens, probably won't get in. When I got in I thought oh that's an opportunity too good to miss. The funding allowed me to actually give up my full-time job and study for Master's full-time.

It's kind of ironic that I kind of started off and made that step myself [going back to school]. I felt a lot better about it because in some ways I was doing it independently. {The hardest part of my process of change} was I think I've always had a reasonable amount of confidence in my academic ability because I always did really well in school. It was a long way and it was tough to go back to studying after all that time. Mainly it was tough to apply myself and actually manage to find the self-discipline to sit down and write essays on weekends when I could've been out partying. It was especially hard when the weather was nice because the weather wasn't nice often in U.K. I think I gradually built my confidence up because whenever I submitted assignments, I did really well right from the beginning. The minute I started on my Bachelor's degree I knew that it was the right decision. I felt that all the way through all of my studies.

I think if I had gotten in [to college] when I was eighteen, I think I would've been much more interested in partying and boys than I would have been in applying myself seriously to my studies. In some ways, the timing, even though I sometimes still look back and think I wish I would've done it earlier because now I'm in my forties and I could've achieved so much more if I had been ten, fifteen years ahead. In some ways when I look back and look at the events in my life, I can see that it might not have worked out at all like I would have planned. [This change happened when it was

supposed to happen in my life]. I guess there was still some regrets, in terms that I feel like I kind of wasted a lot of years doing really dead-end jobs that took me nowhere. On the other hand, I did other things in that time.

When I was doing my Master's degree, I had a few moments of doubt when you sit through a really hard, stressful course and there were a few times when I wasn't quite sure whether I wanted to do Speech Pathology. I knew that in my heart, whatever I was going to do afterwards, I had to finish that Master's because it was funded and I had given up my job because I was doing it. Developing the discipline to study and get all the work done was really hard because I'm a very big procrastinator.

It was really hard to find a job in the first few months because I wanted to work with adults. With Speech Pathology, most people either specialize in pediatric or adult. I wanted to do adult, and there was a lot of competition for adult jobs in the U.K. especially at beginner level. By a weird twist of fate, they [an agency] sent me to a security psychiatric hospital to work as a P.A. to psychiatrists because I had my medical training from my Speech Pathology degree. It turned out that I went there for about six weeks and worked as this guy's P.A., and it turned out that they were desperate for a speech therapist there.

I ended up working as a secretary for six weeks, and then they offered me a six-month contract to do speech therapy there. That was my first job. It wasn't quite what I wanted to do because I wanted to start off in a general medical setting and this was a very specialist setting, but it actually worked out really well. I really enjoyed it and because the patients were long-term and it wasn't quite as hectic as a general medical environment, so I had plenty of time to develop my therapy skills. I did that for almost

two years, about eighteen months. During that time I was in negotiations about the job in the U.S., so that's how I ended up coming here.

I really like it here. The only thing that I would say is my job, my bilingual job kind of worked out interesting but it's with children and it's kind of helped me worked out that I definitely do prefer working with adults. I have been doing some per diem work with adults too, so the combination of what I'm doing has been really good. It's just a really fantastic opportunity to work in a different country and get that experience.

I think I always knew that I was capable of pretty much most things that I would put my mind to. I think I've always been quite self-confident in that way that I never kind of doubted that if I put my mind to learning a new career or learning new skills or learning facts and studying, I never doubted that I would be able to do that kind of intellectually. The main challenge for me was the self-discipline. I think that has been something that has been very beneficial that I developed. I developed that self-discipline partly from my studies, but there were a couple of things that were actually around the same time that I started studying. I also really took up lots of keeping fit and exercise, and that was to me the same kind of thing. . I don't think I ever doubted my ability so much. I think I've always been very much a person that's felt that I could do pretty much, if I set my mind to something then I think I can do it even if it's really difficult and I'll have to work really hard to do it. [I do believe that self-efficacy was involved in this change for me].

I think I always knew that I wanted a career instead of a job. I feel a lot more fulfilled as a person and a lot more fulfilled intellectually because I always felt I always had this nagging sense of yeah you could've really achieved something. I think I feel a lot happier with myself as a person because I've studied and been through that process. I think I also



discovered that I actually really love studying. I would think back to that first year and think yeah but it will go really quickly, and it really did. I learned that even if something seems endless and difficult, if you carry on with it then you could finish it and succeed. I think that's something that I had struggled with previously. Doing my Bachelor's and my Master's was really good for me in proving to myself that I could start something and follow it all the way through to the end and not give up no matter how hard it felt. That's something that has really changed the way I operate now. I just feel a lot more fulfilled and happy as a person.

I think I have that confidence because of my success with what I've done in my studies and I knew that I could come and try it and give it my best shot and it would either work or not. If it didn't work then I could come back, so I think there have been a lot of personal determination and self-discipline and my ability to know things intellectually to put them into action or knowing them intellectually and being complacent. That has bearings more or less on most areas of my life.

*PARTICIPANT K Kuuipo – A 46-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

I've seen this more as a continuous change [my process of a career change]. When I was 8 I decided I wanted to be a writer, and the other thing was to study languages and travel the world. I wanted to find a way to fund that and to be able to do those two things. I really loved literature and I also was a musician and sang. I even sang professionally, which horrified my parents. My father was a lawyer and my mom graduated high school, but whatever I mean they made good. Their whole thing was you have to have a profession that you can fall back on. They still, because of where I grew up which was the South in the sixties and seventies, was they expected she'll get her education, she'll

be accomplished like Miss Beauty Queen. They put me in beauty pageants and all that stuff. They thought she'd have this to fall back on if her husband leaves her because that was a common thing I saw. I mean I worked for my father a lot and did a lot of divorces, and the trophy wives who get into their forties and they left their wives. That left an impression on me.

I was like okay well what can I do to do both of these things, and I was going to do music but my father was like absolutely not. He was like you're going to starve, so I said okay I could become a teacher of some sort. I thought what can I do, I'll become a language teacher because where I grew up, which was Louisiana, I'm half Cajun and I have relatives who spoke Cajun, we had a program exchange with France, Belgium, and Quebec. I went on and went to college. I was going to be a Biology and French major at the time. You know how freshman are. I started double majoring in that, but I really hated the cutting up animals. Also I got married to someone who was of Syrian descent at the time. I want to travel and see the world because I was really interested in other cultures and I picked up languages and accents really easily. I did that, graduated with high honors and all of that, and my marriage was falling apart because I was like twenty-two. That was the classic thing women from dysfunctional homes often do is get married young to get away from the situation.

