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LIFE STORIES OF OLDER COMMUNITY COLLEGE WOMEN

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Donna, an amazingly talented and accomplished violist and educator. Her patience and support throughout our many life adventures has made my pursuit of a doctoral degree possible. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my son Cameron.

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Foremost I would like to acknowledge the love and understanding I have always received from my wife Donna. Everything I have pursued in my adult life has been undertaken with her unwavering support and guidance.

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative research was to explore the life stories of older women attending community college, uncovering elements of their identities and highlighting the role education was playing in the creation of their future selves. This study followed the lives of eight degree-seeking community college women students, age 50 or older, over a two and one-half year period. Six were racial / ethnic minorities, and many came from working class backgrounds. The initial interview utilized an unstructured, arts-based storytelling process to uncover reasons for being in college and a hoped-for future. The follow-up interview utilized a semi-structured life story protocol. Each life story was analyzed holistically, noting themes, story plots, and identity elements. The stories were further analyzed collectively.

The women faced a history of challenges to developing a sought-after identity. These included childhood experiences of trauma and poverty, discrimination, medication and alcohol addiction, physical and mental health issues, mental and physical abuse, and divorce. Age-based factors were prevalent in the stories, and the women noted the impact of a dwindling time horizon in which to reach their goals. Life values were characterized by a deep commitment to family and religious faith.

Development goals varied. Three women focused on reinforcing identities traced to childhood, two envisioned a commitment to education leading to a new identity, and two hoped to expand a current identity. One woman exhibited identity confusion. Six of the women's stories portrayed various degrees of progression while two demonstrated different degrees of regression.

Motivation to attend college was based on a broad set of variables, often mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, education's primary purpose was tied to work and income generation. Impediments to educational progress included the need for developmental classes, balancing work and college, and health issues. Despite their varied struggles, virtually all the women spoke of futures dedicated not just to themselves. Education was seen as a way to enable their generative desires to care for and support others. Significant transformations in worldviews or self-concept resulted from four of the women's educational experiences.

Recommendations resulting from the research include faculty development and staff training related to the needs and concerns of older women students. Older women's life stories can provide valuable input to teaching pedagogy and support services. Faculty must recognize the teaching challenges inherent in multi-generational classrooms. Older women students will benefit from readily accessible life and career counseling services accessed prior to beginning their academic studies. Future research should include a longer term analysis of women's life stories to assess educational impact and a focus on women of a single ethnic / racial minority. Further research into imagery as a means to evoke life stories and as a tool for life counseling is suggested.

Keywords: community college; narrative research; life stories; identities; women; older women; arts-based; storytelling; motivation; transformation; education; racial / ethnic minorities.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Charting a new path through life is often difficult. This challenge can confront people at any age, including those who have reached what Lawrence-Lightfoot (2009) refers to as the "Third Chapter," defined as the "years between fifty and seventy-five, the generative space that follows young adulthood and middle age" (p. 4). As the population of the United States continues to age, more people than ever before are facing their Third Chapter head on. While there were 60.1 million people age 50-74 in 2000 (U. S. Commerce, 2000), that number had grown to 90.8 million in 2015 (U. S. Commerce, 2016).

As adults enter middle-age, concerns regarding generativity, that being one's legacy to future generations, often arise (Erikson, 1997). The unique tension between generativity and stagnation (Erikson, 1997) inherent in the Third Chapter is a harsh reality for many adults. For those with either the means or the fortitude to reinvent themselves, this period of life can result in a heightened sense of caring and giving back that addresses a higher calling (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009; McAdams, 2006a). However, Third Chapter adults are not immune from the continued cycles of progression and regression, and the dystonic elements evident in this stage of life can also lead to feelings of rejection and despair (Erikson, 1997). Possible stagnation covers a wide range of concerns, from feeling stuck in a job to feeling underappreciated to even believing nothing consequential has ever been accomplished in one's life (McAdams, 2006a).

One approach adults use to propel positive change in their lives is to seek new educational experiences (Daloz, 1999). This is evidenced by the fact that over 550,000 adults, age 50+, are enrolled in undergraduate degree granting institutions in the United States (U.S. Department of Education [U.S. Ed.], 2013). Community colleges in particular, which enroll 40% of all undergraduate students (U.S. Ed., 2015) and an "even higher share of students of color and those from lower-income backgrounds" (Goldrick-Rab, Harris, Mazzeo, & Kienzl, 2009, p. 5), play a major role in providing educational opportunity for all nontraditional age students, those age 24+ (Miller, 2014), including Third Chapter women. Community colleges also enroll more students over the age of 30 than any other higher educational institution (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009), and account for over 69% of all first year undergraduates over the age of 34 (U.S. Department of Commerce [U.S. Com.], 2013). Most importantly for this study, over 200,000 women age 50+ attending community colleges nationwide account for 35% of all age 50+ students enrolled at any undergraduate degree-granting institution in the United States (U.S. Ed., 2013).

Three significant issues arise regarding demand for community college educational services, including the availability of data, low levels of student success, and a lack of resources. First, a limited amount of research exists on community college students in general (including older women). As noted by Goldrick-Rab (2010), "A much more rigorous research agenda focused on community college students is needed to inform and evaluate future actions" (p. 454). Latz (2012) echoes this concern when she states, "Considering the current prominence of the community college, the lack of research in this area is a significant problem. Specifically, we must better understand

the lives of community college students to best support them" (p. 2). Spanard (1990) also observes much remains unknown about the overall adult student population, including their needs and motivations. This lack of knowledge extends to student gender differences, including how female students may process their experiences differently (Miller, Pope, & Steinmann, 2006).

Given the sizeable demand for community college services by enrolled students age 50+, and the potential additional enrollment 43 million Third Chapter adults with only a high school diploma or some college credits could further provide (U.S. Com., 2015), it is notable many colleges and universities still have inadequate knowledge regarding the myriad underlying reasons older students are seeking degrees (Palazesi & Bower, 2006; Schaefer, 2010). Greater understanding regarding how Baby Boomers (those born 1946-1964) define value as consumers of community college services would assist in attracting this huge demographic (Palazesi & Bower, 2006). Even a leading textbook on community colleges fails to address the growing enrollment from students age 50+ (Bailey, 2010). Investigating adult degree-seeking students is "particularly important since the majority of studies concerning this population have focused on those seeking noncredit and informal education rather than for credit, formal education" (Schaefer, 2010, p. 69-70). Bailey and Jacobs (2009) summarize the predicament facing community colleges, noting these institutions have "been neglected and ignored" (p. 20).

The second issue arises regarding nontraditional (age 24+) student success. Unfortunately, detailed statistics on factors such as persistence and graduation are not uniformly tracked for this cohort (Miller, 2014). As such, there is a lack of useful

statistical data regarding nontraditional students of all ages (Miller, 2014). What is known is not encouraging. Women who begin college when they are 21 years of age or older take an average 7.2 years from first enrollment to degree attainment at public two-year institutions (National Student Clearinghouse, 2016). Across all higher education institutional types, students under age 20 persist from the first to second year at a rate of 78%, while those over age 24 persist at only 50% (National Student Clearinghouse, 2016b). At the institution from which this study's participants were drawn, over an eight-year timespan only 13.5% of all degree-seeking women students age 50+ completed an associate degree within a three-year period. This figure decreased to 7.8% when isolating those older women students who are also classified as first time college students (Institutional Effectiveness, personal communication, October, 2016).

Third, society has placed less focus on investing in and supporting community colleges. Collectively, community colleges receive relatively meager financial support from the federal government (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009) and frequently lose out to more powerful forces in fights over scarce state resources (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009). Consequently, they are often under-resourced (Bahr, 2013; Chau, 2012; Epstein, 2015; Gardner, 2012; and Maxwell, 2012;) and struggle to invest adequately in faculty professional development (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Combined, these issues make it difficult to support the widely diverse needs and challenges presented by community college students, including older women.

The Problem

The intersection of age, gender, and community college attendance combine to create an understudied segment within higher education. Kim, Sax, Lee, and Hagedorn

(2010) suggest the traditional / nontraditional age distinction is interesting and valuable yet is nevertheless limiting, and recommend research should focus on "more nuanced approaches that account for other student differences" (p. 414). Studying older women community college students presents such a new approach given nontraditional aged women undergraduates are an under-reported group in the existing literature (Lee, 2014). Further, more research is needed on community colleges (Goldrick-Lab, 2010) and a greater understanding of community college students' lives is needed in order to better serve and support them (Latz, 2012). While community colleges have a record of low student retention (Craig & Ward, 2008), unfortunately, "adult students are frequently ignored in scholarship pertaining to community college retention" (Chaves, 2006, p. 140). Little research exists specifically focused on community college women students age 50+. This research thus seeks to investigate a unique cohort of students, namely older, diverse women seeking an associate degree from a community college.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching aim of this narrative research study is to explore the life stories of older women attending community college. It is hoped these stories shed light on the struggles and quandaries faced by older community college women seeking to chart pathways through their Third Chapter of life.

Research Question

The following core research question guided the study:

1. How do older women students describe their life stories and their experiences attending community college?

Significance of the Study

Knowing the life stories and personal life circumstances that are faced by older women community college students has personal, institutional, and public policy implications. As Daloz (1999) notes, "teaching and learning are about relationship" (p. 246). These relationships can be built on a shared understanding of life experiences. To enhance the probability of learning, investments in interpersonal interactions and "understanding the students' served by the institution" are of utmost importance (Keim, von Destinon, Stroud, & Roberts, 2010, p. 960). According to Karpiak (2010), each student has "a past that matters as to their life as learners...To know all this changes us. It enlarges our perspective and sensitizes us to their circumstances *such that it shapes our teaching and interactions with them*" (italics added, p. 23). This shaping of teaching and interactions should further impact organizational design, staffing levels, classroom management, and training of faculty and staff resources. As concluded by White (2001), "Community college leaders need to be aware of the experiences and context in which reentry women are coming back to school" (p. 4) if they are to provide the right mix of programs and services that will aid in their persistence.

Low community college completion rates have received both national and state level focus. In 2010, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) established its College Completion Challenge, which along with the Obama administration, set the goal of a 50% increase in degrees or credentials conferred by 2020 (AACC, n.d.). Concomitant with this challenge has been the influx of funding and programs sponsored by leading nonprofit organizations, including the Lumina Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. Generally

lacking in these noble efforts is recognition of older student needs. Some programs, such as the College Completion Agenda and Complete College America (CCA), speak directly to "25-34 year-olds" (AACC, 2016) or the need to "ensure that many more young people get the high-quality college education that will help them live productive and fulfilling lives" (CCA, 2014, para. 2). This research can thus add an important new voice to the debate about how to better support *all* students on their quest to college degree attainment.

Finally, a more indirect benefit from this research is its focus on the lives of older women. Much of the thinking about adult development over time has been predicated on the narrative accounts of white males who grew up in middle-class households (McAdams, 1993). What has been lacking in attention are stories of women, minorities, and those from lower socioeconomic conditions (McAdams, 1993). The majority of women participants in this study are minorities, and many grew up in less than middle class environments. This study thus adds to the body of narrative research the voices of those previously less heard.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study.

Associate degrees: “can be awarded in academic or professional subjects and also in terminal career and technical programs. Credits earned in associate degree programs can be transferred to bachelor’s degree programs under certain conditions" (U.S. Ed., 2008a). Articulation agreements between institutions generally dictate what course credits can be transferred. An associate degree requires at least two full time years of study, or 60 credit hours. Many associate

degrees are either Associate of Arts (A.A.) or Associate of Science (A.S.), however Associate of Applied Science degrees are also awarded for professional, technical, or terminal programs (U.S. Ed., 2008a).

Baby Boomers: are those born between mid-1946 and mid-1964 (U.S. Com., 2014). Based on birth year and the question, "Do you identify yourself with the Baby Boomer generation?" all participants are considered to fall within this generational designation.

Community College: is a regionally accredited institution conferring up to and including an associate degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Some institutions offer both associate and bachelor degrees, and these are excluded from the percentages drawn from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics.

First-generation student: is a student who is the first member of his or her family to attend college (U. S. Ed., 2005).

Formal education: "is highly institutionalized, bureaucratic, curriculum driven, and formally recognized with grades, diplomas, or certificates" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 29). Compare to *informal* and *nonformal education*.

Generation Jones: are those born in the second half of the Baby Boom, or about 1955-1964 (Hollister, 2009; Wellner, 2000; Williams, 2014).

Generativity: is "Being productive by helping others in order to ensure the continuation of society by guiding the next generation" (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000, p. 462). The concept especially applies to adults in middle age, whose concerns and priorities are often different from younger adults (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). It

can be expressed in many ways, "including teaching, mentoring, leadership, and even citizenship" (McAdams, 2006a, p. 5).

Graduation: at the community college level is defined to be either completing an associate degree or receiving a certificate, both of which are conferred through "for-credit" classes.

Informal education: is also referred to as everyday learning. Its qualities include being spontaneous and unstructured. It can occur virtually anywhere, from home to work to play. Self-directed learning is one type of informal education (Merriam, et al., 2007).

Nonformal education: are organized educational opportunities that tend to have few if any prerequisites and occur over a short time frame. There is often a curriculum and there is frequently an instructor or facilitator. Less structure along with greater flexibility than formal education are typical characteristics (Merriam, et al., 2007).

Nontraditional age students (Adult students): are defined as those being age 24 or older (Miller, 2014; Clark, 2012; U. S. Education, 2006). Kim (2002), Bean and Metzner (1985), and Horn (1997) refer to students age 25 or over as nontraditional. Kasworm and Pike (1994) refers to student's age 25 and older as *adult learners*. Rountree and Lambert (1992) refer to those over age 25 as *adult students*. This study shall define nontraditional based on age as 24 years or over. Age is the most common initial approach to classifying students as nontraditional for purposes of further investigating distinctive student characteristics and needs (Kim, 2002).

Nontraditional students: can be defined in multiple ways that include yet go beyond strictly age (Kim, 2002). They are commonly identified by the presence of one or more of the following seven characteristics that increase the risk of attrition (U. S. Education, 1998): delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, attended part time, financially independent, worked full time while enrolled, had dependents other than a spouse, was a single parent, or did not obtain a standard high school diploma. A nontraditional student can be further characterized as "minimally nontraditional (one characteristic), moderately nontraditional (2 or 3 characteristics), or highly nontraditional (4 or more characteristics)" (U.S. Ed., 1996, p. 5). Nontraditional students "typically include older adults, minorities, and individuals of low socioeconomic status" (Jones & Watson, 1990, p. 2).

Older Adult / Older Student: has a variable definition in the literature. Puccio (1995) defines older students as age 65 or over. Kasworm (1980) and Kenner and Weinerman (2011) define older as age 26 and above. This research will use the age of 50+, unless otherwise noted. This follows the definition used by Cummins (2015) and Vermiller (2014). The American Association of Community Colleges also acknowledges the unique needs of students age 50+ with their Plus 50 Initiative (AACC, 2015).

Open admissions policies: do not require students “to compete for admission at a set time of year nor demonstrate a level of academic proficiency to enroll” (U. S. Education, 2008).

Part-time student: is an undergraduate student enrolled in less than 12 credit hours per semester or less than 24 hours per term (U.S. Ed., 2016).

Remedial education class: is also referred to as developmental education, college-readiness class, and zero-credit class. These are courses offered through accredited, higher educational institutions to students who are deemed not ready to meet the academic rigor of a college curriculum. No credit is given for taking and passing the class, however doing so is a requirement for entrance into a for-credit class. Estimates range from about 40% of all community college students needing at least one remedial education class (U.S. Ed., 2017) to about 60% (Bailey & Jacobs, 2009).

Reentry women: are women returning to education or the labor force after at least a several year absence or who intend to pursue a new career (Padula, 1994).

Seven risk factors of attrition: are those factors identified by the U.S. Department of Education (1998) that increase the risk of attrition. These are: delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, attended part time, financially independent, worked full time while enrolled, had dependents other than a spouse, was a single parent, or did not obtain a standard high school diploma.

Third Chapter: are the years of life between 50-75 (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009).

TRIO Program: is a federally funded grant program available through select institutions of higher education. Services provided include tutoring, academic advising, assistance with financial aid, career counseling, mentoring, and exposure to cultural events. The program is available to "low-income students who are first generation college students and students with disabilities evidencing academic need" (U.S. Ed., 2009).

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following review of the literature is organized in six major sections. The first section addresses community colleges in the United States, including their mission, challenges, and student persistence issues. This study focuses on women, specifically older women attending community college, and the second section investigates gender differences, motivation, socioeconomic challenges, and success factors as they relate to women students. Four aspects of how older women students differ from younger, nontraditional age women students are also included. The third section presents a discussion of the Baby Boomer generation and how studies of generational cohorts may help inform the study of older students' lives. The final three sections address issues of identity and transformation. This includes a discussion of various academic perspectives on the concept of identity in section four, a summary of how nontraditional age women community college students view the transformational impact of education in section five, and finally a review of transformational learning theory and its relationship to identity in section six. The theoretical framework of focus is Mezirow's theory of transformational learning, and the final section includes a summary of the theory along with some alternative views on the content and scope of the theory.

The Community College

Overview and Mission

Community colleges, initially referred to as junior colleges, began in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. Numbering 207 colleges across 37 states in 1922, enrollment was quite small at around 20,000 students (Cohen & Brawer,

2008). By 1940 the number of institutions had grown to 610 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The market for 2-year and transfer degrees continued to evolve such that by 2015 there were 920 public 2-year institutions, 88 private non-profit institutions, and 608 for-profit 2-year institutions (U.S. Ed., 2015d). During the mid-twentieth century the term *community college* gradually came to be associated with publically supported institutions, while *junior college* was more frequently used to refer to branches of private universities and those supported by churches or operating independently (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

At the core of the public 2-year college is the concept of open admissions. Indeed, "community colleges have organized themselves around the theme of ease in entrance, exit, and reentry" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 71), and 95% of all community colleges ascribe to such a policy (U.S. Ed., 2008b). This is not to say certain academic programs within the community college do not ultimately place limits or criteria upon who is accepted (e.g. nursing), or all courses can be taken without prior demonstration of proficiency (U.S. Ed., 2008), but that virtually everyone is given a chance to start (or restart) their academic careers and pursue vocational interests. As Cohen and Brawer (2008) note, "Although it is impossible to bring all students to the point at which they can succeed in the courses and programs of their choice, the community college must continue trying" (p. 308).