I just wanted to travel and see the world. I was even thinking about doing Middle Eastern Studies. I had a lot of interests because the curse of versatility. I could do a lot of things, and everyone's like you can do this, you can do this, and I was young. I said no I'm going to go off for a year, and I had applied to AUC, American University of Cairo, to study Arabic and also in France. Eventually I decided to go to France. I could be a

nanny there and I knew French. I studied Arabic and Farsi in French at one of the national universities there, which was a fabulous experience. I have a lot of friends from that area, and I made a lot of friends there. It was just a magnificent experience.

I applied to twelve grad schools and got accepted in ten. Stanford offered me a five-year full ride Fellowship, and I loved California anyway. The West is more my heart and I have an interest in a lot of Asian cultures, so I decided to go to the West because I had fallen in love with that back in '77 when I was a teenager.

In some ways academia was very foreign to me because it was very middle-class, very proper. A lot of behaviors I grew up with were not readily accepted. I had to mask who I was. Academia, the one thing was it gave me this leisure to read and write and think, but at the same time I felt like it was very repressed and not very colorful and not joyful like in some of the instances I grew up. It's hard to explain. I had to fit myself into this little mold and if you didn't, you were judged as being, so I learned and I acquired those rules.

In the meantime I met my now second husband. It was very interesting because he was also having a similar problem because he's Assyrian, which is a Christian minority from Iran. His parents were highly educated and he was born in Stanford Hospital. His dad got his Ph.D. from there in Physics, and he was a professor in California. His mother was an ABD in Near Ancient Eastern Studies.

We're more down-to-earth [my husband and I] and there's a lot of posing in academia, especially in the upper echelons. I really was having a lot of problems with that, so we both stopped out for a while. I was actually an administrative assistant for the Physical Planet at Berkeley for a while, and they were trying to keep me but I really hated

that job. You get treated very different in that status. I saw that and I'm like forget this I'm going back, and it was still nagging in my mind that I want to get that prestige Ph.D. thing to say I've made it. I went back. He decided to go back, but he went to UCLA because that's where he got accepted. He didn't want to go back to Chicago, so he went down to LA for a year. We did a commuter relationship, which was really difficult. I was teaching five days a week in the French program. I went out to LA and did my research [for my dissertation], finished up and got a job back in Louisiana. There was always that, given the legacy there, I felt like I needed to go back and give back to the community. That was what my mentors had done too.

John, or my spouse, was finishing his thesis. He was not happy, and I was ambitious. I wanted to climb the ladder. I got a job at UT Arlington, much lower load level and tenure track. They were all tenure track. It was a better situation because he still didn't have a job. He [my husband] went to Texas, to Arlington. Its funny people often get in your business. They were like what's he doing following her, so we were always fighting against the grain. I was told I couldn't have children and I really didn't care if I would have children, so we were happy with what we were doing.

After a couple of years, I started burning out. The pinnacle of this was that I got a plum job, like one of the top jobs in French at Penn State. Their department was like top of the line for French. It's one of the few ones that had it's own French department, usually it's the Foreign Language department which I've been in. I got there and I'm like okay I've met an end date and I negotiated. I got a fabulous salary and I even got a job for him, but he was teaching the same amount of courses as I but for one-third pay. I was

supposed to be on the fast track and I just burnt out. I was like is this all there is to this, and I really started feeling a lack.

Basically my heart is an artist's heart. I love intellectual stuff, but without color and beauty and art, it just gave my life meaning. It gave my life structure and understanding. My husband John got a job offer in Lubbock, Texas in Latin American Studies, which is his field. We discussed it and he said come on down, you can write and do that. I had started on working on research for a novel and it was gnawing at me. I was like if I don't do it now then I'll never do it and I'll just get caught up in this tenure track and I'll keep writing academic stuff and never get to the creative stuff. I felt like it was killing a lot of my creativity at that time, what I was doing.

We went and that was an ethnographic experience. It was extremely isolated. I mean it was very interesting and I learned a lot, but then I started freaking out because I lost my status. People started treating me as the professor's wife, instead of someone who had just, and he couldn't even get me a job so there was part of me that's like I can get him a job but he can't get me a job. I started looking for a job there. I was like I just can't stay home. I was like I'll write and do something else. I ended up, ironically now, there was a coordinator for the Honor's Program there and I applied for that and got it. I was in that for two years and that was another eighty-hour weeks. I really discovered I hated administration, but I kept getting promoted.

I wrote my novel and was thirty-six at the time of doing so. Then I was like okay screw it, excuse me, but I'm going to do this. I was tired. I was so tired because I was a workaholic. Whenever I would work, I would work eighty hours. I would just work myself sick though. That's something else that doctor's said, I have high blood pressure.

It was out of control. I did that until; let's see, 2001. When my husband got turned down for tenure, he got approved up 'til president's level. I had actually gotten a job offer at Beamington to be the Languages across the curriculum and International Studies director, but there was nothing for him there and economically it was dead. We were like we both need to have incomes, so Vegas and it appealed to my sense of adventure. It's a wild and wacky place. My husband got tenure at this university and we have been here seven or eight years. We've been here since 2001.

It's a much more cosmopolitan place [Las Vegas]. We belong in a place like this, especially given our backgrounds and stuff. I was not employed the first semester, but I had taught Women's Studies at Texas Tech for a couple of semesters. I had a good relationship with them. They put me in touch here and I was like okay I'll teach part-time until I decide on what I'm going to do and find my job.

In the meantime, I started teaching in January 2002 in Women's Studies. I felt like I was home. It was just great. In the meantime I thought I had cancer or menopause, but I found out that I was pregnant. I was four months pregnant and didn't even know it. I took the summer off because I had to be on bed rest, and my daughter was born prematurely. I took another semester off in the fall, but then I came back and I was teaching in French and Women's Studies.

I was doing this and then in 2004, I had my second child. We found out that my daughter had an Autism Spectrum Disorder. That threw me into a tailspin. I was off in fall of 2004 for my son because we were like what are we going to do. She wasn't communicating. We couldn't communicate with her. We were doing research on all of that, so we were dealing with that and I came to see my chair here who has been a big

mentor to me. I said I'm going to have to quit and she said no don't do that, so she convinced me to stay part-time and I'm glad she did. I think that saved my life and I was also teaching French for grad students with a lot of English and History and really loved that too. Then it came 2006, things were stabilizing out a little bit for her and a visiting assistant professorship came open in the department and she [my mentor] was like, "why don't you apply for it." I hadn't thought that I would be whatever.

The interesting thing was that [getting the job as a visiting professor] re-sparked my interest in research and we started doing stuff on Global Health Policy. We've had two articles published on that plus one on Autism Spectrum Disorders here in Nevada. In some ways, what seemed to be catastrophic was actually a blessing in disguise and it's got me on my current path. All of the threads came together of all of these wonderings. One thing that I've gotten really interested in, well one is the healthcare system, two is the education system especially with respect to the disabled and especially women or females with disabilities because there's a whole field with that, the other issue is environmental degradation or environmental impacts on human health.

To that end, depending on what happens, I've been renewed for another year. I finally feel like I've found what I'm supposed to be doing, but it took a lot of knocking heads and quite frankly I was fortunate that I had a partner who supported me in that and could economically do that for a while. We lived pretty simply. We liked to read and write and be heard, and that's basically when we're not here and our kids are great. They're both really fast academic learners.

This has been the best job I've ever had in my life. I don't know what else to say. I'm forty-six. I think that's true for a lot of women but for me one thing was this whole

beauty myth thing. When I was younger it was like you're so beautiful and people would think that you weren't smart because you have good looks, and I got caught up in that a lot too because of my socialization about capitalizing on that. I knew here you need to build this up to, but I think confidence too as you get older and you start seeing other people saying things and you're like why can't I say it. It's kind of nice because it's like everything is coming full circle. The nice thing about taking the time off too is that I have a lot of time to read things that I was interested in broadly. I'm very interested in comparative religions and spirituality too. That was something that was during my wondering years, and about ecology and environmental studies.

I think it was gradual [my gaining and building my confidence]. I don't think there was this eureka moment, but if I were going to pinpoint a pivotal moment then it was when my daughter was diagnosed. I've evolved in my thinking about that too. A lot of people present it as a tragedy. I mean it really depends on how severe it is and she's got great gifts and she's really special and different and actually she's really smart. I try to look more at; well then it was like okay I didn't die. I think that things that may seem like a tragedy or seem like a crisis often show you how strong you are. You always start putting things into perspective.

[My level of self-efficacy] only came about in I think the last ten years when I was thirty-six years old. There was a lot of questioning before that. I mean a lot of the belief in myself came from what was reflected in the eyes of others or what others were telling me because otherwise I had a very low sense of self-worth for an extremely long time. I had many years of psychotherapy which [allowed me] to deal with my past. I'm a survivor too of molestation and that's something I've opened up about it to my students.



Back then I was not open about a lot of my experiences or even my family. Both of my parents had substance abuse issues and I basically took care of them. A lot of my ego was torn down, especially by mom because she was very proud of me but she was also very jealous because she didn't get to have the experiences that I did.

I think that becoming a mother and taking care of other people, I've realized all of the skills I had too, especially going through what we [my husband and I] had gone through. We couldn't afford to get fancy tutors [for my daughter] and they didn't have enough tutors in the system, so we had to do things ourselves. A lot of times doing these things yourself, as hard as it is, you realize I can do a lot of things and no one else is going to help you so you have to make due with what you've got. That may seem hard, but it can actually be a wonderful thing as long as you don't give too much and then you crumble. It's a balancing act.

*Participant L Lesley – A 39-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

I'm thirty-nine right now. So going backwards, my B.A. my Bachelor's degree that I finished when I was twenty, that was in Psychology. That was always an interest of mine, but then I took graduate courses in Marketing and sort of got into that entire sort of thing.

My first job was as a marketing rep for a flooring company, and then I wanted that marketing, advertising, and promotions. I was interested in all of that, and I think I thought it would be a glamorous type of thing. I worked for a promotions company in Toronto that did all of the promotions for Coca Cola. It's tedious. It's not that glamorous at all. Finally I broke into advertising, which advertising is hard to get into. By that point I was in Toronto.

I'm from Montreal originally. My university was McGill, the university for my Bachelor's. I grew up in Montreal and my first job was actually in Vancouver for two years. That was as the marketing rep for Armstrong Flooring, then over to Toronto. I moved to Toronto and I worked in promotions and then finally got into advertising, which was hard to get into but I got in as an account exec. I was working on; at that point, it was Fuji Film.

I then got into an international advertising firm, which was D&B&B, which is based in New York, but there's some around the world. There was one in Toronto and I got on the Proctor and Gamble account, which when you're in advertising it's good to get on one of those consumer's goods accounts. Crest and Ivory Snow were my brands. I worked at that for a few years, at that agency, that ad agency. I met my now husband who's from Australia. He was traveling. He was a professional golfer, so he was touring in the states in Canada and we happened to meet. He kind of would be coming back and forth, and then we made a decision to move to Australia. That kind of triggered my oh I want to get into something different. I had a good job. I kind of climbed my way up. For the age I was and where I was, I was making what I thought was fantastic salary and all that sort of thing. It was okay let's go to Australia. How old was I? I think twenty-seven or twenty-eight I guess.

I moved to Australia. My husband family wise and where we were, it's the Gold Coast. It's South of Brisbane, so not near Sydney. The Gold Coast is where everybody in Australia goes on vacation, so it's a fun spot with the most beautiful beaches and that entire sort of thing. So there we were and for me to get a job in advertising, I'd be going to Brisbane. It would be like an hour commute kind of thing for me. I started interviewing

at all of these ad agencies in Brisbane. I think I sort of took six months where I worked in a shop kind of thing, where I just worked at clothing shop and went to the beach everyday. I kind of took that time off, and then I started doing the whole interview process and going back and forth to Brisbane and some big ad agencies there.