Since early in their history, junior colleges have been considered a resource for meeting broad community needs. Having adopted a comprehensive model of service to a broad array of constituents (Bailey, 2003), among their current offerings can be found academic preparation for transfer to a 4-year institution, vocational and technical

education, lifelong continuing education, developmental (remedial) education, and cultural and recreational offerings for the community at large (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Since the 1960s an increasing area of focus for community colleges has been workforce development (Myran & Ivery, 2013). These programs are typically non-credit, job-skills courses and programs targeted at both individuals and employees of specific businesses and corporations. The workforce development concept has more recently expanded to encompass a variety of community college efforts to partner with local industry and become a key player in regional economic growth (Myran & Ivery, 2013).

Students of all ages, from young children to senior citizens, can thus be found on a community college campus. Dual or concurrent enrollment is one further example of this, whereby academically prepared high school students can enroll in college-level courses and receive formal college credit while simultaneously satisfying their high school graduation requirements (Jones, 2014).

Despite a common set of defined constituents, community colleges should not be viewed as monolithic (Cohen, 2003). In his study of first time community college students, Bahr (2013) suggests there are five different classifications of community colleges based upon their relative degree of emphasis. These are classified as Community Education Intensive, Transfer Intensive, Workforce Development Intensive, High-Risk Intensive, and Mixed-Use. Emphases are often a reflection of local student demand characteristics rather than the result of institutional top-down policies. Cohen (2003) found institution size based upon total student enrollment is useful for highlighting how community colleges differ on such factors as percentages of part-time

students and ratios of expenditures on instruction. Enrollment at community colleges does vary widely. While the smallest 25% have 360 or fewer students, the largest 25% range from 5,225 upwards of 90,000 students (U.S. Ed., 2014).

Community college enrollment data indicates how important these institutions have become to higher education in the United States and to the goal of making a college education within reach for many who would otherwise be left with few options. Community colleges enroll 40% of all undergraduate students (U.S. Ed., 2015) and "even higher shares of students of color and those from lower-income backgrounds" (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2009, p. 5). Community colleges also "have larger percentages of nontraditional, low-income, and minority students than 4-year colleges and universities" (U.S. Ed., 2008), and enroll over 50% of all first-generation or low-income students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Community colleges enroll more students over the age of 30 than any other institution (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009), and account for over 69% of all first year undergraduates over the age of 34 (U.S. Com., 2013).

Organizational Challenges

Community colleges nationwide typically grapple with managing a myriad of potentially conflicting priorities based on the sheer scope of their missions (Bailey, 2003; Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Some researchers criticize community colleges' comprehensive approach to constituent services given their tight resources, instead preferring a more focused approach on either university transfer programs or technical and vocational programs. However, colleges abandoning the comprehensive strategy risk the loss of broad-based political support. Furthermore, the impact of lower enrollment numbers resulting from a more focused strategy is a dubious approach given

a lack of data to support this alternative (Bailey, 2003). Nevertheless, the debate continues (Frye, 1995). Should the focus be on a terminal degree, transfer to a 4-year school, or somehow both? Should the emphasis be on occupational readiness or more broadly oriented toward citizenship and the liberal arts? Should investments continue in workforce development efforts, given declining marketplace demand, the growth of new competitors, and economic challenges (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006)?

Community colleges often face significant financial constraints. Collectively, they receive relatively meager financial support from the federal government (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009), receive miniscule private donations (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), and frequently lose out to more powerful forces in fights over scarce state resources (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009). While nationwide, colleges of all types are finding tuition pricing has become a major political issue (Bastedo, 2006), the financial reality facing community colleges is their average "tuition and fees are less than half those at public 4-year colleges and universities and one-tenth those at private 4-year colleges and universities" (U.S. Ed., 2008, p. iii). In summary, "Overall, community colleges are the lowest funded sector of education" (Manning & Crosta, 2014, p. 42). Consequently, community colleges are often under-resourced (Bahr, 2013; Chau, 2012; Epstein, 2015; Gardner, 2012; and Maxwell, 2012) while simultaneously having a student body facing the greatest persistence challenges (Bailey & Jacobs, 2009).

Student Persistence Challenges

Community colleges' open admission policies result in a diverse student population facing a host of intrinsic barriers to successful graduation. These barriers include: high remedial course instruction requirements (Attwell, Lavin, Domina, &

Levey, 2006), with about 60% of first time attending students requiring remedial coursework (Bailey & Jacobs, 2009), likelihood of being a first-generation student (Sorey & Duggan, 2008), unclear educational goals, working full time and attending college part time (Summers, 2003), family responsibilities (Craig & Ward, 2008), fear of failure (Cox, 2009), varying degrees of motivation (Cox, 2009), limited student support services utilization (Summers, 2003), and classroom conflict between age groups (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992). In addition to the above, nontraditional age students must often also cope with complex life and financial situations (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kasworm, 2014; Spellman, 2007). Moreover, students at all institution types face the challenge of navigating the higher education system (Tinto, 1988), and experience broad cultural, economic, and social forces (Tinto, 2006) as impediments to graduation. As Summers (2003) suggests, "researchers have determined that student attrition is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood or predicted with single variables" (p. 70).

The magnitude of the challenge faced by community colleges in their efforts to support student persistence can be assessed through the presence of seven attrition risk factors identified by the United States Department of Education (1998). These factors are (U. S. Education, 1998): delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, part time enrollment, financially independent, working full time while enrolled, dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent, or lacking a standard high school diploma. Based upon these seven factors, 75% of community college students have at least one identified risk factor (Kim, 2002), and over half have two or more (Sorey & Duggan, 2008). These community college student risk factors contrast to public 4-year

institutions, where 72% have no risk factors (U.S. Ed., 2002). According to Kim, Sax, Lee, and Hagedorn (2010), based upon the prevalence of these risk factors, most students attending community colleges, regardless of age, can be considered nontraditional. The United States Department of Education offers an additional refinement (U. S. Education, 1996), stating a nontraditional student can be further characterized as "minimally nontraditional (one characteristic), moderately nontraditional (2 or 3 characteristics), or highly nontraditional (4 or more characteristics)" (p.5).

The risk factors (U. S. Ed., 1998) associated with the majority of community college students are evident in low graduation rates. Nationally, only 20% of first-time, full-time students graduate in three years (the benchmark expected time, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education) from the initially enrolled public 2-year institution (U.S. Ed., 2015b). This 20% contrasts to the 58% graduating within the standard 6-year timeframe at public 4-year institutions (U.S. Ed., 2015c). Six years after initial enrollment, over 60% of community college students are either no longer enrolled or are still trying to complete a degree (National Clearinghouse, 2016). Focusing on low-income, first-generation students at public community colleges, Engle and Tinto (2008) found while 63% state they plan to eventually pursue a bachelor's degree, only 5% have accomplished it within six years. Thus, Cox (2009) observed, “perhaps not surprisingly, the students who are the least ‘traditional’ are also the least likely to realize their educational dreams” (p. 8).

In addition to the more straightforward identifiable college attrition risk factors (U. S. Education, 1998), many nontraditional age students face internal struggles as

well. Edwards (1993) notes nontraditional age women can feel all other students are smarter and more capable, leaving them feeling alone and insecure. Brookfield (1999) classifies adult feelings of inadequacy as *impostorship*, defined as the feeling of being "constantly on the verge of being found out to be too dumb and unprepared for college-level learning" (p.11). Merely stepping onto campus can induce panic and a sense of being too old to learn. Cox (2009) notes that for community college students, "entering college marked a high risk and anxiety provoking transition in their adult lives" (p. 21). Cox (2009) further states, "A significant component of students' stress was directly linked to their doubts about succeeding in college and realizing their career goals…For many students, past failure provided objective evidence of their academic inadequacy" (p. 24-25). Anxiety, insecurity, and concerns about keeping up with younger students are common feelings for working-class women contemplating a community college degree (Adickes & Worthman, 1976) and women who have had some previous college experience (Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Paterson & Blank, 1985). Daloz (1999) echoes all of these points when he says fear is the single most common emotion experienced by adults returning to the classroom.

Nontraditional age students also grapple with internal identity conflicts (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001), and Brookfield (1999) refers to the riskiness of the academic journey as potential "cultural suicide" (p. 12). Adult students often struggle with how they will be perceived, judged, and accepted by their friends, family members, and coworkers after they begin their educational journey. Formerly part of a certain group or "tribe," they now risk being ostracized for daring to remake themselves or become transformed. Von Franz (1964) notes viewed from a Jungian perspective,

"the emerging Self may bring great danger to a man's conscious ego" (p. 216). Embarking on a path to creating a new identity is thus often felt to be more of a burden than a blessing (von Franz, 1964). Brookfield (1999) and Daloz (1999) note that acknowledging the complexity of adult students' feelings about returning to the classroom is critical to the learning process.

Deciding on future work and career goals is another identity challenge experienced by nontraditional age students. Research (Seli, Dembo, & Crocker, 2009; Luke, 2015) has shown students who have thought about and decided upon a hoped-for future career are more likely to achieve success in college. However, in Cunningham's (2009) study of community college Baby Boomers, no students were found to have utilized any of the college's career advisement staff prior to making a decision to attend or during the course of their studies. Some students arrive just assuming they will find the program they need, and in other cases they just pick a community college due to cost and convenience, and then look for a seemingly interesting academic program. Similarly, in Schaefer's (2010) study of age 50+ students (pursuing bachelor degrees), participants were "sometimes impeded by a lack of knowledge of what career options they could pursue." Relevant for this study, McAtee and Benshoff (2006) note "Older women appear to need more support and assistance than younger women seeking education and career change" (p. 710).

In addition to career direction confusion, fear of career success (Rountree & Frusher, 1991), or what Horner (1972) would call motives to avoid success, is a possible belief among students in general. This fear about possible future selves is

critical to understand given possible selves can be an added source of motivation for change (Cross & Madson, 1997; Stein & Markus, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Levine (2007) sums up the career-academic focus problem faced by many nontraditional community college students this way: “The students are uncertain of what education they need and they are given little direction on how to attain goals pertaining to education and work” (p. 123). Many of the students are simply “unclear about what they want to accomplish” (Levine, 2007, p. 123).

Adding another obstacle to academic success, Padula (1994) highlights the fact nontraditional age women returning to the classroom often face significant family demands. According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1999), women note feeling stress when a spouse does not go along with a decision to attend college, and a lack of spouse support is considered a major impediment to success for some working women returning to college. One dimension of this lack of support involves husbands who feel threaten by a spouse's educational or career interests and aspirations (Chavez, 2015; Edwards, 1993; Hayes, 2000a). Five of the 11 Hispanic women participants in Chavez (20015) stated they had to overcome feelings of “men being controlling, as well as emotionally and physically abusive” (p. 215). Divorced women often have less family support and face added motivations to meet financial needs (Padula, 1994). For example, divorced and recently relocated, one woman student in Schaefer (2009) lamented, “I don’t have anyone to discuss things with, so I have to think them through in my mind. I don’t have a spouse, I don’t have a mate, I don’t have a friend” (p. 141). As AAUW (1999) notes, the presence of children creates conflicting priorities, providing a powerful sense of motivation on one hand yet

nervousness and insecurity about meeting academic requirements on the other. Given these conflicting priorities, AAUW (1999) also notes reentry women are significantly more likely than men to value flexible class scheduling and options for degree completion.

Women at Community Colleges

Overview

Cohen and Brawer (2008) state prior to the late 1970s, men accounted for the majority of enrollment in colleges and universities across the United States. That relationship changed in 1978, and women today continue to outnumber men in enrollment (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Two-year public colleges follow the same pattern of gender enrollment, where in the fall of 2014 over 56% of those enrolled were women (U.S. Ed., 2014). The percentage of women increases to 58% when looking at students who attend part time, and increases to 60% when considering students age 50+ (U.S. Ed., 2013).

Women's Academic Choices and Career Self-Efficacy

Women and men attending community colleges continue to gravitate to very different programs and majors. Table 1 (U.S. Ed., 2015e) shows the percentage of degrees in academic major categories, and accounts for 87% of the almost 1.2 million associate degrees and certificates awarded in the fiscal year 2014-2015. As shown in Table 1, women were more significantly focused on humanities and service-oriented majors, while men were more focused on STEM and trade related degrees. The three highest volume degree awarded categories - liberal arts, health professions, and business - account for over 58% of all degrees and certificates, and are more heavily

weighted toward women graduates. Out of 38 different degree-awarded categories tracked by the U.S. Department of Education (2015e), only two categories had men and women within 10% of each other: communications / journalism (women 55%; men 45%), and parks / recreation / leisure and fitness studies (women 47%; men 53%). As Eddy and Lester (2008) observe, a gender gaps continues to exist regarding women's representation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

Table 1

Types of Associate Degrees Awarded by Gender, FY 2014-2015

	Women	Men
Family and Human Sciences	93%	7%
Education	89%	11%
Legal Studies	84%	16%
Public Administration and Social Services	83%	17%
Health Professions	82%	18%
Languages and Literature	80%	20%
Psychology	76%	24%
Social Sciences	64%	36%
Business and Management	64%	36%
Liberal Arts and Humanities	62%	38%
Agricultural Operations	37%	63%
Law Enforcement and Protective Services	35%	65%
Architectural Operations	31%	69%
Natural Resources	29%	71%
Math and Statistics	28%	72%
Computer Science	24%	76%
Applied Sciences	17%	83%
Engineering	14%	86%
Transportation	9%	91%
Construction, Repair Technologies, Production	6%	94%

Note: Data summarized from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics database.

Related to academic major, it is also relevant to address gender-based career

self-efficacy given work and career issues are paramount to why women (and men) return to college (which will be further addressed). Betz and Hackett (1981) studied the impact of self-efficacy, defined as "the degree of difficulty of the tasks the individual feels capable of attempting" (p. 400), as it relates to 10 traditional female occupations and 10 traditional (also labeled nontraditional) male occupations. Their study utilized traditional, 4-year university undergraduates. Females were found to have significantly higher self-efficacy in traditionally female occupations, and males higher self-efficacy in traditionally male occupations. Overall, males expressed equivalent self-efficacy in both traditional and nontraditional occupations, while women had significantly lower self-efficacy on nontraditional versus traditional occupations. Interestingly, no sex differences were found on two fields dominated by men (at least in 1981), physician and lawyer. In addition, women also indicated more overall interest in traditional occupations. "Thus," state Betz and Hackett (1981), "the traditionality of the occupation appears to be an important factor in females' perceptions of occupational self-efficacy" (p. 404). The interests expressed and scores on self-efficacy occurred despite the fact all the study participants were deemed of equal capability, based upon ACT test scores. Rotberg, Brown, and Ware (1987) similarly found gender and sex role orientation were predictive of career self-efficacy among nontraditional age community college students, and tentatively conclude "career choice is influenced by both career interest and career self-efficacy expectations, which are themselves modified by gender and sex role orientation" (p. 169).

Betz (2007) addressed gender and its relationship to different sources of career efficacy information, including exposure to various learning experiences. Based on

Holland's model of careers (see Armstrong, Day, McVay, & Rounds, 2008), "men reported greater access to information in the Realistic and Investigative areas, whereas women reported more exposure to learning experiences in the Social area" (Betz, 2007, p. 413). (No differences were found in Artistic, Enterprising, and Conventional areas.) This result is consistent with Trusty, Ng, and Ray (2000), who in their study of students seeking at minimum a four-year degree, found "There is consistent evidence that women choose S [Holland Social classification] occupations and college majors more than men" (p. 51). Trusty, Ng, and Ray (2000) note gender-role socialization plays a role in this finding. In summary, women's perceptions of career self-efficacy and access to various types of relevant learning experiences may play an important role in their decisions on which occupations and which education majors to pursue. Perhaps these factors are reflected in the fact that while women earn more associate degrees and certificates, "they are more concentrated in lower wage and lower skill fields" (AAUW, 2013).

There are, however, indications that nontraditional women students are at least becoming more confident in thinking about career selection options. In a 1981 study, Slaney, Stafford and Russel (as cited in Padula, 1994) found reentry women to have more career indecision than traditional college students. In 1986, Slaney (as cited in Padula, 1994) found no significant differences. More currently, women community college students have been found to be significantly more likely than men to "plan their career or work after college" (Miller, et al., 2006, p. 724). This is similar to findings in Luke, et al. (2015), wherein women community college students had significantly higher levels of self-confidence in their career decision-making abilities than men. Of

course, a higher degree of confidence in and of itself does not necessarily result in women feeling more confident in their ability to pursue nontraditional careers and college majors. They may merely feel more confident sticking to a narrower range of choices. The types of majors being selected by community college men and women (as highlighted in Table 1) would seem to suggest that, at least for community college students, gender and sex role differences continue to be a relevant factor.

Women in the Classroom

In addition to the tendency to gravitate to different academic fields, expressions of gender differences may be found in the classroom. Research suggests “there are two equally valid ways of acquiring knowledge, a separate way and a connected way" (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989, p. 35) and that women tend to place more emphasis on connections, involvement, and caring. While not limited to only older adults, Beer & Darkenwald's (1989) own quantitative study found overall “that women perceive more Affiliation [capital in original] and a greater degree of Involvement [capital in original] in the classroom than do men” (p. 40). Similarly, in a study of traditional age university students, Magolda (1992) notes that "receiving-, interpersonal-, and interindividual-reasoning patterns were used more by women than men, and the mastery-, impersonal-, and individual-reasoning patterns were used more by men than women" (p. 369). These findings are compatible with Keim, von Destinon, Stroud, and Roberts (2010), who note that women students "are more likely to want to go along with a group, be agreeable, and prefer to avoid conflict" (p. 964). Hayes (2000b) reinforces this point, adding that women demonstrate a preference for “rapport building” approaches to classroom conversation versus a “report out - compete for control” approach often used by men.