They liked that I had all this North American experience and ad agency experience and all of that. It was going really well, but after the second or third interview, I started having panic. I ended up being up at night going oh my gosh I don't want to do this. As it got closer and closer, I realized, and I've never had that feeling. I started feeling sick like I really don't want to do this. I think I felt like I was going against the grain of my personality kind of thing. I just stopped the whole process and I think I started working at Bally's Shoes.

I applied to the university there. Griffith University was on the Gold Coast and they had a Psychology program. I was just like phew; yeah this is what I want. There was a big gap because I graduated when I was twenty and then up until that point going back into the Psychology field. I was twenty-nine [when I applied to this program]. In Australia, it's a bit different. You do a three-year Bachelor degree. You get your Bachelor's of Psychology, your B.A. in Psych, and it's a three-year program. I had to do a fourth year, which is like the Honor's year. I had to do that, which I had completed and there was a small thesis that you had to do. It was pretty intense in a one-year period, you know. Then I worked at different, I worked with autistic children and did all kinds of little jobs. Then I entered the Master's Program there. After a year I decided I wanted to transfer into the Doctorate Program, so I applied and got into that.

[My husband and I] had gotten married in '92 and then had our first child in '93. I was missing my family. My family was in Canada. I had a couple of people in the States, but mostly in Canada. My mother was ill. She had been ill for a long time with Alzheimer's disease. It was really hard being so, so far away. I was only getting home every two years kind of thing within a seven year period. I wanted to move to at least the United States, which is closer to Canada. We started the whole visa process. I had a new baby. We decided to move and this took a year getting the transfer, getting the U.S. visa, and all of this, which is very traumatic. I put my program on hold.

I had completed all of the coursework for the Master's, a Master's in Clinical Psychology, except for one subject, which was a stats course and my thesis. They [the university] said, "okay that's fine; you can do it from the U.S. It's so complicated." We arrived here and I became pregnant right away with my second daughter. I was going through a tough pregnancy and all that, so basically I was never able to continue it. We moved from Australia to Palm Springs, and we arrived Thanksgiving weekend so the end of November of that year 2004.

Literally a month later I found out I was pregnant with my second child. It sounds strange, but it was culture shock moving to the U.S. after being seven years in Australia and coming from Canada. It was very different for us, very, very different. Adjusting to a whole new place, a new climate, it was so hot there, and my second pregnancy was kind of tough. I managed to take two more courses during my pregnancy at the Chapman University there. So many years past by that you're kind of, even if I was able to try to do it, the university there said well too much time has past by. Then we moved to Las Vegas two years ago, so what was that? 2007.

I started the process of applying to something here. In a way it's starting all over. Probably my first choice would be to do the Clinical Psychology Program because I completed, like I said, all the coursework except for one course. At UNLV they only offer the Ph.D. program in Clinical Psych, they won't do just a Master's. I kind of thought well I should just do something and get something, a Master's, so at least I could get a job. I would love to do a Ph.D. That's kind of where I am. The reason I wouldn't commit to a Ph.D., well I don't feel I can, it's just I don't know how long we're going to be here. That's where I am now, and it's hard to just get it done, for a Master's, to get in there and get it done because I've got two kids and a husband who works sixty, seventy hours six days a week. He's just not physically there all the time, so it's hard to juggle everything.

It's a lot harder. I regret just not finishing the Master's in Australia. I really regret it, but I had my first baby and I was a million miles away from my family. They [my family] were in a different country from me when I had my first child. I think I was a little bit freaked out that year, so all I did was take care of my child and then we started the visa process to the States.

[With my career in advertising], I just felt I was going against the grain. I just felt like I could do it and I probably could do it sufficiently well, but I'd never felt completely comfortable doing it kind of thing. I thought yeah this is not as fulfilling as I thought. It turns out I loved it [going back to the university], standing up and teaching twenty kids at a time. I realized you force yourself into these situations and it's like wow you discover things that you never thought you'd like but you really do. I was in love with the program. I left advertising just because I didn't feel it was really gelling with my

personality. I never felt the way I felt entering the Psychology department, like I really, really enjoyed it and I got something out of it. It was just personal satisfaction.

I never really felt that in advertising. It was just a job and I didn't have this great love for it kind of thing. I think it was, yeah I don't want to spend the rest of my life doing this and not feeling completely comfortable all the time. I guess now you think of people, many, many people, who do jobs that they aren't completely happy with. They're just doing it because you've got to live.

At some point I'm going to get this degree, and at some point I'm going to get a Ph.D. even if I'm fifty. At some point that will be done, and I have no doubts about that. I know it will happen. It's funny because when I was in my twenties, I never ever thought I'd be a stay-at-home mother. Never in a million years did I think that. I was never like that's what I want to do, but then you have children and it's like oh I'm not putting my six-month old in daycare. Even your one or two-year old you can't. Also circumstances, we moved from here to there to here. There's been a lot of change in our lives and stuff.

I want to complete my studies and I definitely want to work. I also think it's, I've got two little girls, I want them to see that mom does, because they say daddy goes to work and now mommy's been going to school but mommy does the shopping. It's like I don't want them to think that gosh. My mom worked. My mom was a nurse. I want that for my little girls. I want them to see that mom does something important and works and earns money as well. I want that message for them.

You know when you're even just taking courses and it sounds silly, but you receive a good mark at the end of the course or you get an A, it's like you're validated a little bit. You've been staying at home a few years, raising children, which are, super important

and all of that, but it's something that I did and I got commended for this. A professor saying you've written this really well or you're a good writer, it's like oh it's so nice to have compliments for your abilities. I miss that because I hadn't had that for a few years. I'm thirty-nine, but I know a lot more of who I am. I've definitely got more confidence than in my twenties or mid-twenties. [Having my daughters] has definitely been a sacrifice for me personally. I'd love to be working and studying and doing my own thing as well, but yeah I think it's been important that I'm there during these young years.

[As far as my decision to change careers], I think that once I made the decision I became more confident in actually making the decision. I had no doubt in myself at all. So yeah I guess that's confidence or feeling like I have self-efficacy. I don't think I'm going to be the world's best kind of thing, but I don't doubt that I can do it and that I have the skills and abilities and I'm capable of doing it and well. I think I have the idea of that before, like while making the decision to change. I think it was probably a little bit more like I don't want to do this advertising. I thought I want to go back to Psychology and that kind of field. When I got in it, it felt so right. That was great. I've never doubted that I could do it, it's just a matter of circumstances and life getting in the way kind of thing.

*PARTICIPANT M Maile – A 41-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

Currently, I am forty-one years old. The career change, I think at that time, I was married. I had been married five or six years. It was right after I had my first son. He's going to be twelve next week, so twelve. I was working full-time as a supervisor at a production facility. It was TJ Maxx Warehouse and it was a distribution center for all the retail locations. I had been there seven or eight years. I don't think I remember the exact numbers, but I had been there for several years. Prior to being pregnant, I had been very

successful in my career. I have a background in Merchandising. I have an Associate's Degree in Merchandising and Marketing Fashion. I have my four-year Bachelor's degree in Business.

They had hired me as a merchandiser. I did a lot of training in Boston, back East where our main office was. I was flying to Boston one or two or three times a year for training and I was moving up pretty fast because I had just gotten married a couple years before that. We had no kids, no responsibilities.

I was doing, I think, really well in my career, but I was starting to get burned out because we hired low education level employees. The job was more manual labor, packing, clothing, and putting tickets on the clothing, so very labor intensive. I was wrapped up in my career and I was traveling, it was exciting and I got to learn a lot and do a lot. Then I started seeing how we were treating our employees. Right around that time was when I got pregnant, so I had my first son and it just totally shifted the way I looked at the world and the way I looked at everything. I had been there a lot of years by then, and I had gotten to know the people.

I was actually working and watching an Oprah show and it just hit me one day that I can't work there. She was talking about something about your life, one of her shows about your life, career, and the thing I got out of it was if you do something you want to do then the money will come later, don't let finances be what's keeping you in a job that you hate. It has to be like you're making enough money that it allows you to pursue that thing that you love doing.

[I decided to resign from this company] and that is when I ended up going to Family-to-Family connections and I really liked working there. It was very family-friendly. We



were helping families because it was like those neighborhood offices where family connections are a piece of it and then they had counseling. It was Lifeline at the time. Lifeline was a program that provided clothing and formula and diapers to children. They had counseling services and they had all of these direct services like food and clothing, that type of thing. Family-to-Family was also housed there. It catered to a Spanish community, a Hispanic, Spanish-speaking community. They had ESL classes and it was really good because they could go to school and they would drop off their kids at daycare. I really enjoyed it and I had read up a lot with my first son, but I had changed careers because I had gone into social service. I hadn't decided to go into early childhood education yet, so I was kind of in that phase.

[At the age of thirty], I went back to work at another social service agency. I started working at Head Start. They do education, but they also do social service. They have a big parent education component and like the classes have parent involvement, which is really big. They have a parent award. They have a lot of resources. I remember during Christmas we would do food baskets for the families. Plus you had a Pre-K going on in the classroom, and I liked it too because there was a lot of parent participation.

I had my second son and I was six weeks pregnant when they told me I was going to have a high-risk pregnancy because I was having problems already. I was six weeks pregnant and the doctor put me on bed rest at six weeks. I was worried the whole time. When they did the amniocentesis, they told me that there was an eighty-five percent chance that he had Spinal Bifida, so I was on the Internet reading about Spinal Bifida. I think I was kind of prepared for it that he was going to have a disability. That's when I

got more interested in early childhood. I was really reading up on it [in reference to my son's disability].

[Once my son was released from the hospital after a month], I took him to Early Intervention. Early Intervention is zero to three for children with disabilities. You have to qualify. It's kind of like an IEP with the school district. You get an ISFP. You have to qualify and they have to meet certain delayed standards and they're tested. Some children automatically qualify. If you're preemie, if you're born so many weeks like twenty-six weeks is the cutoff, weigh less than two pounds, if you have anything diagnosed like cerebral palsy or Down syndrome, if you have anything diagnosed then you automatically qualify.

After I had worked with a developmental specialist for my son, I decided to work for Early Intervention and was offered a job. I worked there in that position for a few years. I want to say maybe like three years I was in the position. During that time was when I decided to go back to school to get my Master's. I had wanted to go back to school to get my Master's. By then I decided I liked the field and I wanted to go back into Early Childhood and I wanted to do early intervention. It was kind of nerve-wracking going back to school after ten, fifteen years. I got my Bachelor's back in, I must have been twenty-four when I got my Bachelor's, so ten or fifteen years went by before going back to school. I actually got divorced before that because by the time I got done with my Master's I was divorced.

I think I had been thinking about it [getting a Master's] and then I got to where I was a family specialist and I realized I couldn't do any other job function without a degree in Early Childhood. After family specialist you can move up to a D.S., but you have to have

an Early Childhood degree. I think I felt like I couldn't do anything until I got that degree. I had already been interested in the field, and I had wanted to go back to school but I was raising the kids by myself under a lot of stress and I was just like this is not the time. I was thirty-eight when I entered the Master's program.

I think probably what made me want to go back to school was a combination of having my son with a disability and hitting that plateau at work where I wasn't going to be able to do the kind of work that I wanted to do unless I had the degree. That's what made me want to go back to school.

I think that was more of my moment to change careers [when my company started to get more political after the birth of my first son] and I think everything kind of led up to the eventually getting the Master's. What is funny is that when I married my husband, and he even to this day reminds me, that I refused to marry him unless he would agree to move back to San Francisco so I could finish school. So in the back of my mind, I always had wanted to go back, but just kind of the way things worked out, you get married and have kids. I did finally go back to school later.

I really liked school and I think it's a culmination of the idea. My kids were my whole life, but when they were with their dad, I would just sit there and stare at the walls. I'm like okay I need to find something to fill all this time. That's when I was like okay I'm going to get my Ph.D. when I'm done with my Master's. I think it gives me a lot of positive feedback getting good grades that I'm getting from somewhere that I wasn't getting anywhere in that point in my life. A lot of energy was coming back from that.

[My process of change was very hard]. It was hard with the kids. I think what I was surprised with was how hard my family has been because when my husband is not in a

good place and I help need help with daycare or whatever to go to school or get a project done, I fall back on my family. I think most of them don't think that I should be going back to school. Its traditional Hispanic family should be home with the kids. My parents did not want me to go to college. They wanted me to get married and have children, but I didn't listen to them. My family never planned for me to go to college. My mom told me right before I was leaving, "you're not going to make it so don't go." She said, " it's a waste of time and it's not what we Hispanics should do." I just didn't listen to her.