The “report-out” type of classroom environment can add to the anxiety faced by older adult women returning to school (Hayes, 2000b) given their likely lack of recent experience with a more oppositional style of talk. While Hayes (2000b) notes the general tendency is for men to talk more in the classroom than women, some research shows this is actually not the case for nontraditional age women, who will participate in class more than younger students of either gender. Hayes (2000b) speculates women’s life experiences and motivation to learn are key ingredients in their desire for classroom participation.

Another gender relevant issue is the tendency to emphasis masculine ways of teaching critical thinking skills in the classroom, which Brookfield (2005) says “elevates a Western form of cognitive, rational knowing above other forms of comprehension” (p. 56). This leaves scant space for consideration of emotions, spirituality, or holistic approaches. Thus, according to Brookfield (2005), nontraditional age women students may bring life experiences to the classroom that seem at odds with how they are expected to develop their critical thinking skills, a process therefore made more difficult and frustrating.

Other differences between men and women students have been noted. Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2006) found women community college students were significantly more likely to participate in "academic activities, introduce themselves to teachers outside of class" (p. 724), and to miss class due to work than were men. Community college men are more likely to indicate they plan to transfer on to pursue a 4-year degree than are women (AAUW, 2013). Men, note Luke, Redekop, and Burgin (2015), are also significantly more likely to believe in an internal locus of control,

meaning that they attribute outcomes to their individual effort or skill versus external forces such as luck or prejudice. Women, however, are significantly more likely to make a strong connection between their classwork and the career they may wish to pursue, and are significantly more likely to say they intend to return to college the following semester. A stated intent to succeeding academically is also a significant predictor of female community college student progress (defined as grade point average and course completion), however is not for males (Perrakis, 2008).

In summary, it is likely women and men will take different approaches to learning and exhibit different classroom behaviors, with no approach being deemed superior to the other (Flannery & Hayes, 2000). Nevertheless, Flannery and Hayes (2000) sound a cautionary note, suggesting that general conclusions drawn about women's learning preferences not be used to mindlessly reinforce stereotypes. Overgeneralizing gender differences is also a hazard (Hayes, 2000b, Magolda, 1992). Magold (1992) and Hayes (2000b) make the critically important point that gender differences can be context and socially constructed and that there is variation within gender. Men, adds Magold (1992), are also found to use connectedness and relationships in their approaches to learning. The main point to remember then is developmental and life experiences of men should not be generalized to women (Brooks, 2000).

Adult Women Students' Motivations for Seeking Education

Regardless of gender, the literature suggests avoiding overgeneralizations about adult students, and instead recommends viewing the adult learner "as a diverse set of individuals with distinct demographics, social locations, aspirations, and levels of

preparation" (Lumina, 2007, p. 4). The reasons behind seeking a college degree are one example of this diversity, with various motivations cited that intertwine, are multifaceted, and subject to change (Merriam, et al., 2007). Various studies (Cox, 2009; Peters, 2010; and Schaefer, 2009) have found economic drivers, filling a personal void, satisfying a long-held desire, and career advancement among the many motivational factors driving adult college attendance. Peters (2010) notes these motivations are reflected in older adult students (age 43+) taking responsibility for their learning, exhibiting a desire to learn, and enjoying the learning process.

While there are numerous motivating factors for adult reentry women, studies of nontraditional age community college women found factors related to work and career are significant (Cunningham, 2009; Edwards, 1993; Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Hooven, 2009; Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000; Johnston, 2010; Miles, 2009; Peters, 2010; Schaefer, 2009). Two studies by Johnston (2010) and Miles (2009) utilized the Education Participation Scale (EPS) testing instrument to address motivational aspects and are notable for their consistent findings on the importance of vocation. Johnston (2010) surveyed 264 community college women and 103 men with a mean age of 34 (with the majority in their early 30s). Women were "most motivated by Professional Advancement, followed by Cognitive Interest, Educational Preparation, Communication Improvement, Family Togetherness, Social Contact, and finally Social Stimulation [capitals in original]. In short, females seem to be less motivated by social reasons and more motivated by practical reasons" (Johnston, 2010, p. 76).

Miles (2009) also used the EPS instrument, focusing on 159 African American women attending a community college or a university, with 70% of the women between

25-39 years of age. Overall findings, similar to Johnston, indicated the women were "motivated to return to college, in order, for professional advancement, cognitive interest, and educational preparation" (p. ix). Social contact was the least cited reason. The professional advancement scale includes subtopics such as "achieve an occupational goal," "prepare for a job," and "get a better job" (Miles, 2009, p. 50). Miles (2009) and Padula (1994) also found when asked to select the single most important reason for returning to school, the women participants selected vocational-oriented reasons. Financial stability is especially relevant for nontraditional women students who are not married and have dependents (Miles, 2009). Finally, comparing community college students to four-year university students, Miles (2009) found community college women were more motivated by the desire for educational preparation, including on the subscales "make up for a narrow education," "to get missed education," and "prepare for further education" (p. 50).

Peters (2010) conducted a case study of 10 community college students, six of whom were women and between the ages of 43-58, and similarly found economic circumstances very motivational. All of the women students were first-generation to attend college and married. Four of the ten participants were specifically chosen due to having recently been laid off from their jobs, and the remaining were selected without an employment criterion. Nevertheless,

> All 10 participants disclosed an economic dilemma that provided an incentive to return to school. In this sample, seven of the 10 participants had been laid off, one had quit a job and could not find other work, another had a minimum wage job that was not meeting his family's needs, and one participant had just moved to the area and could not find work (Peters, 2010, p. 86.)

Nontraditional age women also return to college for reasons that clearly transcend vocational needs or interests. Personal self-satisfaction, fulfilling a lifetime dream, and growth aspects are also frequently part of the equation (AAUW, 1999; Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Mohney & Anderson, 1988; Palazesi, 2004; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010), as is finding work that has inherent value and meaning (AAUW, 1999), being a role model for children (Adams, 1996; Cunningham, 2009; Miles, 2009), fulfilling a personal goal (Miles, 2009), boosting self-esteem (Edwards, 1993), and contributing to one's community (Miles, 2009). Women returning to college after working for some period of time place more emphasis on these various self-fulfillment aspects than do men (AAUW, 1999).

Reentry women students also place a greater emphasis on creating an identity separate from family and on answering basic philosophical questions, such as 'Who am I?' (Adams, 1996; Flannery & Hayes, 2000). To nurture their independent development, Edwards (1993) found women fell on a continuum regarding their integration of school with family, with some desiring lots of interconnections, some desiring partial connections, and others wanting to keep the entire schooling process disconnected from children and partners. For some, according to Edwards (1993), "their 'self' *was* (italics in original) a mother as well as a student. For others the difference was easier to envisage" (p. 90).

Various studies provide examples of how nontraditional women students feel about education as transcending career goals. Peters (2010) found participants "disclosed they felt there were missing pieces in their lives that college would fill" (p. 133). Three of Peters' Baby Boomer women participants were not back in school just as

a stepping stone to a job, rather they wanted to do things they also enjoyed. One of the three participants noted, “It has been a long-term goal for me to get my degree” (Peters, 2010, p.100). Schaefer (2009) likewise had older women participants (bachelor degree seeking) who “considered lifelong learning and personal enrichment to be their primary motivation for returning to college” (p. 138). One woman felt she was “missing something,” and another commented, “It’s like a lifelong dream, very challenging, very hard, but I’ll be able to look back on it and have that little diploma hanging up there on the wall” (Schaefer, p.138). Thus, as Vaccaro (2005) notes, even women who enter college motivated by career interests come to see their education in a much broader sense of investing in herself.

Various studies (Cunningham, 2009; Miles, 2009; Mohney & Anderson, 1988) have noted nontraditional age women’s motivations to seek a degree are thus complex, with student’s often citing multiple reasons for returning to college. Since women each have their own very unique combination of enabling events that support their enrollment decisions, Mohney & Anderson (1988) note it is critical to appreciate the myriad of factors that intersect in the decision-making process. Mohney & Anderson (1988) add it is not uncommon to see a list of five to ten reasons or events leading up to the decision to attend college.

Two studies, one by Kartje (2000) and the other by Palazesi (2004), highlight the multifactor decision elements for community college adults. Kartje’s (2000) study of 18 reentry women community college graduates (ages 28 to 77) found no single trigger can explain enrollment, rather "often it was a combination of factors that spurred action" (p. 93). Motivating factors clustered into four categories: 1) dream fulfillment /

self-fulfillment; 2) economics; 3) children; and 4) opportunity. Economics broke into two segments: using education as "an instrument to re-enter the workforce, change careers, or enhance their value in the labor market, and a desire for education to offset a lifestyle that was dependent on public assistance" (Kartje, 2000, p. 99).

In a grounded theory study of how participants between the age of 40-54 (men and women) conceptualized the value of attending a community college, Palazesi (2004) identified three triggers that were involved in putting participants along a path of reinventing themselves through attendance at a community college. These triggers were: life changing events (usually externally driven, such as illness or divorce), enhancing existing self-identity (through adding new skills and behaviors), and opportunity to fulfill a long-desired dream (modifying a self-identity, for example via a complete role change). While Palazesi tended to find an initial trigger that could be identified for each participant, in many cases the initial event activated the other two triggers as well. An example of this is where a woman starts taking a class for personal enrichment, and develops a second interest in pursuing a promotion due to her expanded knowledge (AAUW, 1999). Conversely, a woman may initially seek better pay or more interesting work, and then develop the desire to pursue "education for education's sake" (Edwards, 1993, p. 57).

Changing circumstances, or timing, is also an important ingredient if enrollment is to occur. Various events in the students' lives come together to make the decision to attend community college possible or even necessary. These opportunities are inherent in life transitions, including job loss, retirement, illness, death of a family member, end of military duty, a supportive home and/or work environment, divorce, and children

reaching a greater degree of independence (Cunningham, 2009; Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000; Kartje, 2000; Mohney & Anderson, 1998).

Children having grown or left the house for school is a common precipitating event for adult women returning to higher education (Daloz, 1999), and similarly, raising children is often a reason why college goals were previously deferred (Hooven, 2009). In an example of children becoming more independent, one community college participant in Peters (2010) highlighted she had tried twice previously to complete her degree, and now that her children were older, she was going to try again. "It's just Mom has always wanted to go to school, back to school, and it's just time that Mom did it" (p. 98). Timing also can reflect the harsh reality of being a single parent with small children and feeling compelled to seek a better financial future. For some, opportunity also includes finding out about special assistance programs (Kartje, 2000).

Frequently family responsibilities prevented nontraditional age women students from ever seriously pursuing any type of career path a college education could provide. In Peters (2010) all of the women participants referred to family in this way. Sometimes a woman's spouse sees her responsibility to be home full-time with children (Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Peters, 2010). In other cases, a woman's father or spouse sees no reason for a woman to attend college (Chavez, 2015; Peters, 2010). Other reasons noted in Peters (2010) for not pursuing a college education much earlier include needing to work to contribute to the family's income, to support a family-run business, or constant uprooting to follow a spouse's military career.

Motivation meets opportunity continues to be a common theme in the literature. Overall, factors related to vocation and careers tend to be a primary impetus for

nontraditional age women to attend community college. Yet numerous studies paint a nuanced picture, with multiple overlapping motivations, among them: being a role model (Adams, 1996; Barry, 2012; Cunningham, 2009; Hooven, 2009; Miles, 2009); obtaining vocational skills & better jobs (Bates, 2012; Hooven, 2009; Padula, 1994); achieving a lifelong desire for higher education (Hooven, 2009); providing for family (Bates, 2012; Edwards, 1993; Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Padula, 1994); gaining general knowledge and self-improvement (Bates, 2012; Padula, 1994; Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010); enhancing self-esteem (Bates, 2012); receiving direct and indirect encouragement from children (Dominguez, 2010); reacting to a life-changing event (Barry, 2012; Dominguez, 2010); and relying on religious faith and spirituality (Artiaga, 2013; Bates, 2012; Dominguez, 2010; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). The relative weight and timing of these factors make each woman's story unique while at the same time exhibiting many motivators in common.

Socioeconomics and Adult Women Student's Motivation

Nontraditional age women from working class backgrounds face additional complex obstacles as they attempt to pursue a community college education. Even if secondary schooling was completed, challenges to continued educational attendance arise, born out of a combination of dwindling or limited financial resources and various cultural traditions. Lack of financial resources and the need to work can keep women from initially attending college at a traditional age (Adickes & Worthman, 1976; Artiaga, 2013). More women than men indicate the reason they did not pursue a college education immediately after high school was due to circumstances or forces they could not control, including a lack of money and a lack of information on financial aid options

(AAUW, 1999). This is especially so if the person is low-income or is raising a child. Men who go directly from high school to work are significantly more likely than women to say they did not pursue college due to a lack of interest and the belief they could find a decent job without attending college (AAUW, 1999).

Challenges also arise due to cultural and economic class traditions. As Adickes and Worthman (1976) point out, adult women from working class families tend to "have been influenced by a combination of traditions that has not placed great value on higher education for women" (p. 3). Traditions include graduating from high school, getting married, and having children. Edwards (1993) notes that parents and teachers low expectations for students based on gender, race, and class status also has an effect on educational goals and degree attainment.

A further challenge is the conflict that can arise between working class identities and challenges to those identities nurtured through higher education (Adams, 1996; Luttrell, 1989; Wentworth & Peterson, 2001). According to Luttrell (1984), these pre-existing self-identified traits include "being tough," "being rebellious," "being quiet and withdrawn," "being cute," "being the mother and marriage type," "not being smart," and "having common sense" (p. 162). Class-derived identity conflicts are also highlighted in Edwards (1993), who notes experiences derived from living in the working class differ from those of the middle-class. These different life experiences can affect classroom learning and behavior. Some of the working class participants in Edwards (1993) mentioned when their life experiences did not coincide with those of fellow classmates from the middle class, they concluded there must be something wrong with their own experiences. Reflecting this feeling, one person stated her

working-class life experiences must indicate “I haven’t done something properly” (Edwards, 1993, p. 88).

Artiaga’s (2013) study of Hispanic immigrant women attending a community college, all in their 40s, found cultural and gender traditions had influenced participants at a relatively young age, which affected their long run educational trajectories. In the participants’ Mexican communities, it was common for girls to only attend through middle school. The proper place for a young woman was either at home caring for family or finding work to support the family. Once in the United States, the women had to work hard at overcoming cultural and gender biases against their college attendance, including from spouses. One participant said she spent 10 years attempting to break these biases before undertaking her educational studies.

Another finding in Artiaga (2013) relates to the challenges presented when English is not one’s first language. Among the effects of lacking high-level English proficiency is an increase in time it takes to achieve a degree and a feeling of being ostracized from fellow classmates. Feelings of being marginalized derive from an absence of team inclusion and a sense that others deem them not bright enough to make relevant contributions to joint projects. English as a second language (ESL) students also comment on the fast pace of college classes and feel especially challenged taking English composition classes (Chavez, 2015).

A relevant case study of the type of challenges faced by working class women is found in Rose (2001). Through observations of his mother’s life, Rose (2001) comments on what it means to be a working class waitress. Rose (2001) refers to fears over work security, the need to develop a deep well of self-reliance, and feelings of

isolation that can arise from multiple responsibilities that preclude time for other interests. The story of Rose's mother's also recounts how physically demanding and debilitating working class jobs can be. Rose's account shows how only obtaining a seventh grade education will virtually doom any college degree aspirations if a woman is simultaneously faced with supporting a family through full time work. (In this case, Rose's mother was married and her husband was disabled.) Rose (2001) states membership in the working class produced "a sense of financial vulnerability [that] would remain with my mother for the rest of her life" (p. 5).

When working class women later in life find themselves laid off from work they can face especially difficult circumstances on the road to re-employment. In Hodges' (2013) qualitative study of 17 women over age 50 who lost jobs from a textile plant, each person's life narrative highlights the breadth of the hardships caused by an enforced transition, first to school, and then back to the job market. Many workers had from a ninth grade to a high school education, 11to 40 years seniority, and began attending a community college for retraining. One participant's description of the older women at the plant is similar to that in Rose (2001), namely "their character is defined by a strong desire to work and dedication to the job" (Hodges, 2013, p. 95), and that co-workers (or in the case of Rose, customers) can become almost extended family. Similar in part to working as a waitress full-time (Rose, 2001), the laid off employees knew they would never find something that had paid as well as the textile plant if they did not obtain an education beyond high school.

Despite a solid work ethic and dedication to a job, working-class older women face a harsh reality. These women have a financial need to work, (and desire to work),

however they face diminishing local job opportunities, perceived age and gender prejudice, and restrictions imposed by financial aid sources to study fields either overly restrictive or in areas of little interest (Hodges, 2013). One participant in Hodges (2013) had not found a job in her chosen field after sending out over 300 resumes. Another woman, to pursue something academically more relevant to her interests, had to work part-time to pay more of the education costs. In the end, Hodge's (2013) participants found part-time jobs are relatively plentiful for older women, and full-time positions, regardless of skills, are not.

Although working-class women should also not be seen as a homogeneous group (Jackson, 2003), for many a cycle of lifelong experience and learning still "centers on low-paid, low-status jobs that are often part-time or fixed term…" (Jackson, 2003, p.374). Women who are older, especially older women of color, have an especially difficult time finding well-paying jobs after a layoff (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). Re-employment opportunities are also a special concern among rural low-income women (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). Thus social class is in itself a barrier to mobility (Jackson, 2003), a sentiment echoed in Reay's (2003) study of 12 working class women (ages 29-late forties), which found the "tensions between the self and the social remain despite the women's 'best' efforts" (p. 314). In the end, Adams (1996) states, women, especially working-class women, risk experiencing new forms of isolation and hopelessness when they refuse to return to their former selves yet are simultaneously unable to implement and more fully actualize their desired new identities.