I guess the hard part [of this process] is that it is just time consuming. I do think it cuts in with the time I have with my kids even though I try to focus and do it whenever they're with their dad, a lot of it spills over. I felt like that short-term loss would be better in the long-term when I get my degree and I have ample time. When I got this job [a teacher for CCSD] then I get off way earlier and I have way more time for them. This semester I have one class so we are doing so much more stuff at home than we ever did. This was the payoff I was looking for because by next year I'll get a better job and I'll be making more money and have more time, which I would've never gotten if I hadn't gone back to school. I felt like yeah we're going to give up a lot short-term and my kids didn't have a choice in that, but I think we'll be better off long-term.

I think that after the divorce I couldn't have done it. I was at such a low place with the divorce, and what I didn't mention was that the divorce had resulted because my ex-husband started to verbal abuse me and my children and then I realized how hard of a time my son was having. I didn't realize how much it was impacting him and it was kind of toward the end of my services with Early Intervention when the problems started. I didn't get divorced until way later, but the problems started there and I remember now

that my developmental specialist would bring the pamphlets on domestic violence because I think she saw the warning signs and I was in it, so I guess I didn't see it. He never actually hit me, but I felt that I was in danger so I left.

What was really hard was, I had a decent job and I had my convertible and I was driving my two kids and the next day I had nowhere to live and no money. He closed out all of my accounts. My son was in a private school and the tuition check bounced. I had no job and I probably hadn't worked for a year and a half because I had been at home with the kids. I was driving to get help and you're supposed to go to Catholic Charities. I'm Catholic from a big Hispanic family, so I think I stayed married a lot longer than I wanted to because I didn't want to tell my mom I was getting divorced. I think that all kept me at a certain place too. After a while I got back on my feet, I got a job, things started to smooth out as far as financially, then that's when I wanted to go back to school. I knew it would be hard because I had the two kids, but I kept thinking it would be worth it.

I had read Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Affective People. I did not realize how much it impacted me, but it changed how I viewed things. I read it again at the Ph.D. level for one of my classes and one of those things is you have to make goals. When I checked my goals against my last goals, I was like eighty percent. You also test each component I think. Some of mine were really high like the visionary one because I think I really took it in at that age. It kind of stayed with me and I realize now that that's kind of just how I view life.

I think that I've fallen into believing that you can accomplish that type of thing through whatever. You can do whatever you want to do and all that positive stuff. [I truly

believe that self-efficacy] helped me through this process. I think it did. I think I've had it since I was in my twenties and it kind of became a way of life. What was interesting in our Ph.D. was our Leadership class; we'd read that book. As soon as I saw it I'm like it's interesting to read now and what really surprised me is reading it with my kids in mind. Now it's different when you look at it with two kids in mind and how I want to be able to teach them those things.

I needed to go back to school or else I wouldn't have been able to do everything for my kids. How effective are you as a parent when you're not happy with yourself and you're not getting that satisfaction from life or whatever? I was thinking I needed maybe even a break from them. Maybe I couldn't handle them and in my mind, I'm doing something constructive by going to school and bettering our lives.

*PARTICIPANT N Nairobi – A 47-year-old Midlife Career Changer*

Currently, I'm forty-seven. I was a clinical psychologist. I was doing that for twenty-two years altogether. Four years were in Community Mental Health, two of those four were in In-patient Mental Health. I went right into private practice. I saw kids, marital, families, and depression, anxiety, that's about it. I didn't do any pain stuff or phobias. My partner did all of that. I got my undergraduate degree in Psychology, so with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology you can't do anything. So what did I start doing? Oh I got my very first job at Goodwill Industries in the kitchen working with mentally retarded kids. Actually they were adults, not kids. What I did was I was a Voc Rehab therapist, where I would get ten clients at a time. What I was doing was I was training them how to get a job. Somebody would place them and then we would follow around. They were working

in McDonalds, back of the kitchen cutting or something, but I got that job because of my experience in the restaurant business. It wasn't because I had a Bachelor's degree.

After I did that that was in Pittsburgh I took a real quick job at Montverde Hospital. I did that for seven months I think, Voc Rehab, but instead of training I was more out in the field doing the placement stuff and paperwork. I didn't see the clients, I did paperwork. I barely left my office and I was buried in paperwork all the time. That was when I decided to go back and get my Master's degree. My grandmother had died and she had left me some money to go to school. I hurried up and got in the Clinical Psychology program. It was maybe a year and a half, at that. You could be licensed in the state of Pennsylvania at the time of the Master's degree. I went real fast. I wasn't doing anything else.

Actually I forgot a whole piece of my life. After I graduated, I moved to Denver. I worked in Fort Logan in an RCC, Residential Childcare Facility. It was a group home for girls from thirteen to eighteen. That was when I started counseling. That was more of a counseling job, so you were actually the primary counselor for however many girls. I did that for a year, and that was when I came back. I got tired of Montverde and Voc Rehab stuff. I had taken the ASBAP to go into the Air Force. I took the ASBAP's and talked to the Air Force.

They were going to take me down to officer training school and do all that. I was all ready to go, got out there, getting ready to enroll. I was doing it as a Second Lieutenant and they changed the entire story. The papers that they gave me to sign were not the same. They couldn't promise that I'd ever go to flight school. They couldn't promise me anything after officer training, and that wasn't what they had said in Pittsburgh. I took a

job in Fort Logan. I bailed and said I'm not doing this because you guys will send me to Afghanistan or some shit and I don't want to go. I went to Fort Logan, took a job in Fort Logan, and did that for a year. Then my grandmother died and she left me money, so I moved back.

I went to school. It was a quick program and when I was done with that, during that time was when I was working in In-Patient Mental Health as a Mental Health Tech. Really what I did was admissions, discharge, paperwork, group therapy. Basically I made sure everybody got up and ADL's were done, stuff like that. As I got closer to getting the degree, they took me over to Out-Patient Mental Health and I started doing individual therapy. I did that until I graduated, and then when I graduated, at the same time I had been working crisis for the county. It was twenty-four hour crisis. I had met Wendy who was the psychologist up in the pain clinic. She also was going to move to Pittsburgh at the same time that I was moving. She said hey do you have a job and I said no. She goes, "why don't we open up a practice", and I said okay sounds good to me. That was what we did and we started meeting physicians, drug reps, other psychiatrist, and psychologists, just trying to get referrals. We got hooked up with all the insurance companies because at that time, that was like in the late eighties, and at that time HMO's weren't huge yet. We spent a good two years just building a referral base and getting hooked up with the HMO's and stuff. It was still okay.

What it ultimately came down to was the insurance companies dictated therapy to the point where after we were there sixteen years and over the course of that time, they would tell you well I'm sorry this person has such and such insurance and I can only authorize one visit. You're sitting there going well what's the use of them coming



because then if I say they're suicidal, I want to see them one more time this week and then I want at least five follow up visits, it was like a bartering thing. As HMO's got bigger and bigger, so initially it was the management of the cases and that you had no authority over that, and as a result you found yourself buying more liability insurance because you were just sure that someone was going to sue you.

I just wasn't interested in running the business, and I was the one running it. Wendy was much better at being social. She was great with the drug reps. She was the one if they were having the golf outing, she would go. She would have a dinner meeting at night. She loved to do all that stuff. I hated that stuff. I didn't like it at all. She was awful at money, so she did all that sort of stuff and I did the business end of it.

We worked really hard the first amount of time and then there was a period of time when we were just coasting. We had referrals, we always had clients, and things were going good, but then she decided that she was tired of it too. She wanted to play. She didn't like dealing with the insurance companies and so she started seeing fewer and fewer clients and taking more and more money. I told her Wendy I'm picking up the extra hours so I'm taking a set amount. I didn't want my income to be like this, I wanted to know how much money I was making, so that's what I did. I just said to Jeff [my husband] I'm tired and I don't like it anymore. I wasn't having fun and it wasn't about the clients. It was just too hard and not fun. I want to go to work and go home and if I ever see a client again, it's going to be for free. I'll never, ever counsel for money ever again. I had no idea what I was going to do. It wasn't like I had a plan.

I was just turning like thirty-eight, thirty-nine, something like that. I was in my late thirties. I had no plan, zero plan. He [Jeff, my husband] had a good job and we didn't

have huge bills. We didn't have kids, so we didn't have any of that. It wasn't like okay now what are you going to do, like if I had been home with my parents then they would've been like what's the plan. He really didn't put any pressure on me to have a plan and I had always bartended through college. My grandfather owned a bar when I was a kid, so I had been tending bars since I was like this. I said well I'm going to get a job tending a bar, so that's how I started to get out of it. I took a job three days a week or so, but working lunch at a bar close to home and then working the rest of the days. You don't just close the door; you have to dissolve the business slowly. I had said to him [my husband] well I'm just going to cut back my hours and as Wendy keeps wanting to take more and more money and I see less and less people, there will be ultimately no money. Then we'll be able to dissolve the business and we can refer the clients elsewhere. It was apparent to me that she didn't want to do it.

I took a job tending a bar and I loved it. Those were the best days of the week. You could actually see the difference in my disposition. I'd get up singing and dancing on the days I was going to go work in the bar, and then the days I had to go into the office were horrific. It was just like oh this is bad, and then as I realized that this is inevitable, it got harder and harder to go into work. I just said that's it and I think that I'm done. She said oh good I think I'm done too. I tended bar until Jeff got transferred to Las Vegas in 2000.

At that point, I would've been perfectly happy the rest of my life being a bartender. I was just like I don't need a career. I had a career, had money, had all of that, and it didn't mean anything to me. Just suddenly nothing mattered. It was like that shift between I'm a kid or young adult and I'm living the way I think I ought to live or have the goals that I

think I have to have based on how I was raised. My mom always said you have to have nice stuff; you have to keep it nice, everything has to be orderly, you have to be professional, you have to successful, and you have to be all those things.

As a result it kind of equated to what we had. We had lived in an upper-class neighborhood. We had drove nice cars. We had nice furniture. We hung out with other professional people and did that kind of thing. When we sold everything there and left, I said I don't want to do that, I don't want that kind of life. I want to be happy and I want to be calm. Whatever I wasn't, I wanted. I just didn't want to be a rat race. I didn't want all of my life to be a rat race. That's what I felt like it had become, so I was going to tend a bar but I couldn't get a job here [Las Vegas] to save my life.

[I worked at a few neighborhood establishments as a bartender] and found out that is not what I really wanted to do. I decided I was going to be a teacher. So I went and I took like a semester of classes. I took like three or four classes and I loved being back in school again. I absolutely loved that and I had some really cool professors. It was just that I hadn't been in school for eons. It was much different. Even when I was in college, I used to sit and listen and this was more interactive and small. It was small classes and I really enjoyed being back in school. We had practicum teaching and I very quickly decided I didn't want to be a teacher. I was interested in learning, but I couldn't be a teacher. The kids were driving me nuts.

At the time I had adopted Alex [my dog] and we used to go to the dog park three times a day. That was my life. I'd sit at the dog park and talk to people. I met Jane Williams who was a professor down in Special Ed. I was just saying man I don't know what I'm going to do, I'm not going to go back and get another Master's. For a minute I

thought that was temporarily insane. I was going back to get another Master's degree when I already had one Master's degree. I had started a Doc program years ago when I was working with Wendy. I had started taking night classes in Pitt, but it started to be too much. I couldn't do everything I was doing and classes too, so I had dropped out. I remembered that I loved being in those classes and I thought maybe that's what I need to be looking into, a Ph.D. program.

Just no more than two days that I had been thinking that, I met her in the dog park. We were just talking and I didn't even know what UNLV was. She said, "I know they're having an open house so why don't you go to open house?" At that time Dr. Putney was running the open house and she knew Dr. Putney, so she said I'd tell her to look for you. She said just go and see what it's all about. That's what I did. I decided that my interests really were in Ed. Psych because I was really interested in learning and really interested in cognition.

Everybody kind of got me tucked in right away, real quickly. It did take me some time. I'll bet you that by fall, I was just starting to feel like I could crawl. Walking was out of the picture. I was like you know what, baby steps; just let me be able to keep my head above water. I liked it and that was it. I literally just fell right into it. It was not a plan. I was probably forty-two when I started the program.