The issues faced by women of low socioeconomic status are very similar to women in general. What is magnified is the emphasis on several challenges and related motivations. These motivations include creating a more financially secure and independent future (AAUW, 1999) that leaves behind dead-end, low wage work, escaping domestic violence, and even renewing commitments to get off drugs (Barry, 2012). Children continue to play a complex role, providing motivation to demonstrate good role model behaviors and to provide improved financial support, yet simultaneously presenting conflicts surrounding balancing priorities (Barry, 2012). In sum, Luttrell (1989) notes working-class women "feel a deep conflict between self and others, placing their needs last either by choice or force" (p. 34). Due to the resulting multitude of stressors they experience, “It is vital to understand what poor women believe about themselves, perceive themselves capable of accomplishing, and fear that they might become in the future” (Robinson & Davis, 2001, p. 4).

Adult Women Students’ Success Factors

Friends, faith, family, and mentors can all play a pivotal role in helping nontraditional age women manage the fear associated with returning to the classroom. When no one else steps forward to assist, a spirit of self-reliance is tapped. Every participant (including 5 women ages 50-62) in Schaefer’s (2009) study noted family members, including spouses, children, and siblings, were their single most important source of support, a theme reinforced by Artiaga (2013) and Barry (2012). As summed up by one woman student in Peters (2010), “It is kind of a family deal as you get older cause, everybody has to cooperate or you are really, it really hurts your performance in your classes and everything” (p. 100). A spouse can play a critical role. As one

participant in Filipponi-Berardinelli (2013) noted, “My husband has always offered support for me. Whether it’s school support or household support, he is always there for me” (p. 13). Cox and Ebbers (2010) found the main source of support for community college women in their late 20s and 30s was friends and family members, especially women friends and classmates.

Thus the litany of negative forces pushing against degree attainment can be “counterbalanced by the positive influences extended by family, friends, tutors, instructors, and counselors” (Chavez, 2015, p. 219). Indeed, in addition to family and friends, relationships with faculty and staff can also have a hugely positive impact (Artiaga, 2013; Bates, 2012; Chavez, 2015; Cox & Ebbers, 2010; Filipponi-Barardinelli, 2013; Hooven, 2009; Peters, 2010; Schaefer, 2009). Family support even cascades down into the expression of comfort with e-learning. Women adult students in Chu (2010) were more likely to rely on family emotional support for things like general Internet self-efficacy than were men.

While support from family and friends is ideal and often critical to success, tapping an inner strength and a strong religious faith is sometimes the only thing available to rely upon. In Chavez’s (2015) study of first-generation Hispanic women (all under age 50), “Students often relied only on themselves for motivation” (p. 213). As one participant said, “Nobody has ever encouraged me to go to school. Nobody! Not even my parents” (Chavez, 2015, p.214). The significance of a resilient attitude and a strong will in the face of adversity is also noted by Dominguez (2010) and Artiaga (2013) in their studies of Mexican American community college women.

Palazesi's (2004) study of community college Baby Boomers likewise found "Virtually all participants identified themselves in some way as self-reliant or moving towards self-reliance, independence, and individualism" (p.76). These descriptors led three of the women in Palazesi to describe themselves as survivors. One stated, "I survived all I've been through. I won't go down easily" (p. 76). Even turning fear on its head has been found to be a useful emotional propellant. This was described broadly in Filipponi-Berardinelli (2013) as "There was too much at stake to run" (p.7), and as one participant said, "I don't want to fail as a woman, as an individual, as a parent" (p.7).

A reliance on religious faith is also an important success component for adult women students. Dominguez's (2010) study of Mexican-American re-entry students attending a community college found faith an important theme in the students' decision-making processes. Religious faith was found to offer support and courage during times of uncertainty and personal insecurities. In her study of African American community college women, ages 21-45, Bates (2012) found for every study participant faith and prayer played key roles in supporting success. Faith was a source of both strength and direction, and without it doubts were seen as leading to worries and failure. A focus on spirituality tightly linked to Latina culture was also noted by Artiaga (2013) in her study of community college women.

Lumina's study (2007) references a simple fact: adult learners need counselors and mentors. Schaefer (2010) found older adult students would benefit greatly from mentoring opportunities. Indeed, one of the factors related to academic success of nontraditional Hispanic women in Chavez (2015) is mentors. As noted in Padula (1994), reentry women may experience emotional distress regarding their role identity

and beliefs about who they are and what they wish to become. Women returning to college wonder how to best approach nurturing their evolving selves while simultaneously investing in family relationships and responsibilities (Daloz, 1999). Daloz (1999) believes mentors can play a critical role in supporting and assisting nontraditional women students, and that building a mentoring relationship begins by listening to student's stories. As a result, mentors can incarnate dreams and provide the encouragement necessary to create the future (Daloz, 1999).

Community College Women Age 50+

While studies found have not focused solely on community college women age 50+, isolating gender-specific data from studies on older students and age-specific data from studies of nontraditional age women students indicates older women share a number of common motivational factors with younger, nontraditional age women students. Younger women Baby Boomers, those born after 1955, are still focused on starting a whole new career or developing their current career (Cunningham, 2009). It is not until approximately the age mid-60s and beyond that vocational interest begins dropping and one becomes largely focused on preparing for bridge employment (periods of retirement interspersed with part-time work) or intellectual stimulation as central motivators (Cunningham, 2009; Puccio, 1995).

Women in their 50's are also still responding to critical life events (Cunningham, 2009) as are those in their 30s and 40s, including divorce and job loss. Women of all ages may relish the full and unconditional support of their husbands and partners as they embark on new adventures. At the other end of the spectrum, they will receive no support from their partner. As one older woman stated in Lawrence-Lightfoot (2009),

she may also experience a partner's "actions as 'subversive,' 'consciously and unconsciously' designed to make everything harder for her, to cause her guilt, to make her stop her passionate pursuits" (p. 231).

Still, various researchers note women should not be considered a homogeneous group, and in this vein there are notable distinctions between younger and older nontraditional community college women (Adams, 1996; Edwards, 1993; Flannery, 2000b; Magolda, 1992). These distinctions include some motivational differences and factors related to life stage, including children, health, identity, and generativity. When it comes to motivation to attend a community college, there are several factors that appear to become less important as people age. Using the Education Participation Scale (EPS) test, Johnston (2010) found aspects related to social contact and social stimulation become less important over time. Social contact in the EPS includes subscales such as “having fun with friends,” “make new friends,” and to “get away from loneliness” (Miles, 2009). Also becoming less important to older women are areas related to communications improvement, such as “speak better,” “learn another language,” and “improve language skills.” Regarding career selection, reentry women over age 40 select traditional male occupations less frequently while women under age 35 are selecting these roles more frequently (Padula, 1994).

Human development is a result of the complex interactions between biological, psychological, and sociocultural forces, and time, or the point in life when a given combination of the three forces occurs (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). Rountree & Lambert (1992) state women choose to pursue new educational experiences for reasons that evolve over the different stages of life. As noted by Merriam (1994), "The mere passage

of time creates new roles for adults" (p. 86). In their study of adult lifespan development, Bluck and Habermas's (2001) findings show "time perspectives begins to change in midlife as one realizes that there is more time passed than there is left ahead" (p. 142). The stage of life that woman age 50+ are managing presents unique challenges to both the student and to the education system. As stated by Havighurst (as cited in Merriam, 1994, p. 79), "The adult educator can usefully see the adult part of the life cycle as consisting of a set of stages or phases which make different demands on education and offer different opportunities to the educator." Merriam et al. (2007) also acknowledge that various psychological models of adult development offer useful insights for educators. It is this passing of time that makes older women different from those younger in three important respects: children, health, and identity.

One critical life event that generally separates older women students from younger students is child rearing. AAUW (1999), Cunningham (2009), and Filipponi-Berardinelli (2013) note having grown or older children can be an important enabling factor for older women returning to the classroom. While younger children can provide the role model motivation for women to attend college, as can the related strong desire to provide better family financial security, returning to college comes at the cost of time away from children, spouses, and partners. The demands of being a mother while in college is often problematic and creates an ongoing struggle to balance conflicting responsibilities (Artiaga, 2013; Barry, 2012; Hooven, 2009). An even greater level of stress exists if the woman is a single mother, where academic deadlines collide with preferences for caring for children (Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013). Older women, who constitute this study, are typically past the stage of raising children. While this source of

added academic stress is often removed in older women students, it can be replaced by fears born of decades away from formal education and associated doubts about an ability to succeed in an academic environment (Brookfield, 1999; Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013).

Issues of health also naturally become a more complicating factor with age. Age is the most significant factor for diseases found in developed countries (Niccoli & Partridge, 2012; Disabled, 2016), including cancer, cardiovascular disease, neurodegeneration, cataracts, osteoporosis, hypertension, and Alzheimer's disease. A wide variety of age-related changes in the immune system, reduced DNA repair capabilities, and modifications to neurotransmitter levels can also lead people as they age to be more vulnerable to a variety of environmentally induced negative health outcomes (Geller & Zenick, 2005). Adults age 45-64 also have higher incidents of serious psychological distress than do adults 25-44 (U. S. Center, 2015), yet interestingly, midlife adults (46-59) demonstrate the greatest levels of transformational thinking (Labouvie-Vief, Chiodo, Goguen, Diehl, & Orwoll, 1995). Older adult women will naturally bring particular wellness aspects of their lives with them into the classroom in ways that differ from younger adults. These issues may affect perceived possible careers and therefore academic majors, emotions and feelings, and motivation.

The concept of the life span recognizes certain unique aspects of each phase of life (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). Erikson's life stage theory provides a useful starting point for considering how older women, age 50+, are fundamentally different than their thirty-something counterparts. Erikson identified eight life cycle stages with his wife Joan later adding a ninth (Erikson, 1997). Individuals move through the stages in a

stepwise, upward fashion that is not tied tightly to a specific age (Merriam et al., 2007). Indeed, Erikson (1997) states wide temporal ranges are possible. As the challenge presented at each stage is met, the individual becomes well prepared to meet the challenge of the next stage (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). Erikson also acknowledged "as adults we may revisit earlier stages to resolve or re-resolve conflicts from earlier periods in different ways" (Merriam et al., p. 306), thus softening a seeming rigid linearity some have criticized (Daloz, 1999; McAdams, 2014).

In each stage of Erikson's model the individual faces the challenge of successfully resolving a conflict between a positive need and a negative force. The challenge typically faced by a person in her or his 20s or 30s is the conflict between intimacy and isolation (Erikson, 1997). In Erikson's model (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000), an individual establishes some sense of a personal identity first, and then moves forward to a shared identity, or intimacy, with another. While many men, career-oriented women, and women scoring above the median on masculinity in sex-role orientation tests seem to progress in this fashion, many women do not (Dyk & Adams, 1990; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Women, note Kail and Cavanaugh (2000), also "resolve intimacy issues before identity issues. They marry and rear children, and only after their children have grown and moved away do they deal with the question of their own identity" (p. 326). There is evidence some women develop identity and intimacy in a fused relationship (Dyk & Adams, 1990), or in ways that are different from and more interconnected than men (Josselson, 1987). Having children further cements identity postponement (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000) because it generally leads to strong pressures to engage in traditional male - female role behaviors. According to Palazesi and Bower

(2006), searching for a postponed or renewed identity is one aspect of older women seeking a community college degree.

In addition to the possibility of spiraling back to address unresolved identity issues, women (and men) age 50+ will also be faced with resolving the unique later life stage conflict of generativity versus stagnation. A growing body of evidence supports the concept of generativity in Erikson's model (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000, McAdams, 2015). Middle-aged adults do seem to have different concerns and priorities than younger adults. Generativity includes the concept of caring about one's legacy and gifts to future generations (Erikson, 1997), and how one can productively contribute to a better future for those to come (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). The countervailing forces of rejection, despair, and stagnation must be managed to successfully navigate this stage (Erikson, 1997), and having successfully navigated all the earlier stage conflicts is no guarantee of success at this new stage (Burns & Burns-Lundgren, 2015).

According to Kail and Cavanaugh (2000), while most middle-age adults must eventually deal with the challenges of generativity versus stagnation, the timing of such a challenge is difficult to predict. The process is also complicated by the notion generative inclinations can wax and wane and can exhibit differing levels of intensity in different domains of life (McAdams, 2015; McAdams, 2014). Thus the generativity process may influence older women students and their educational experiences in ways that differentiate them from younger nontraditional aged students, including how these older women think about possible careers, academic majors, commitments to their studies, and investments in their identity development. The degree of current success navigating this stage may also become apparent in a person's life story. Life stories told

by those low in generativity often have common themes (Lewis, 2000), including plots involving early injuries and repeated conflicts and an overall story setting that appears threatening or neglectful (McAdams, 2006a).

Carl Jung adds some final insights applicable to the need for studying older women students as separate from younger students. Jung's process of individuation (Cranton & Roy, 2003) is about becoming ever more conscious of one's own uniqueness; it is a growing recognition of one's differentiated and unique personality, and is a process that takes a lifetime to unfold. Yet it is not until midlife, according to Jung, "that the individual is capable of blending the yin and yang of personality;" it is not until the second half of life that what has previously been suppressed can become accepted (McAdams, 1985, p. 204). Jung thus bluntly states the focus of our lives must change as we age, for

> We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie...Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning, or the natural aim, must pay for it with damage to his soul... (Jung, 1971a, p. 17-18).

The passage of time and the infinite variations possible with individuation (von Franz, 1964) highlights the importance of exploring the uniqueness inherent in older women's' life stories.

The older women community college students that comprise this study have another element in common in addition to age. Being from the same generation, their lives share a common historical context. Isolating generational influences on identity, attitudes, and approaches to life is complex, yet is a relevant factor to consider.

Baby Boomer Generation

Overview

As will be further addressed in Chapter 3, all study participants were from the Baby Boomer generation, generally recognized as those born between mid-1946 and mid-1964 (U.S. Com., 2014). All but one follow-up participant is from the second half of the Boomer generation, thus entering adolescence and beginning adulthood during the 1970s and early 1980s. Given the potential influence of broad societal trends on identity formation, it is relevant to consider how these trends may have affected this study's participants.

Mannheim, a leading theorist on the sociology of generations, believed certain feelings and thoughts could be traced to generational location and that these factors fit within a "socio-historical structure" (as cited in Pilcher, 1994, p. 482). Furthermore, states Pilcher (1994), "the formative experiences during the time of youth are highlighted as the key period in which social generations are formed" (p. 483). Thus, "political, economic, and social events occurring during a person's formative years continue to affect her worldview for the remainder of her life" (Williams & Davidson, 1996, p. 274).

Stewart and Healy (1989) elaborate, arguing social experiences coincident with individual development in childhood have influence upon an individual's values and worldview, and that these events, if experienced toward late adolescence and the transition to adulthood, will have the power to influence a person's identity. While acknowledging the concept of a social cohort as "amorphous," Rosow states it is "extremely valuable in sensitizing us to forces that we are prone to forget or ignore"

(Rosow, as cited in Pilcher, p. 494). Campbell, Campbell, Siedor, and Twenge (2015) note that generational research can never explain everything, nevertheless the average differences should not be ignored. Generational cohort can thus be viewed as a useful concept regarding human development (Alwin & McCammon, 2007).

Baby Boomer Commonalities

There are various ways to approach understanding the Baby Boomer cohort. The first is to consider sociological events. When asked to name the 10 most historic events of their lifetimes (see Table 2), Deane, Duggan, and Morin (2016) found Baby Boomers' unique defining moments were the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the Vietnam War.

Table 2

Percentage Mentions for Baby Boomers' Top 10 Historic Events in Their Lifetime

Sept. 11	70%
JFK assassination	45%
Vietnam War	41%
Obama election	38%
Moon landing	35%
The tech revolution	26%
Civil rights movement	18%
Fall of Berlin Wall / end of Cold War	16%
MLK assassination	15%
Iraq / Afghanistan wars	11%

Note: Based on survey of 2,025 adults conducted in 2016 by Pew Research Center.

Steinhorn (2006) found four cultural strands rooted in the sixties that form the essential framework for understanding the Baby Boomer psyche. These were 1)

questioning authority; 2) striving to implement the nation's ideals; 3) a disdain for the perils of technology; and 4) a desire to experiment, to exhibit open-mindedness, and remain youthful in attitude. Indicative of this framework, Boomers read satirical magazines such as *Mad,* the second most-read magazine among high school students. The book *Catch 22* became a bible for Boomer youth. They were inspired by America's original promise and dedicated to doing something about its shortcomings. Technology's dark side was evident in *Dr. Strangelove*, the HAL computer in *2001: A Space Odyssey,* and the destruction and murder in the Vietnam War. Yet technology's positive potential was symbolized in the moon landing and humanity's capacity to reflect upon the mysteries of the universe. In summary,

> To boomers, the entire culture seemed prepackaged, dehumanized, devoid of emotion and spirituality, built on big and small lies like planned obsolescence and better living through chemistry and winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. It was a culture of technocratic and bureaucratic euphemisms designed to cover up an irrational war and environmental degradation and social conformity and hierarchical thinking and cars that were unsafe at any speed…When their elders dug in and refused to budge from the old ways–telling boomers they shouldn't listen to this music or they shouldn't protest a war or they shouldn't demand their civil rights or they shouldn't rush change or they shouldn't behave a certain way because it would violate their moral teachings–boomers took it as an invitation to defy, seeing these admonitions as delay tactics, as desperate attempts by their elders to reassert control over a world that had passed them by (Steinhorn, 2006, p. 80, 84).

Boomers have similarly been viewed as indulgent (Roper Starch, 1999), rebellious, free-spirited, and cause oriented (Agati, 2011), while at the same time characterized as possessing a "hard-charging work ethic and drive to get ahead" (Harter & Agrawal, 2014, para. 1), independent (Roper Starch,1999; Wiedmer, 2015), goal-oriented, and motivated by upward mobility with personal identities tied closely to their work and careers (Wiedmer, 2015).

Intra-Baby Boomer Cohort Distinctions

Despite these general insights about the Boomer generation, caveats abound. Stewart and Torges (2006) note while most Baby Boomers, regardless of when they were born, were influenced in some way by such factors as national prosperity and the Cold War, it is extremely difficult to ascertain how and to what degree complex social forces influence children. Generational research poses interesting challenges, including determining if differences are merely due to maturation effects (Duncan & Stewart, 2000) or the manner in which the issues themselves are interpreted (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). A further complication is the degree to which new generations invent and propel cultural alternatives that lead to subsequent adoption by the mass culture (See e.g. Bengtson, Furlong, & Laufer, 1983). Cross-generational data on equivalent terms is also scarce (Stewart & Torges, 2006), complicating the research process.

Generational research has also shown itself to be topic dependent. Some studies find generational differences do exist on specific issues, such as the way Catholics think about faith (Williams & Davidson, 1996) and the subject of feminism (Duncan & Stewart, 2000), while others find lesser generational differences or differences that are more nuanced, such as with relationship commitments (Stark, Kirk, & Bruhn, 2012), work values (Hansen & Leuty, 2012), and attitudes toward abortion rights (Schnell & McConatha, 1996). Unfortunately, notes Campbell, et al. (2015), generational research has often relied upon weak data or anecdote.

In light of these challenges, studies (Delgado, 2015; Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006; Roper Starch, 1999; Stewart & Torges, 2006) generally warn against any temptation to treat Boomers as homogeneous. Individual personality is one

complicating factor, with some people recognizing how their self fits into a larger picture, and others seeing their self as unique and distinct (Stewart & Torges, 2006). Delgado (2015) believes "variations within the Boomer generation are greater than the variations between generations, making broad generalizations difficult" (p.8). Delgado (2015) also notes little attention has been focused on racial and ethnic Baby Boomer subgroups. According to Boveda and Metz (2016), even extremely large national datasets of people age 50+ lack enough participants from racial and ethnic minorities to make any generalizable findings possible.

Therefore, some generational subgroups may possess stronger cohort identities than others. For example, "belonging to the Baby Boomer generation may be more a central identification for white and middle-class people than for people of color or those from working-class backgrounds" (Stewart, 1994, p. 231). Certainly the relative emphasis on major lifetime events is different for Whites than minorities (Deane et al., 2016; Stewart & Torges, 2006). For example, Stewart and Torges (2006) note Baby Boomers in general mention the assassination of President Kennedy as a significant memory, however African Americans mention the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X more frequently than Whites. While 22% of Whites mention the moon landing as a top ten event, only 8% of African Americans do so (Deane, et al., 2016).

Further complicating any methodological approach to Baby Boomer analysis is the debate over the age range definition itself. Mannheim recognized the practical challenge of how to distinguish between age groups and define their boundaries regarding cohort definition (Pilcher, 1994), and researchers have noted the standard

1946-1964 range is somewhat arbitrary (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). Using just the demographic variables marital status, education, living arrangements, work, and income, Eggebeen & Sturgeon (2006) found only modest differences between oldest and youngest Baby Boomers. However, their study did not address the complex variables of attitudes, values, and relationships.

Basic demographic data can be further divided to study differences based on gender and race. As illustrated in Table 3, Baby Boomer men and women have a different pattern of labor force participation (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006). For those born in the mid-1950s, as they approach age 50, men are more likely to be employed on both a full- and part-time basis than women.

Table 3

Middle Cohort Baby Boomer Percentage Labor Force Participation by Gender

	At Age 47-49	
Middle Baby Boomers (born 1953-1955)	Male	Female
Not in labor force	9.3	20.2
Part time	14.0	24.2
Full time	76.8	55.6

Note: Extracted from Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006, p. 15, Table 1.6. Numbers are percentages.

In Table 4, there are also notable differences in levels of completed education based on race/ethnicity (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006) of Baby Boomers born in the mid 1950s. Whites are more likely to have completed a four-year college degree than either Blacks or Hispanics, and Blacks have a higher level of educational attainment than Hispanics.

Table 4

Middle Cohort Baby Boomer Education by Ethnicity

Middle Baby Boomers (born 1953-1955)	White	At Age 47-49 Black	Hispanic
< High School	5.7	15.8	40.6
High School	32.1	32.5	27.6
Some College	29.5	32.3	18.0
Bachelor's Degree or >	32.7	19.5	13.8

Note: Extracted from Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006, p. 13, Table 1.4. Numbers are percentages.

The data on labor force participation and education are important given their influence on income. As Eggebeen & Sturgeon (2006) note,

> Whites are twice as likely at any age or cohort as either Blacks or Hispanics to have earned [family income] at least $75,000. Similarly, Whites are only half as likely as Blacks or Hispanics to have earned less than $30,000 in the previous year…There is some evidence that all three groups experience growth in incomes over time, however (p. 15-16).

Eggebeen & Sturgeon conclude that the demographic data indicates about 40% of Whites appear well prepared to handle the economic and social challenges of aging, while only 20% of Blacks and 15-20% of Hispanics appear similarly prepared. The challenges faced by Latino Baby Boomers is echoed by Gassoumis, Wilber, Baker, & Torres-Gil (2010), who found they face a range of demographic and economic challenges to a greater degree than non-Latinos. In summary, demographic data indicates race differences "are so stark as to make broad generalizations about baby boomers as a whole erroneous" (Eggebeen & Sturgeon, 2006, p. 17).

Another approach to understanding potential Baby Boomers differences is to conduct a segmentation analysis. Roper Starch (1999) completed telephone interviews

with a national cross-section of 2,001 Boomer adults and, using cluster analysis, identified five Boomer segments. These segments are summarized in Table 5 (Roper-Starch, 1999). Roper-Starch data indicates one third of Baby Boomers are pessimistic about their futures, with many woefully unprepared financially for retirement and therefore expecting to need to work throughout their retirement years. Given that wealth disparity has only continued to widen between upper income families and middle and lower income families since the study was conducted (Fry & Kochhar, 2014), it is probable this level of pessimism has grown.

In general, 80% of Boomers plan to work at least part time in their later years (Roper-Starch, 1999), a further indication this generation is redefining what it means to be retired (Boveda & Metz, 2016; Shultz & Wang, 2011). Staying in the workforce longer, bridge employment (working part time in a new or existing career), encore careers (moving into a completely new full time position), and starting a business are all being planned by Boomers (Boveda & Metz, 2016; Roper-Starch, 1999). One thing Delgado (2015) notes most Boomers will share, however, regardless of other variables, is discrimination based on age.

Various studies (Hollister, 2009; Stewart & Torges, 2006; Wellner, 2000) also point out major differences in the socioeconomic environment of the 1960s versus the 1970s to early 1980s. While the first half of the Baby Boom (Early Boomers) are entering young adulthood in the former period, the second half (Late Boomers) are still children. Therefore, Early Boomers become of age with Vietnam, Woodstock, Walter Cronkite, and Gloria Steinem. Later Boomers are more likely influenced by personal

Table 5

Baby Boomer Retirement Goal Segments

The Strugglers	9%	"Of the five Baby Boomer segments, the Strugglers are the lowest income group, with a median household income nearly $30,000 below that of the average Baby Boomer. This group is disproportionately comprised of females (64%) rather than males (36%). The Strugglers are saving virtually no money for retirement, because they simply have no money to save" (p. 19).
The Anxious	23%	"The Anxious are best characterized by their sense of apprehension when they look ahead to their later years…With their limited means, they currently strive to put some money aside for retirement. The Anxious do not expect to be rewarded with financial well-being when they retire. Indeed, many do not expect to be able to stop working…The Anxious also express great concern about their health care coverage during their retirement years" (p. 19).
The Enthusiasts	13%	"A defining characteristic of this group is that Enthusiasts—without exception—do not plan to work at all during retirement. Indeed, they envision having plenty of money and plenty of time for recreation. For them, retirement promises to be a time free of the rigors of working" (p. 20).
The Self Reliants	30%	This segment has the highest income and educational level of any group "and is aggressively putting money into retirement-oriented investments. However, in contrast to the Enthusiasts, the Self Reliants want to continue working at least part time after they retire. Indeed, the contrast with the Enthusiasts could not be more striking: whereas all of the Enthusiasts expect to stop working, only 1% of the Self Reliants expect to not work at all. What motivates the Self Reliants to continue working is not the pay, but rather the interest and enjoyment that work provides" (p. 20).
Today's Traditional-ists	25%	"This segment, in many of their attitudes toward Social Security and Medicare, seem to have a stronger sense of confidence and less of an attitude of uncertainty than the other segments displayed toward these programs. However, this group is not totally traditional: Today's Traditionalists plan both to work and to rely on Social Security and Medicare during retirement" (p. 20). This segment resembles "in many ways more traditional American workers of the past generation" (p. 79).

Note: Percentages of Baby Boomers by segment, summarized from Roper Starch (1999).

computers, AIDS, and CNN (Wellner, 2000). Early Boomers have the draft; Later Boomers do not (Perez-Pena, 2014).

Among the formative experiences to which this study's women participants were generationally exposed is a continuation of the women's rights movement, including the failed attempt to pass the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution (ratification deadline in 1982), the legalization of abortion resulting from *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, and the publishing of feminist books such as the best-seller "Our Bodies, Ourselves" in 1971. During the early to mid 1970s the fight also continues for equality among minorities and marginalized groups, the United States withdraws militarily from Vietnam, the Watergate scandal leads to President Nixon's resignation, and the environmental movement gains momentum with the first Earth Day celebration. The distinctions among the first half Early Boomers and second half Later Boomers environment are so noteworthy that observers give Later Boomers the distinctly new names Boomer Reboot (Perez-Pena, 2014) and Generation Jones (Hollister, 2009; Wellner, 2000; Williams, 2014).

One of the most important distinctions separating the Early from the Later Boomers is the combination of economic changes and population demographics. Generation Jones represents the peak in growth in post-WWII births, with this cohort facing increased competition for jobs both from their bulging peer group and from the large number of older Baby Boomers who proceeds them into the job market (Hollister, 2009). Smith and Clurman (2007) note the veneer of virtually limitless prosperity in the 50's and 60's wears off for Generation Jones, marked by the first oil crisis in 1973 and the second one in 1979. By 1982 the unemployment rate is up to 9.7%, and in 1983

remains at 9.6% (U. S. Department of Labor, 2017), presenting a difficult labor market for Later Boomers beginning their careers. The beginning of offshoring and corporate downsizings compound employment difficulties (Williams, 2014). Deteriorating economic conditions leads to "a decline in the proportion of workers in professional occupations within this [Generation Jones] cohort, a trend that was reversed for subsequent generations" (Hollister, 2009, p. 7).

On a psychological level (Stewart & Torges, 2006), crowded schools, colleges, and labor markets create an environment that encourages an especially high level of competitiveness and individualism as Baby Boomers, Generation Jones in particular, struggles for recognition and their share of the American good life. This intra-generational competition may help explain why Baby Boomer children score higher on indices of anxiety and lower on levels of well-being than those born before the boom (Piazza & Charles, 2006; Stewart & Torges, 2006).

Since this study's focus is on women age 50+, it is relevant to conclude a review of the Baby Boomer generation with a reference to gender. Having a longer life expectancy than men along with a history of being paid less, many women appear to be facing difficult retirement futures (Delgato, 2015). Concern is especially high for divorced women, especially minorities, who will likely face high poverty rates during retirement (Butrica & Smith, 2012). As indicated in Table 3, women have experienced different labor force participation rates. This difference translates into disparate career trajectories and more intermittent work histories for women (Boveda & Metz, 2016). Stewart and Torges (2006) add that women and those from working class backgrounds report more regrets about lack of education, and women report greater regret about

foregone career opportunities. While the women's movement instigated numerous societal changes, including the encouragement of women to develop their own identities separate from families and spouses, Stewart and Torges (2006) expect issues of identity will continue to be of significance to Baby Boomer women in their middle age.

Identity

Identity development has been highlighted as an ongoing challenge for Baby Boomers (Stewart & Torges, 2006), and one that is a lifelong process (Savickas, 2011). Identity development is a concern for women of all ages returning to college, given "much of women's learning has to do with women's identity and self-esteem..." (Flannery, 2000a, p. 54). Given older women students have also specifically noted modifying or creating a new self-identity is one aspect of returning to college, it is important to address differing perspectives on what identity is, how identity can be revealed through storytelling, and the relevance of identity stories to education.

Identity Perspectives

The concept of "identity" is ultimately a philosophical question (Baumeister, 1986). Indeed, some philosophers comment the word has been poorly defined within the social sciences, leading to a level of incoherence in the debate about what it actually means (Descombes, 2016). From a practical perspective, the study of identity is approached from two diverse directions: the outer sphere of society and its many tendrils, and the inner / personal self (Alasuutari, 1997; Barresi, 2006; Baumesiter, 1986). "Identity" further subsumes many differing definitions and perspectives depending upon the academic discipline through which it is studied. Stryker and Burke, (2000) believe psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, political science, and history all

claim some ownership of the term and its relevant meaning and theory. The result, according to Burke and Stryker (2016), is a lack of a unitary, agreed upon theoretical definition. Three common sociological uses of the term "identity" reference culture (e.g. ethnicity), group identity (Tajfel, 1982), and elements of the "self," wherein self is some conglomeration of meanings the individual ascribes to the role or various roles they play (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Differences in perspective regarding the concept of identity can be thought of as one of emphasis on the major factors that influence identity. Sociologists trace their foundational concepts of identity back to Mead and symbolic interactionism. Identity theory derived from this frame believes "at least initially and at least largely, selves are built upon responses to them made by others (Stryker, 2007, p. 1089). As Mead (1934) notes, "The content of the objective world, as we experience it, is in large measure constituted through the relations of the social process to it (p. 112)." In other words notes Stryker (2007), "society shapes self, and self shapes social behavior" (p. 1089). The very notion of "meaning" is thus created through social processes (Mead, 1934). One example of this can be seen in the cultural influences within certain Australian Aboriginal societies, where

> Those who have suffered illness or accident do not have rights to narrate the tale of that experience. Rather, such rights are allocated to those who nursed the sick back to health. In these communities, when one is sick, one is not oneself and therefore not able to access what happened (Sampson, 1982, as cited in Ochs & Capps, 1996, p. 34).

Stryker and Stryker (2016) claim Mead's foundational framework on self and identity to be very relevant today, despite its incompleteness. One example of proposed outmoded thinking is that Mead believed in a largely singular self-identity. A common

sociological view today contemplates a self that is "multifaceted, composed of diverse parts that sometimes are independent of one another and sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually reinforcing and sometimes conflicting..." (Stryker, 2007, p. 1091). One challenge inherent in this view, according to Stryker and Burke (2000), is that research "generally has not faced squarely the implications of the 'multiple identities' conceptualization" for the simple reason "the greater the number of related identities, the greater difficulty of dealing simultaneously with relationships among them" (p. 292). Sociologically-derived identity theory also continues to seek ways to develop a more complete understanding of the various bases of identity (category, such as Christian or Jew, and role, such as parent or child) and the impact emotions play on identity formulation and salience (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

While sociologists historically may have criticized psychologists for placing too much emphasis on dispositional traits (Stryker, 2007) and not enough on "role-related performances and expectations for behavior" (Stryker & Stryker, 2016, p. 42), sociologist and psychologists have been converging on "a shared conceptualization of the self as a highly complex but organized phenomenon" (Hermans, 1996, p.33) that values both the inner and outer world. Identity is now generally recognized to be socially and geographically constrained, emerging from social interactions, and shaped by variables such as history, culture, gender, ethnicity, and social class (Brockmeier, 2015; Bruner, 2004; Markus & Nurius, 1986; McAdams, 2006a; McAdams, 2015), as well as influenced by dispositional traits (McAdams, 2015; Stryker, 2007) and a desire for agency (McAdams, 2015; White, 2007).

Still, debate continues on the degree to which a coherent self can exist in modern societies. McAdams (2006b) makes the case "people construct stories to make sense of their lives" (p. 110) and the construction of a coherent narrative of the self is an important aspect of finding meaning. We may all be social actors, but establishing ourselves as an *authentic* social actor, one with a status of "*identity achieved"* (McAdams, 2015, p. 248; italics in original) leads to a narrative that more successfully integrates one's life story. The status of identity achieved can be contrasted to a summary of Marcia's (1966) three other categories or stages of identity development: moratorium (struggling with exploration yet no commitment), foreclosure (avoiding exploration and making a premature identity commitment), and diffusion (lacking interest in or any concern about commitment to an identity). Of course an "achieved identity" in early adulthood, for example, in no way excludes identity transformations over the life span. Transformations of various kinds are always possible.

For McAdams (1993), identity is comprised of those behaviors and selective, key life episodes that can speak to the fundamental question, "Who am I?" Likewise, Alasuutari (1997) acknowledges two or more "characters" may exist within a personality, but these multiple lines of action are still united into one "'self'" (p. 12). What might otherwise be seen as incoherence is hopefully unified; a consistent story is both a good story and one that helps us cope with changing and demanding circumstances. Indeed, research (McAdams, 2006b) has come to show that people who tell coherent stories of their lives also happen to be those who "love, work, and live well" (p. 122) and make positive contributions to the world in which they live.