[I could have made this career change earlier in my life], there were several times before. I could've made it, five years earlier was when I started thinking this is messed up. We [my husband and I] had stuff. I was making money and life was good. At that time I would've been considered successful in other people's eyes. I don't know that I ever felt that because there was always the voice in the back of my head that either what I

was doing at different times was unethical because it became you juggled stuff like one of the contracts we took, we did try to make a shift. I loved that as long as it was about the kids and the families, but really to leave it and leave that actual kind of work, probably five years.

It took me five years to finally get up the nerve to say the money doesn't matter, if I make you mad then it doesn't matter, if you don't like it then I don't matter and it doesn't matter to me, if my parents think I'm nuts then it doesn't matter to me. It took me five years to tell myself that it wasn't about what everyone else thought about me. Ultimately that was what it was because then I became a bartender and nobody could believe it. They were like are you nuts, are you crazy, and I said no I just want to be happy. That was that.

[I never thought about my quality of life] because I was living the way that I thought I should. You know, you go to school and this is what you do, and you just do it. My dad would say, when I'd say something like I'm not happy doing this and it was good for a while and I learned lots of things, and he'd say "Participant N I don't always like going to work and I work hard and I did well but I can't honestly say that I got up everyday and liked going to work." I thought well that's you dad. That's what changed. I wasn't really thinking about what everyone else would think. For a long time, whenever I'd think about it, because I didn't have a plan of what else I'd do. In our group of friends, I won't have anything. What do you do, well I don't do anything, and that was an issue for me that I'd be nobody. I wouldn't have anything. I would have no career and I would have nothing. I couldn't imagine that. I had always worked and I had always worked for a purpose.

I've never been a terribly confident person. [When I made the decision to change careers], I never thought about it. That's why I said I never had a plan. I never, ever thought is it the right decision. I can honestly tell you, that stuff never entered my mind. It was more that I don't care. I always did stuff because of how I would've looked, if I would've looked good and if I was happy. Those were the two things. I would say it was my identity. I mean it was kind of who I was. As the 'I don't care' got stronger and stronger, the lack of having that identity just sort of fell by the way side. Then it was more of an emotive, I'm happy. I really had that drastic one day I'm tending a bar and I'm like yay and the next day I'm clinical psychologist meeting with big people and talking about big things and making big changes in the world, but I was miserable. That was what I wanted.

If you talk about confidence, if I ever had confidence then it's been more about my decisions. I always, somewhere in my mind, think I have ability. I still don't know if it's confidence, but somewhere I know I have ability but confidence was never one of the things that I sort of said yeah I can. Maybe I had confidence and I didn't know it. Maybe I have confidence now and I don't know it. I never thought I'd make it through school. In my heart, I could say whatever I wanted to say to anybody else like Jeff or my parents like yeah it's no problem and they were talking about graduation, and I'm just thinking in my mind shit. They were talking about graduation and I never thought I was going to see that day. I never really articulated that to anybody, but it was always there, the entire way I went through the program. Even when I was doing my dissertation data I thought something's going to happen, something awful and bad is going to happen.

I think the one thing that I can say for sure is that for sometimes during the change, I feel like I've lost sight of who I am. There's been times when it's like who are you and what are you doing? I haven't been sure about where I'm headed or what I'm doing. It's really pushed me to do things and be things that I hadn't ever even thought of, like teaching a class for example. I was never a teacher. I felt like you had to have training to be a teacher.

[I think that self-efficacy played a role in my change]. I can honestly say I did a lot of reflection during the program, just in terms of who am I, who do I want to be, who do I think people think I am, where do you fall. There are clearly different groups of people, different professors, so am I really coming across the way I want and is that okay. Is that going to get me where I want to go? Who do I need to be this way with, who do I need to be that way with, always like where do I fit, maybe that answers it better. I was always checking myself to see where I fit, and is that where I want to be or need to be. Stuff like that, so always, always checking. That was one thing that I probably never did. I was always so busy before that I didn't have time to be checking who I was.

I always thought that I need to be clear in my mind who I am. That's something that has been true since I made the decision that it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks. That's really stuck with me in every aspect of my life. I never had a need, whereas before I might have been. It's like I have a much clearer view of who I want to be than I ever did in my other career. I was just more driven and more just do it, and it wasn't so much worried about more energy put towards that I wanted other people to see me in a certain way.

[The biggest change that I see in myself] is the conscious effort to make decisions and reflect is one part of it, and the other one is just how I feel? I do that everyday too, do I feel about that class, do I feel good about that grade, am I enjoying what I'm doing, do I feel like I'm making a difference? If I'm planning for something, it's like what do I have to do to make it an experience that it's maybe going to make a difference. That's how I teach my classes. I think okay well I never, ever spent anytime in my other career ever thinking about the day. For me, I had done so many different things like the crisis stuff and the kids that I saw and the in-home stuff. Those are devastating situations that people are in, but I had to compartmentalize it. If I internalized that stuff then I would never want to do that work.

Now I probably spend more time looking back on my days, where I never did that. I was always thinking about tomorrow. Now I hardly ever think about tomorrow. I really think about today and yeah I plan, but in percentages, seriously eighty percent of what I reflect on internally, cognitively and emotionally, is eighty percent of my day and what I did today. Twenty percent is what I'm going to do tomorrow; I really don't care what I'm going to do tomorrow now. I always cared about tomorrow, so that's one thing that's very different.

[I am really enjoying my new career as an assistant professor at the University of Memphis]. The change has been good!



APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

Table 2

Frequency of responses for each participant according to themes

	Timing	Quality of Life	Role Model for children, nieces	Confidence/ Empowerment	Self-Efficacy
A	X	X	X	X	
B	X	X	X	X	X
C	X	X	X		
D	X	X	X		X
E	X			X	X
F	X	X			X
G	X	X		X	X
H	X	X		X	X
I	X	X			X
J	X	X		X	
K	X	X		X	X
L	X		X	X	X
M	X	X	X	X	X
N	X	X		X	X

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Note: Quality of Life can be broken down into three distinct areas:

1. Wanting a career
2. Life Circumstances – divorce, abuse, relationship demise, realization of not having a child, and death of a family member.
3. Making a difference

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