Hermans (1996) tends to agree with McAdams (1993) and Alasuutari (1997) that the self can be multi-charactered, yet adds each self is also multivoiced, each with a relative autonomy to the other. Within this dialogic model, the self self-negotiates, self-opposes, and hopefully self-integrates. The centralized *I* is replaced with a "decentralized, polyphonic narrative with a multiplicity of *I* positions," that are "culturally and psychologically constrained" (Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992, p. 30). In the end, Herman suggests a kind of self-coherence is still possible within the multivocal self (McAdams, 2006b). While the autonomous characters of the self may tend to their own activities, a counter, centripetal force exists that "attempts to bring these tendencies together to create a field in which the different characters form a community…The synthesizing quality of the Self is indispensable" (Hermans & Kempen, as cited in McAdams, 2006b, p. 119). This notion is similar to that summarized by Stein & Markus, (1996), for whom the self is a conglomeration of generalizations regarding specific tendencies across various behavioral domains.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who claim the self faces "so many diverse stimuli and shifting demands that it simply cannot assume a coherent form" (McAdams, 2006b, p. 120). Raggatt (2006) views narrative identity "more like a cacophony of competing interests or warring historians" (p. 32). According to Raggatt (2000), not only is the self composed of multiple voices, each with its own life story, each self competes with the other, a fact made all the more complicated by each possessing its own moral identity and desire for power. In the end, there is no central core that constitutes a "self." Summing up the study of lives in all it richness, McAdams (2008a) notes "No single theory or research paradigm integrates all the work being

done" (p. 243). Given the complexity of identity, it is relevant to next consider one approach to its investigation.

Revealing Identity Through Stories

One approach psychologists are taking to the study of the self is through the concept of *narrative identity.* A narrative identity "refers to an individual's internalized, evolving, and integrative story of the self" (McAdams, 2008, p. 242). Stories are molded and modified continuously as people age, experienced as a range of transformative instances on the road to consolidating a personal identity (McAdams, 2015). Indeed, telling stories are understood as an integral part of the personal transformational process (Brooks, 2000; Savickas, 2011).

As a concept, narrative identity seeks to find the middle ground between the personal and the social, acknowledging stories "live in culture" (McAdams, 2008, p. 246). This idea of a linkage between identity, culture, and story is reinforced by Brockmeier (2015), who states, "Neither our understanding of who we are nor our very existence in a cultural world can be separated from the stories that we and others tell about ourselves." According to McAdams (2015), to formulate a narrative identity (what may also be referred to as a personal myth), "You construct the past and imagine the future in order to explain how you have become the person you are becoming" (p. 250). This imagining or projecting a story of the self into the future is also an important aspect of narrative identity, and is a component of this research. In summary, the subjective, autobiographical self is revealed in a person's life story: "Narrative identity *is* the person's life story" (McAdams, 2015, p. 259; italics in original); or put another

way by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998), “personal narratives, in both facets of content and form, *are* people's identities" (p. 7; italics in original).

Focusing solely on women is a relevant study construct given their unique life story experiences and perspectives. As Rountree and Lambert (1992) state, "Adult women students are a special population with unique problems" (p. 87). Padula (1994) reinforces this point, noting the life experiences of women returning to college are often broader and more complex than their male counterparts due to women's wider variety of roles and responsibilities. Related to the notion gender plays a factor in the construction of a narrative identity, McAdams (2015) notes, “Women tell different stories about their lives than do men, based both on different experiences and different cultural expectations regarding the kinds of narratives women and men are supposed to tell” (p. 254).

Lieblich, et al. (1998) echo McAdams’ observation, noting that men and women construct narratives differently, with men showing a tendency to display more clearly defined plots while women create narratives along multiple dimensions. Not only are the stories themselves different, women also tend to write longer self-representational descriptions than do men (Labouvie-Vief, Chiodo, Goguen, Diehl, & Orwoll, 1995). Relatedly, Adams (1996) notes nontraditional age male students disclose fewer details about family and emotional matters than do women. In the end, the wide spectrum of social roles played by nontraditional women students can result in “a more fragmented and confused sense of self” (Adams, 1996, p. 207).

One important area in which life stories differ between women and men involves motherhood and its impact on identity. As noted by Angelique and Mulvey

(2012, p. 7), “By choice or circumstance, women continue to be defined and confined by expectations of motherhood. Being a mother continues to be de-legitimized in different and yet convergent ways in both the private and public spheres.” Even when women are very satisfied with domestic responsibilities, they remain “well aware of the low status placed upon the roles of housewife and mother by others…” (Adams, 1996, p. 206). This awareness generates feelings of confusion and guilt for reentry women students. As one woman noted, “How can I have both my family and myself?” (Daloz, 1999, p. 197). Articulating all the struggles faced, a woman shares,

> I know I'm being selfish coming here, but I can't be the perfect mother . . . whatever that means now . . . *and* a successful career woman *and* find time for my parents and to always look good for my husband. I can't get it right anyway, so I may as well get it wrong in a way that gets me something for myself” (McAdams, 1996, p. 206).

Women tend to also view the academic process as one relying on objectivity, and therefore come to see their mothering experiences as both irrelevant and irreconcilable with the demands of academic work (Edwards, 1993).

Another manner in which life stories are likely differentiated between men and women concerns connectedness. While Cross and Madson (1997) note that clearly variation exists within gender, research indicates "U.S. women are more likely than U.S. men to describe themselves in terms of relatedness to others, whereas men are more likely than women to describe themselves in terms of independence from others" (p. 9). Women are more likely to positively evaluate themselves on likeability and sociability, while men similarly positively evaluate themselves on power and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, women include relationships in descriptions of their ideal

selves more so than men (Cross & Madson, 1997). These observations appear rooted in multiple social and cultural influences.

Relevance of Identity Stories to Education

The quest for identity coherence and understanding has implications for educators and educational institutions. Many people find the journey to establish a coherent sense of self that accommodates both the personal and the social an evolving struggle (Barresi, 2006). As Barresi (2006) notes, "The task of making sense of our lives by unifying these experiences, scripts, and social identities and projecting them into the future is not easy" (p. 205). If one goal of higher education is to support and guide people through their journey of identity development while cultivating the capacity of projecting themselves into the future, then knowing more about students' life stories would seem an important prerequisite. Indeed, according to Wentworth and Peterson (2001), helping students understand their past experiences and identities can assist them in meeting the challenges posed by seeking a college degree.

The idea of identity inextricably tied to a self-authored story in adulthood has direct pedagogical implications for higher education. Karpiak (2010) observes, "As instructors in academic settings, we may be naturally inclined to view our students from the outside, their style of communication, their level of competence and engagement, or their punctuality with attendance and assignments" (p. 23). However, that is too limiting a view of students as individuals, each with the potential for learning. Indeed, each student has been influenced by:

> …the cultural factors that have shaped their life, the struggles they have faced, the ways in which initial educational experiences have shaped their view of self and learning, and how these views, in turn, change through the course of their adult education. To know all this changes us. It enlarges our perspective

> and sensitizes us to their circumstances such that it shapes our teaching and interactions with them (Karpiak, 2010, p.23).

Palmer (1997) strikes a similar chord, stating "What we teach will never 'take' unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students' lives" (p. 11). In commenting about public education in general, Palmer (2003) adds the most important question a teacher can ask is, "Who is this child, and how can I nurture his or her gifts?" (p. 2). Taylor (2009), in his comments on how to foster transformative learning, suggests dialog not based necessarily on an analytical framework but instead a dialog that attends to feelings and personalities, one "emphasizing relational and trustful communication" that can be extremely personal (p. 9). Relational dialog would seem to encompass sharing the stories of who we have been, who we are today, and who we want to be. It also suggests the need to dig a little deeper into students' stories, to know something about their emotions and how they feel.

Finally, Karpiak (2008) states, "Through stories, our own or others, and through our listening, we further a classroom space that is more accepting, more sustaining, more respectful, and more caring – a space in which we as learners and as teachers open ourselves to others' views and thereby to enlarging our own" (p.92).

Students at community colleges are coping with their ever-evolving sense of self that is bound to an historical and social context, all of which are further influenced by their own "dramatic' situations…that provide the fuel for personal and social narrative" (Barresi, 2006, p. 204). Story is thus an integral aspect of evolving adult identity *and* knowing what that story has been and where it might be headed has important implications for teaching and learning. It is also important to consider how education can be used to support a transformation in one's personal story.

Transformation and Nontraditional Age Women Students

One element that keeps nontraditional age women students striving for a community college degree is the belief in the transformative nature of the educational process itself. Students start out thinking they want a degree just to change careers, and in the process of pursuing their degree, they begin to question everything (Kartje, 2000). Various types of personal transformations resulting from educational experiences transcend those of initial expectations (Hooven, 2009; Kartje, 2000). Women may find their college experiences help them recognize the significant influence society has had on their sense of self, with a resulting growth in their own personal identity (Adams, 1996). Women of color can also see their education as a way to not only transform themselves but also transform "the perceptions of dominant culture" (Pope, 1996, p. 165). Ultimately, higher education experiences provide women with a feeling of personal power and independence along with expanded and reformed relationships (Pope, 1996). One woman textile worker in Hodges (2013) who returned to college recounted the following impact, even though she had run out of health insurance and college financial assistance funding:

> Life's so different now. If I would not have went to school and just left the mill and worked anywhere, just got a job, I would not have learned the opportunities that are out there for me . . . There should be a law that everybody has to go to college . . . It changed my life. I will never be the same person again'' (p. 93).

A heightened sense of confidence and expanded ways of thinking are two transformational results of the college education experience. Cunningham (2009) states one faculty member "found that her students went through a metamorphosis, and having gone through the academic program they developed a newly discovered sense of self-confidence" (p. 117). Barry (2012), Edwards (1993), Kartje (2000), and Peters (2010)

similarly found that adult re-entry women develop more self-confidence and higher self-esteem as a result of their education. Confidence can reflect both "dealing with the world" and "a more private/personal relationship confidence" (Edwards, 1993, p. 153). Participants said, "I've seen it as a good opportunity to grow" (Peters, 2010, p. 129), and, "It gives you a lot of insight into the world today" (Peters, 2010, p. 129). Participants (age 50+, mix of men / women seeking a bachelor's degree) in Schaefer (2009) also noted an increase in dialectical thinking and acquiring a focus on thinking more broadly and deeply. Kartje (2000) summarizes the transformative impact of education on women community college graduates (age 28+) in this way:

> To a person, they described dramatic changes that they observed in themselves from the time that they first enrolled at their community colleges until they were awarded their degrees. They often related the sense of a personal transformation, as they developed confidence in themselves, began to question others, and became aware that they could be somebody who would make a difference (p. 192).

Midlife is an important time during which women explore their identities (Wentworth & Peterson, 2001), and the process of reinvention and potential transformation of identity is commonly mentioned by nontraditional age community college women. In Palazesi and Bower's (2006) interviews with 20 community college students (mean age of 48; 12 women; 5 African American) identity modification was a central theme. Women students said, "You know things happen to you and you lose some of your identity. So I needed a new me."; "Okay, so, like, I'm reinventing myself. Yeah, that's a good way to put it."; and "Hey, I'm tweaking [who I am]" (Palazesi & Bower, p. 50-51).

In Palazesi (2004), one participant modified "not only her role-identity as a worker but also identities as a learner, independent person, helping person, mentor,

people person, family member, spouse, and member of the community" (p. 121). Other studies have likewise found nontraditional age women students acknowledging their college goals as seeking an extension of their personal identity or as undertaking a process to form a new one (Filipponi-Berardinelli, 2013; Wentworth & Peterson) and as a way of investing in development of the self (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010).

Identity work among community college students is a complex process and can proceed along multiple dimensions. Babineau and Packard (2008) specify four dimensions, including attempts to reclaim a past self, working through rejection of the past prior to developing a new self, constructing a new self without much regard to the past, and expanding a current self. The nurturing of identity operates differently for each woman, with some seeing it more as providing an integrated identity that melds education, self, and family, while others come to value the separate identity that education provides (Adams, 1996; Edwards, 1993).

One tangential aspect of transformation to consider is the impetus to give back and to help others, or what has been previously addressed as generativity. Despite – or perhaps because of – the challenges they have faced in their lives, a number of older adults are seeking a regenerative path. One survey (Emeagwali, 2007) found 50% of Americans between 50 and 70 want a job that makes a broad contribution to society. In Reay's (2003) study of what she refers to as "mature working-class women," fully "11 of the 12 women claimed to be going back into education not primarily for themselves but for the benefit of others" (p. 304). One participant noted, "I want to feel I'm doing something really useful" (Reay, 2003, p. 305). All 10 of the participants in Schaefer (2009) stated that helping others was important to their own spiritual development.

Miles (2009) also notes a desire by nontraditional age women to give back and support others as a motivation for pursuing a college education.

Nevertheless, despite all that reentry women accomplish through their college attendance, Adams (1996) points out an undercurrent of fear things will not change after graduation can linger. In many cases the broad social forces reentry women faced prior to attending college remain as they prepare to graduate. Transformation of the self then continues to face various potential constraints, some of which seriously confound the best efforts to continue on a path of individuation (Adams, 1996; Luttrell, 1984).

Given that transformation in identity is one possible outcome of education, it is important to consider a theoretical framework that helps explain and map the transformational process.

Transformational Learning Theoretical Framework

Older community college women students' acknowledged shift in a sense of self, stated desire or actual creation of modified identities, expression of new personal narratives, and possession of new self-knowledge can all be considered to fall within the realm of transformative learning (Hoggan, Mälkki, & Finnegan, 2017). It is therefore relevant to consider a theoretical framework regarding transformation and how it can be useful in discovering the study's findings. At its highest level, transformational learning theory reflects an attempt to explain how adults make meaning from their life experiences, and how in turn those experiences influence personal development and subsequent actions (Merriam, 2015). It focuses on the process of how people go about creating a revised or wholly new set of interpretations and understandings derived from their life experiences (Taylor, 2008). Transformational learning is about "dramatic,

fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world" (Merriam, et al, 2007, p. 130); it's about changing "*how* we know," not merely what we know (Kegan, 2000, p. 49; italics in original). Not all learning can thus be classified as transformative.

Mezirow's Theory of Transformation

Mezirow's (1994, 2000) theory of transformation is the most widely known framework in higher education. Mezirow's theory is grounded in a constructivist orientation, wherein the manner in which a person interprets and reinterprets life experiences is central to making meaning and learning (Mezirow, 1994). Constructivist perspective acknowledges each person is unique, and "suggest that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Crotty, 1998, p. 48). Further, narrative research - the methodology utilized in this study - is about the study of experience and the underlying meaning embedded in stories told by participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). It focuses on both "the individual (e.g., feelings, hopes, values, and dispositions) and the individual's interaction with the larger social context (e.g., environment, external forces, and people" (Jones, et al., p. 83).

Mezirow's theory of transformational learning, or perspective transformation, was developed from a study of community college women's re-entry programs in the 1970s. Equating the goal of these programs to consciousness raising, Mezirow (1978) identified perspective transformation as the central process occurring in the students' personal development. Mezirow (2000) summarizes the transformation process as one where:

> we transform our taken for granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (p. 8).

Transformation relies on discourse with others as a means of evaluating our thinking and incorporating the perspectives of others, and is based upon the requirement to take action on our new perspective. This action, states Mezirow (2000), may be immediate, delayed, or merely reaffirm an existing pattern of action.

Mezirow's (2000) model is founded on two major elements: a person's established frame of reference and a process comprised of various steps one passes through on the road to transformation. A frame of reference provides the anchor for a set of values and a sense of self, infusing us with a sense of stability and establishing a baseline identity. It provides for personal coherence and continuity (Hoggan, et al., 2017). Due to its critical role, the frame of reference carries with it strong emotional attachments that are vigorously defended by the self (Mezirow, 2000). A frame of reference (also referred to as a meaning perspective) consists of two parts: a habit of mind and resulting points of view (Mezirow, 2000). An interpretive summary of a person's frame of reference identity is shown in Figure 1.

A habit of mind is a series of assumptions and related predispositions on a wide range of components and prior influences that comprise a person's sense of self. These range from culture and social norms to personality and values. Habits of mind act like a filter, screening and processing life experiences. These experiences and habits of mind become outwardly expressed as points of view. Points of view are built upon smaller clusters called meaning schemes, which are "more specific and less global, and refer to a particular belief. Also, they seem to operate often on an unconscious level, revealing

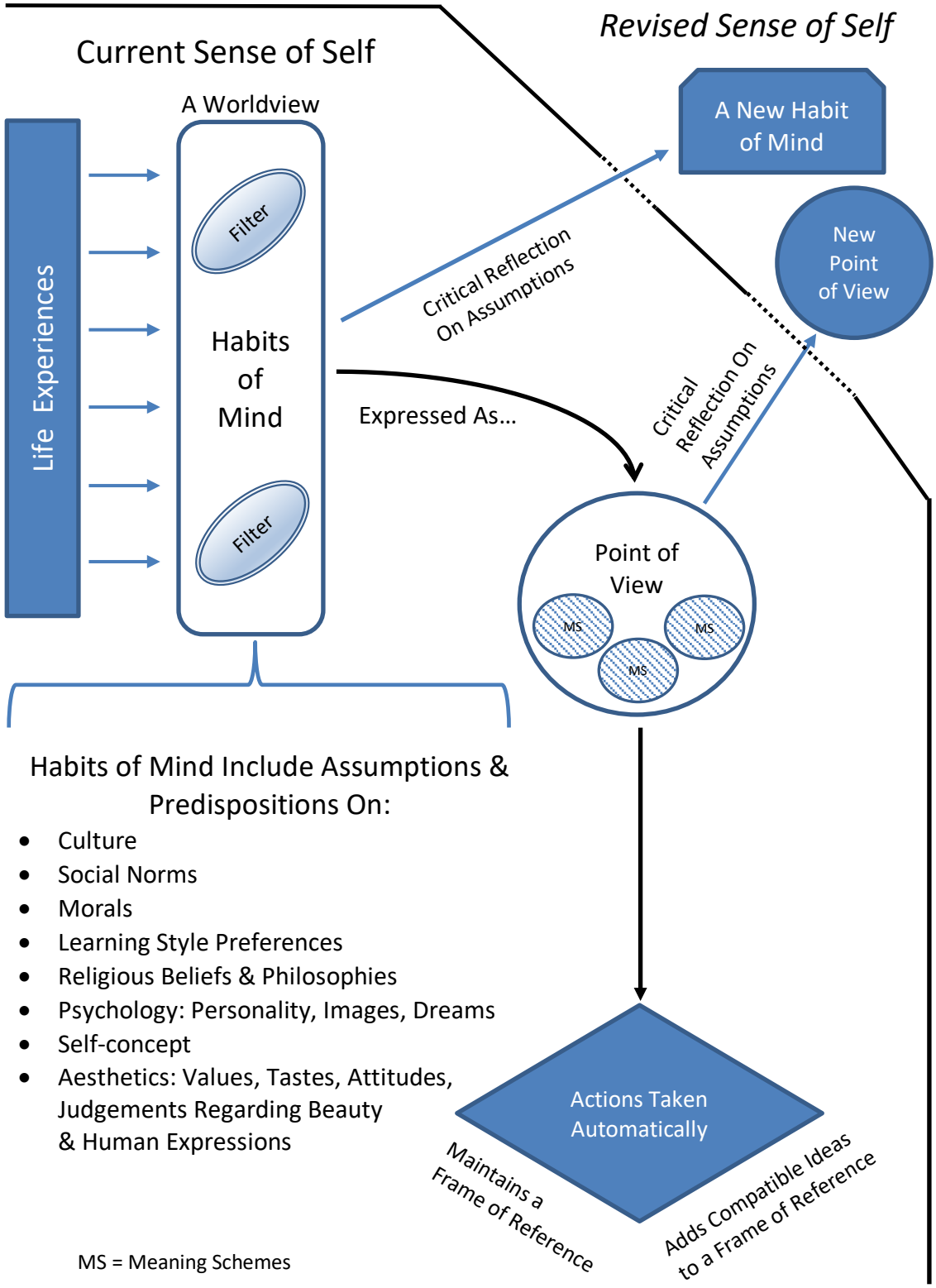


Figure 1. Elements of Mezirow's Frame of Reference. Researcher-derived from Mezirow (1994, 2000).

themselves when individuals experience difference or through sharing personal habits or narratives" (Taylor, 2000, p. 296). Furthermore, meaning schemes "arbitrarily determine what we see and how we see it," and “suggest a line of action we tend to follow automatically unless brought into critical reflection" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18).

The concept of critical reflection is paramount to Mezirow, for we can transform frames of reference "by becoming critically reflective of their assumptions and aware of their context" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19). A person can critically reflect on a wide range of categorical assumptions, including specific content, a given process, or the premises underlying an assumption. Transformations may come about in two ways: suddenly and dramatically, or in a more progressive, instrumental fashion. They sometimes can also occur through affective interactions or simply come about due to mindless assimilation (Mezirow, 2000). Over time, a series of changes in points of view or a premises change in habit of mind "may cumulatively lead to a transformation in self-concept" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21).

The second element in Mezirow's model is the actual process or phases a person passes through when transformation happens. Typically, transformation progresses as follows (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22):

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

Merriam, et al. (2007) note these steps comprise four main sub-processes. The starting point is when a person undergoes a disorienting dilemma, an experience that contradicts an existing mental framework for how to understand the self and the world (Hoggan, 2016). This dilemma is seen as a crisis that cannot be adequately addressed with standard, ingrained approaches (Merriam, et al., 2007). Next, the individual engages in critical reflection on the experience and in so doing begins examining beliefs and values along with initiating problem solving. Third, a process of dialogue with others is undertaken through which a broader understanding and justification for change is sought. Finally, some decision to act must be made, which can lead to an immediate action, a planned future action, or a conscious reaffirmation of the current situation and thought patterns. Going through the entire process of critically examining personally held assumptions frequently presents very difficult and intense emotional struggles. Therefore, the conative dimension of the mind - a sheer force of will - is often needed (Mezirow, 2000).

Mezirow (2000) acknowledges a person's interests and priorities change over the course of a lifetime, and views how we develop over that lifetime as embedded in an ongoing learning process. Ultimately this learning process is grounded in how we go about making meaning, which is accomplished through the process of "critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 25). Following this ongoing, phased process of learning supports the individual in developing a greater sense of agency. A central goal of adult education is to assist adults in realizing their potential and cultivating their capacity to become autonomous learners.

Mezirow Critique

While Mezirow's theory has been widely credited with providing a robust, foundational approach to the subject of adult transformation (at least within the education discipline), it has also stirred critique and much debate on what is adult transformation (Hoggan, et al., 2017). One level of critique has centered on Mezirow's significant reliance on critical reflection and associated cognitive processes. While Mezirow (2000) does acknowledge other ways of knowing, Hoggan, et al. (2017) notes they are presented as secondary at best. Merriam (2004) states people have been found to have "transformed their perspectives without being aware of the change process" (p. 66), indicating no conscious critical reflection ever took place. Others have taken "a leap of escape rather than a reflective, incremental process" (Pope, 1996, p. 164).

Observers have called Mezirow's theory incomplete due to its reliance on rational thinking and a lack of emphasis on affective, intuitive, and holistic ways of knowing and making meaning (Dirkx, 1997; Hoggan, et al., 2017; Merriam, 2004; Taylor, 2000). Tisdell (2012) notes the theory lacks adequate integration of spiritual forms of knowing, yet knowledge and construction of new meaning can come about through rituals and symbols, often in an unconscious manner (Tisdell, 2003). Dirkx (1997) believes transformation must focus on the soul, and consequently places emphasis on symbols, imagery, narrative, story, and myth as relevant pathways to transformation.

Boyd and Myers (1988) prefer to not limit transformation to ego-centric, cognitive processes inherent in Mezirow's (2000) theory, and instead suggest a Jungian analytical psychology approach to transformation. In Boyd and Myers (1988)

framework, people experience transformation by gaining insights that go beyond the conscious ego through, to the extent possible, exploring hidden aspects of the Self that reside in the unconscious. The term “discernment” is added by Boyd and Myers (1988) to the process of transformation, wherein extra-rational sources of meaning are co-equal partners to the rational. Aspects of identity can become known through an openness to the symbolic meaning inherent in such concepts as the shadow, the anima, and the animus.

While Mezirow (2000) has acknowledged context and culture can play a role in transformation, Taylor (2000) believes they have been paid inadequate attention in his theory. Taylor (2000) suggests context should take into account such variables as "readiness for change," "prior stressful life events," and an overall "predisposition for a transformative experience" (p. 309). Cultural influences that play a role in how and when transformation unfolds include life history, childhood legacies, geographic location, and even macro historical events (Taylor, 2000).

Another critical observation focuses on the process itself. Taylor (2000) takes exception to the concept of ten steps or phases of the transformation process, which Mezirow (2000) indicates will generally be utilized even if not in a perfect order. Instead, phases may be repeated prior to any transformation. Taylor (2000) states, “It seems apparent that the journey of transformation is more individualistic, fluid, and recursive than originally thought. Also, certain phases or components, such as working through feelings, seem to be more significant to change than others” (p. 292).

The trigger of transformation is also open to debate, with a disorienting dilemma not the only seeming explanation (Brooks, 2000; Pope, 1996). Individuals can go

through indefinite periods searching for something less profound and less life-threatening, or the process can start in an unnoticed or casual manner, all still providing an opportunity to explore that ultimately leads to having a transformative experience (Nohl, 2015; Taylor, 2000). In her study of first-generation university women (ages 35-50), Pope (1996) also found it difficult to trace a path through Mezirow's (2000) transformation process based on the narratives collected. Instead, processes were chaotic, occurring "more like simultaneous waves crashing in and around the everyday lives of these women" (p. 163).

Mezirow's approach also leaves open-ended how to decide between multiple transformative experiences to come. A person may explore new options (see Step Five, p. 79), however in the case that one or more options presented are potentially transformative, and require a decision of a type not made before, it is postulated by Hoerl and McCormack (2016) that such a decision cannot be made rationally. Choices regarding potential transformative experiences "constitutes, in an important respect, a step into the unknown" (Hoerl & McCormack, p. 257).

One of the challenges facing the study of transformation is semantics (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). As Cranton & Roy (2003) similarly note, "Sometimes, when we read and reread writing from different perspectives - from depth psychology, adult education, or humanism - we find that people are talking about the same things but using a different language" (p. 96.). Stated a slightly different way, Cranton and Taylor (2012) note differing perspectives on transformation "may simply be the result of scholars examining different facets of the same thing" (p. 8).

In addition, should the concept of transformation, as Brookfield (2000) notes, be

reserved only for epiphanic or apocalyptic events? If so, how should these be defined? Why, as well, can a significant event not always lead to a transformation in perspective while a seemingly insignificant event can (Taylor, 2000)? Howie and Bagnall (2013) prefer not to call Mezirow's work a theory at all, instead labeling it a conceptual metaphor that has thus been able to skirt adequate critical evaluation.

Hoggan (2016) prefers to categorize Mezirow's approach as a theory of perspective transformation only, as opposed to a broader, metatheory of transformational learning, which should encompass a wider range of changes that people experience (Hoggan, 2016; Hoggan, et al., 2017). Hoggan (2016) further suggests applying criterion for learning or change outcomes before deciding if the outcome qualifies as transformative. These criteria are depth (a major change), breadth (multiple contexts of life), and relative stability (an irreversible change).

While parameters that assist in determining if an experience could be considered transformative are valuable, "it is more accurate and beneficial to focus on the extent of transformation and the exact ways in which it is manifest" (Hoggan, et al., 2017). Ultimately, believes Hoggan (2016), it may be best to not consider what we learn about ourselves and the world "in a binary fashion as either transformative or not transformative" (p. 72). Put even more bluntly, Newman (2012) states, "Perhaps it [transformative learning] is a plaything of the mind, about which we can argue the toss, but which has little or no basis in everyday practice" (p. 40). In the end, Dewey provides a simple yet useful clarification: transformation can be defined as the reconstruction of consciousness through experience (as cited in Karpiak, 2000).

Summary

With their open admissions policies, public community colleges offer two-year degree and certificate programs to many students who otherwise would not likely be able to pursue a college education. Women age 50+ are a unique group among the students who are enrolled at the nation's community colleges. While they frequently share an interest with younger women students in furthering their employment and career opportunities, the older women also exhibit their own characteristics based on life stage, health, and generativity concerns. These older women students face numerous obstacles to persistence, including feelings of fear and inadequacy, the need for remedial coursework, tension in the classroom, and uncertainty over goals and career direction. Women from lower socioeconomic environments also struggle with inadequate resources and often lack the financial support necessary to attend school full time.

Ultimately what older women returning to a community college are often seeking is some form of identity development. Having focused on family and children early in their adult lives, these women are now attempting to refocus on who they are and what they might still become as they enter life's Third Chapter. One approach to understanding who these older women students are today and what they hope to become is to study their life stories, for identity, culture, and story are intricately linked. Through a depth of exploration of individual student's stories, educators can come to a greater understanding of the transformations being sought, the struggles being faced, and the actions and interactions that may prove most useful in supporting older women students at this unique point in life.

The next chapter will discuss in detail the methodology and specific methods to be used to address the research question, "How do older women students describe their life stories and their experiences attending community college?" Two different approaches are used to solicit the stories of older women students. One is based upon a traditional interview format, while the second is based upon a novel approach to picture-based storytelling.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Some people think we're made of flesh and blood and bones. Scientists say we're made of atoms. But I think we're made of stories. When we die, that's what people remember, the stories of our lives and the stories that we told.

Ruth Sotter

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate older women community college students' life stories. As such, it asks the question, "How do older women community college students describe their life stories," and consequently, key elements of their evolving identities? Relatedly, it seeks to understand older women students' experiences attending community college as a component of their life stories. Knowledge of these stories and experiences can provide new insights to higher educational institutions on how to understand, serve and support older women students, whatever their goals may be. This study acknowledges the fundamental challenge posed by Latz (2012), who notes we must "better understand the lives of community college students to best support them" (p.2). Indirectly, it seeks to address the need for further research on midlife transitions, which "has been largely ignored compared to childhood and late life" (Skaff, 2006, p. 192).

To address the research question, a longitudinal qualitative study was undertaken, incorporating two different yet mutually reinforcing methodologies. The first of these methodologies utilized a novel, arts-based storytelling session. The second session, held two and one-half years later, followed a traditional narrative research format. This chapter presents the rationale for using a qualitative approach, the related philosophical underpinnings, details on the methodologies and narrative analysis

methods, selection and profiles of the participants, and comments on researcher positionality and reflexivity.

Qualitative Approach

A study's research questions will drive and align with the overall methodology. This alignment will be based upon the relevant epistemological and ontological assumptions. One approach to the research questions would be to pursue a quantitative study based in a positivist or post positivist epistemology. While an experiment is not applicable here, a population could be identified of older women adult degree-seeking community college students. With an appropriate consideration given to the details of the population definition (region(s) of the country, urban versus rural, large versus small colleges, public versus private versus for-profit, etc.) and sound sampling techniques, a sample could be developed and a survey administered. The survey would likely be comprised of largely quantifiable questions, for example based upon a type of Likert Scale. The resulting data would be amenable to various statistical analyses, from simple averages to complex correlations. The data collected would likely be compared to previously identified hypotheses, which the goal would be to prove or disprove. Underlying this approach is the epistemological belief there is a truth we can measure, or at minimum (post positivist) a truth we can approximate in the results.

The other overall approach to research is qualitative in nature and is the one that best fits this study's research question. This approach relies on a different set of philosophical underpinnings. Among its wide-ranging precepts are that "Ways of knowing are inherently culture-bound" (Lather as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 12), reality is shaped – even co-created – by our social, economic, and political

environment (Jones, et al., 2014), and power and oppression can distort perceptions of what is true (Jones, et al., 2014). Qualitative approaches to research are best when we want to:

> identify variables that cannot be easily measured…because we need a *complex* (italics in original), detailed understanding of the issue…when we want to *empower individuals* (italics in original) to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

In summary, qualitative research is favored when "statistical analyses simply do not *fit the problem"* (Creswell, 2013, p. 48; italics in original); when reducing stories to averages is not the relevant objective (Berg & Lune, 2012). As Creswell (2013) notes, measurements of interactions among people can be difficult to capture and "may not be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences" (p. 48). Questions of an evolving self, intertwined with community and society, can be soundly addressed in a qualitative study. In the end, utilizing qualitative, narrative-based methodologies "results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires, or observations" (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 9). Indeed, narrative research (as an example within the qualitative tradition) can take complex issues and add layers of complexity (e.g., Abbott, 2004; Elms, 1994). Added complexity, new nuances, and outliers need not be avoided or marginalized when utilizing a qualitative stance to research.

Theoretical Perspective

Narrative research, the qualitative methodology employed in this study, aligns with the philosophy of constructivism. Constructivism recognizes and values the processes whereby people make meaning and assign meaning to their world (Jones, et

al., 2014). Similarly, narrative research focuses on both "the individual (e.g., feelings, hopes, values, and dispositions) and the individual's interaction with the larger social context (e.g., environment, external forces, and people)" (Jones, et al., 2014, p. 83). Jones, et al. (2014) further notes narrative research is about the study of experience and the underlying meaning embedded in stories told by participants. Indeed, "narrative inquiry seems consonant with constructivist and interpretive perspectives" (Jones, et al, p. 86). Furthermore, bringing together the integral relationship between imagery, narrative, and constructivism, Higgs (2008) states, "The arts, used in research, provide an opportunity to broaden the scope of qualitative design and add dimension to the constructivist paradigm" (p. 547). Higgs (2008) is relevant given an arts-based approach is one component of this narrative research.

Constructivism's importance and relevance to this research is it "points up the unique experience of each of us (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). It is these unique experiences and their reality, as construed by each participant, which will form the basis of each personal story. At the same time, the social world must be acknowledged as having an impact upon the formation of the self. This additional philosophical component of constructivism aligns with the social identity concepts of Mead and others, as described in Chapter 2. In addition, while the constructivist interpretations of experience are deemed "useful, liberating, fulfilling, and rewarding," no single interpretation can be read as the "true" or "valid" version (Crotty, p. 48).

Methodologies & Methods

Methodologies

This study utilizes two distinct yet related methodologies to elicit the telling of a life story: an arts-based, storytelling methodology and a traditional narrative research methodology. While narrative research coupled with an interview method exists as one of the traditional methodologies to explore lived experience, it is not the only one. Arts-based methodologies are available, defined broadly to include poetry, dance, painting, collage, novel, photographic portfolios, visual art installations, and many other forms of visual and performing arts. As noted by McNiff (2008), arts-based research is by its nature "characterized by endless variations of style, interpretations, and outcomes" (p.34). Nevertheless, a guiding definition of art-based research is "the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions, and all the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people they involve in their studies" (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). One "factor unique to ABR [arts-based research] is its aesthetic power" (Chilton & Leavy, 2014, p. 415).

Methods for Arts-based Storytelling

There are a wide range of approaches under the arts-based umbrella (Chilton & Leavy, 2014). The use of imagery to evoke storytelling is one of these approaches. In a process somewhat analogous to what is proposed for this study, Gillies, Harden, Johnson, Reavey, Strange, and Willig (2005) asked participants to create their own paintings in response to the trigger "ageing." The discussions around the paintings created the narratives that generated themes, some of which focused on the concept of

transformation. With photovoice, participants are given cameras to document aspects of their lives and to create their own self-representation (Mitchell & Allnut, 2008). In this manner participants create stories that identify, describe, and explain who they are, their social context, and their community at-large (Janesick, 2014). Photovoice's use of imagery is relied upon to jump-start discussion and initiate taking action (Chilton & Leavy, 2014).

Photovoice has often been used with participants who are on the margins of society (Janesick, 2014), and this was one reason Latz (2012) utilized this technique with community college students. According to Latz (2012),

> Photovoice is an innovative research methodology that endeavors to acknowledge and highlight the perspectives of marginalized groups. This method was utilized because I consider community college students to be marginalized in a whole host of ways, including the lack of attention from researchers (p. 2).

Latz (2012) used participant-provided photographic images to study the lives of community college students and proposed a constructivist grounded theory that explained community college student enrollment based on "discomfort with perceived levels of social agency, or freedom, in life" (p.1). In addition, photovoice was the methodology chosen in Ortega-Alcazar and Dyck's (2012) study of Nigerian and Indian migrants. The authors noted while they could have simply given participants questions to be asked in an interview, "photo-elicitation adds another dimension triggering a different reflexive and analytical process" (p. 109).

Another arts-based, imagery option is the use of existing or researcher provided images, which is the approach planned for this study. According to Weber (2008), "The primary source of images on which the research question focuses may be *found*

material or *already existing images* (italics in original), whether from museum archives, books, billboards, film archives, videotapes, magazines, and so forth…" (p.48). In a serendipitous use of existing photographic imagery, Banks (2007) highlights a study conducted by psychologist Yannick Geffroy, and the difficulties Geffroy was having interviewing elderly members of a village. During one discussion, a woman

> stood up suddenly...She went and opened the doors of an old wall cupboard from which she brought out a large box, full of old photographs...These family photographs, by helping her memory to recall events and their contexts, allowed us to glean more data and facts from the emotions she was reliving" (Geffroy, as cited in Banks, 2007, p. 67).

In Matteucci's (2013) constructivist grounded theory study, initial interviews were followed by story creation based upon a set of researcher provided images. Participants selected images that described their experiences and were asked to explain their choices in a conversational format. In their study of spirituality, Gottheil and Groth-Marnet (2010) likewise presented participants a series of researcher provided images and asked them to create stories around each image. As Gottheil and Groth-Marnet (2010) state, "The approach of eliciting narratives to images was chosen for its capacity to bring forth different elements in the research on spirituality that had not been covered so far by other methodologies" (p. 454). Aligned with the above examples, this study similarly proposes the use of researcher provided images to provoke and evoke storytelling.

The use of imagery as inquiry in the 20th century can be traced back to Carl Jung, beginning in 1914 (Chilton & Leavy, 2014). One of the significant developments to occur regarding the use of researcher provided images in psychology and narrative analysis was the development of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) by Henry

Murray and his colleagues at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in the late 1930's and early 1940's (Gieser & Stein, 1999).

The TAT consists of 30 images, "each showing an ambiguous black and white picture of a situation or event" (Gieser & Stein, 1999, p. 3). Shown a subset of the total, an individual is asked to make up stories for each of the pictures. The process, states Gieser and Morgan (1999), "elevates each person to the stature of protagonist and creative author in portraying his or her approach to life" (p. 55). The TAT "has to do with stories, narratives, plot lines, threads, scenarios, themas, scripts, and imaginal productions" (Shneidman, 1999, p. 87). Patterns in these themas then provides insights into the storyteller's life and personality (Gieser & Stein, 1999). TAT has made a major impact in the field of psychotherapy, counseling, and an understanding of people's identities. Its strengths include the "ability to make what is concealed manifest" (Anderson, 1999, p. 37), "the wealth of information it is capable of eliciting" (Gieser & Stein, 1999, p. 9), and its focus on the individuality of each person (Anderson, 1999). It has been called "an extraordinary tool" (Karon, 1981, p. 86).

This study does not use the original TAT images, however the process upon which the participant will create a life story from images provided parallels the concepts underlying TAT. Indeed, TAT was the guiding approach behind the study by Gottheil and Groth-Marnet (2010). The psychological foundation upon which TAT was based has been used to expand the application of image and story to a host of areas, including business and managerial success (especially by McClelland), leadership, race relations, and the study of cultures (McClelland, 1999).

Other research offers support for the use of symbols, metaphors, and images to evoke stories of people's identities. For example, Higgs (2008) states,

> Metaphors are widely used in therapeutic practice to allow clients and therapists to characterize and communicate often difficult-to-describe felt experience. Arts, as creative acts, provide a perfect opportunity to create new metaphorical models to illustrate the subject or question under study (p. 552).

Additionally, according to Faranda (2014), there is a sound scientific basis for analysis based upon metaphors. "There is evidence that play, metaphor, and image are outward manifestations of brain systems that are integral to self-representation, self-formation, self-protection, and self-integration" (Feranda, 2014, p. 70). Feranda (2014) notes recent neuroscience research provides support for the interrelationship of image and self, and "it is our experiential involvement with an image that brings forth the increased therapeutic importance" (p. 74).

Images, when used in conjunction with words, provide a powerful way of probing experience and meaning. Di Simplicio, McInerney, Goodwin, Attenburrow, and Holmes (2012) state "generating mental imagery elicits a greater emotional response than verbalizing the same material," (p. 1245) and using words in conjunction with mental images is helpful in constructing meaning. Reavey and Johnson (as cited in Majumdar, 2011, p. 71) "suggest that visual images can generate further talk around life experiences which do not fit neatly into pre-rehearsed personal or cultural narratives." In summary, imagery is a powerful tool in the creation and analysis of life stories.

The first phase of this research utilizes 60 different archetypal cards, sourced from a textbook on archetypes in branding (Hartwell & Chen, 2012), as the ingredients for storytelling. Each card contains an image and an associated word. Examples of image and associated single word cards utilized in this study include Hero, Caregiver,

Lover, Explorer, Warrior, Sage, and Healer. A number of the cards align directly with McAdams' list of common imagoes, which he defines as the "characters that dominate our life stories" (McAdams, 1993, p.122). Representative example cards are shown in Figure 2. Each card image is 4.5” x 4.5” in dimension.

Hero *Caregiver* *Rescuer*



Figure 2: Three samples from the deck of 60 cards in Hartwell and Chen (2012). Participants select any number of cards to create and tell their stories.

Archetypes are believed to transcend the individual and the personal. They reside in the realm of the collective unconscious of all people and are rooted in the symbolic and mythological (Jung, 1971b). Jung (1964) expressed, “A word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider ‘unconscious’ aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained….As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason” (p. 20-21). Holm (2014) adds to this idea, stating

> A symbol carries aspects of reality that can hardly be expressed in any other way (p.3). Humans have a facility for inner symbolic thought…This thinking develops gradually, and, initially, we cannot access it directly, but we can grasp it at the level of story, fiction, art, architecture, music, and other human forms of expression, which we interpret and to which we ascribe meaning and significance (p. 6-7).

The images produced in Hartwell and Chen (2012) were chosen due to their practical interpretations of a wide range of symbols and concepts. This hopefully makes the research exercise approachable, enjoyable, and less directly psychologically focused while retaining the powerful integration of image and storytelling referenced above. The possibility of interpreting participant stories in a somewhat broader, symbolic fashion opens up the potential for new levels of understanding, something that would be beneficial for teachers and mentors alike. For example, if a student tells her story in terms of imagining herself a Hero to herself and to her family, how might we broadly conceptualize and communicate that notion? McAdams has analyzed life stories in this way, drawing out themes from multiple sources, including mythology and history. Myths, which incorporate archetypal symbols, exist on both a cultural and individual plane. A personal myth "delineates an identity," and is a "sacred story that embodies personal truth" (McAdams, 1993, p. 34).

Methods for Narrative Story Analysis

While art-based methodologies present a unique approach to research, they share a great deal philosophically with the second methodology employed, traditional narrative research. Narrative research aligns with this study's research question as well, for "Narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as lived and told in stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 128). When thinking narratively, one recognizes interpretations can vary, context and temporality matters, and the relationship of teller to listener should be considered (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, et al., 1998; Ochs & Capps, 1996). Lieblich et al. (1998) notes studying narratives provides insights to both the individual's identity and her broader culture and social environment.

Clandinin (2016) summarizes the concept of narrative inquiry as simply "a way of understanding and inquiring into experience. It is nothing more and nothing less" (p. 13). In summary, as Ochs and Capps (1996) observed, “Narrative and self are inseparable” (p. 19).

Lieblich, et al. (1998) provide a useful overarching framework to approach narrative analysis. They begin by identifying two ways of considering the unit of analysis. The first, which they refer to as *categorical* (and others may call content analysis), identifies story sections or even single words, collects them, and then seeks to assign them to a specifically designated category. In the alternative *holistic* approach, "The life story of a person is taken as a whole, and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative" (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 12.). Given this study's focus on the whole person and her development, the holistic approach is the more relevant (Lieblich, et al., 1998; Wells, 2011). Figure 3 summarizes the two major avenues of holistic interpretation to be pursued, content derived themes and form derived plot, temporality, and myth. Once the life stories are reviewed in this holistic manner the theoretical lens of Mezirow (2000) can be utilized as one way to consider the possible transformational college experiences of the participants.

Themes. To generate themes in a holistic fashion, the story material is read several times until special "foci," or themes, emerge (Lieblich, et al., 1998); material collected is read repeatedly until a pattern is conceptualized (Wells, 2011); the life story narrative is studied and re-studied until appropriate thematic strands are detected, all supported by the participant’s own words (Yow, 2005). Throughout this process the

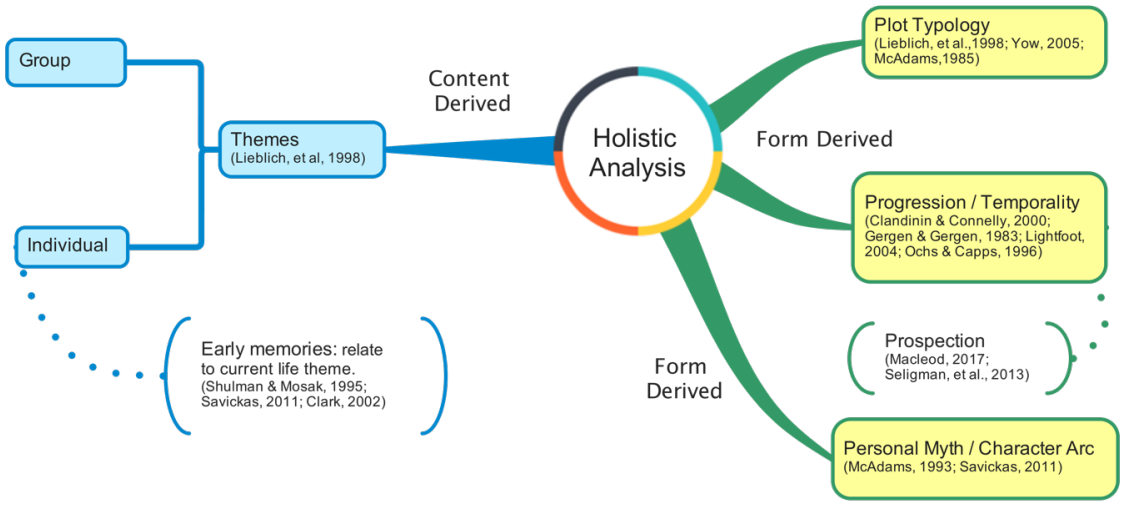


Figure 3: Avenues of holistic life story interpretation. The figure indicates the different narrative analysis methods utilized in this research. Holistic themes: Lieblich, et al. (1998). Early memories: Clark (2000); Savickas (2011). Plots: Lieblich, et al. (1998); McAdams (1985). Temporality: Gergen & Gergen (1983); Lightfoot (2004). Prospection: Macleod (2017); Seligman, et al. (2013). Personal myth and archetypes: McAdams (1985, 1993); Savickas (2011).

reader considers such aspects as "the transitions between themes, the context for each one, and their relative salience (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 63). The reader should be open to indications of contradictory themes and areas of inconsistencies, discrepancies, and even omissions (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Themes can be generated in this manner individually and across individuals, as was conducted in Bateson's (1989) study of five women's lives and careers.

A subsidiary approach to addressing individual life themes is to analyze early memories. This approach has its roots in Adlerian psychology. Alfred Adler was a pioneer in the development of many modern approaches to psychotherapy. Adler focused on holism, social context, and goal-directed behaviors (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017). One element of Adlerian practice is the conducting of a 10-step life style interview, of which early recollection are a part. Early recollections can be thought

of as another projective technique that can help identify a person's current life themes, philosophies, struggles, and preoccupations (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017; Savickas, 2011; Shulman & Mosak, 1995). As Clark (2002) summarizes, early memories provide another important level of insight into a person's outlook on life. When not used in this fashion, literal perspectives on early memories can be thought of as contributing to the holistic themes of a life story.

Three approaches to narrative analysis rely on the overall form of the story: plot typology, temporality, and personal myth. While story words and content often exist on a surface level, form is broader and presents the possibility of exploring a deeper layer of identity along with the perceptions and values of the storyteller (Lieblich, et al., 1998).

Story plot. A story plot, known as a narrative typology or overarching structure, is one approach to narrative form analysis (Lieblich et al, 1998; McAdams, 1993; Savickas, 2011; Yow, 2005). While ultimately each person's life story is unique unto itself, there are nevertheless frequently recurring patterns (McAdams, 1985). On one extreme, Karpiak (2016) noted life boils down to essentially two stories: "an individual sets out on a journey, and a stranger comes to town" (p. 1). After reviewing 1,200 works of literature and theater, Polti (1916) concluded there are 36 possible dramatic story situations.

A streamlined and manageable framework for classifying story plots was created by literary scholar Northrop Frye, who derived his classification of four mythic archetypes from the great stories of antiquity (McAdams, 1985). Regarding stories, Frye (1964) states,

> I'm saying that everything is new [in literature], and yet recognizably the same kind of thing as the old, just as a new baby is a genuinely new individual, although it is an example of something very common, which is human beings, and also it's literally descended from the first human beings that ever were (p. 45-46).

Summary interpretations of Frye's four essential mythic plots, or literary structures, are offered by Gergen and Gergen (1983), Lieblich et al. (1998), and McAdams (1985, 1993). A synthesis of the four mythic story plots is shown in Table 6.

Comedies and romances carry with them an optimistic tone, and are neither necessarily funny nor about attraction between people (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). Comedies often involve an ordinary person pursuing the "pure and simple pleasures in life" (McAdams, 1993, p. 51) and involve people seeking happiness and stability through the minimization of constraints. When life is out of balance, the heroine seeks to restore social harmony (Lieblich et al., 1998). While the focus of comedies is generally on the joys of domestic life and love, romances focus on "the excitement of adventure and conquest" (McAdams, 1993, p. 51). In the romance, a series of events are presented "in which the protagonist experiences challenges or threats" (Gergen & Gergen, 1983, p. 257), yet in the end emerges in victory. Life is seen as a difficult journey with events nevertheless surmountable.

In contrast to comedies and romances, tragedies and ironies convey a pessimistic narrative tone. In a tragic story there is a fall from grace and a sense of isolation. Life ends up out of balance, leading to eventual ruin (McAdams, 1993). The heroine ends up in defeat (Lieblich et al., 1998). Ironies often display a battle against chaos. Life involves ambiguities and complexities that are ever shifting and seem to lie beyond comprehension. In other cases, life appears as a puzzle, the solution to which is never

revealed. The heroine makes the best of unsettled situations however she can (McAdams, 1993).

Table 6

Four Story Mythic Archetypes

Plot	General Sentiment	Issues Arising in the Plot	Moral
Comedy (Opposite is Tragedy; Frye, 1964)	Optimistic	Attempting to minimize environmental obstacles or overcome challenges and other constraints on a path to happiness and stability. A feeling is provided that all has worked out properly. The story is not necessarily humorous.	An opportunity for happiness is presented. Characters previously apart come together. Social rituals and skills are often on display as an element of eventual unity.
Romance (Opposite is Irony; Frye, 1964)	Optimistic	An upward path toward growth with a sense of eventual victory. A key ingredient is adventure. Attraction between people is not necessary.	The protagonist must cope with continually changing circumstances and challenges along life's journey. The essence of journey is to struggle.
Tragedy	Pessimistic, Ambivalent	Attempting to cope with and minimize life's dangers. One may have reached a pinnacle of success, then falls precipitously. A progressive narrative is followed by a rapidly regressive one.	"Pain and pleasure, happiness and sadness are always mixed" (McAdams, 1985, p. 92). The protagonist feels defeated by forces of evil. Sadness prevails, though wisdom may be obtained.
Irony (Satire)	Pessimistic, Ambivalent	Attempting to find some useful perspective on a life filled with ambiguities, utter chaos, and contradictions.	The person comes to feel life itself is just beyond comprehension. Feelings of cynicism and ambiguity abound.

Note: Summarized from Gergen and Gergen (1983), Lieblich et al. (1998), and McAdams (1985, 1993).

McAdams (1993) provides an important context for applying the four mythic archetypes, noting people may draw on all of the forms in constructing a personal myth, and that each narrative mixture is unique. Nevertheless, most life stories will emphasize one or two forms while minimizing the others. Occasionally, "nearly a pure manifestation of a single archetype" will be found (McAdams, 1985, p. 54).

Langdon Elsbree likewise believed all narratives are comprised of a limited number of story forms (McAdams, 1985). His taxonomy of plots is complementary to Frye's and is composed of five types. These plot types "can be treated in a comic, romantic, tragic, or ironic mode" (McAdams, 1985, p. 56). The five story forms are summarized in Table 7 (McAdams, 1985) and a description follows. In all cases, brief periods or examples of the plot does not qualify a story per se as having a specific quality.

In consecrating a home, "the action is the fostering of growth, individuation, and the continuity of human societies" (McAdams, 1985, p. 56). Having a family is not in itself adequate, rather focusing on home should be expressed as a major concern over an extended period of time. A plot involving fighting a battle displays evidence of a significant struggle or serious disagreement, and does so over a specific period of life. While taking a journey a person "undertakes a physical or psychological (spiritual, philosophical) voyage for an extended period of time" (McAdams, 1985, p. 122). The journey will be full of discovery and surprise. Taking an occasional vacation does not qualify.

When enduring suffering is present, a person has "experienced a prolonged depression or disillusionment" (McAdams, 1985, p. 122). Stating one has occasional

guilt or fears does not qualify. When pursuing consummation, a story displays creative expression, enlightenment, emancipation, or "a single minded devotion to a job, cause, activity, or person which, the person maintains, fills his or her life and brings with it fulfillment" (McAdams, 1985, p. 122).

Table 7

Five Generic Story Plots (Based on Elsbree)

Plot	Issues Arising in the Plot	Story Rhythm
Establishing and consecrating a home	Establishment of home and/or family is the main concern during an extended period of time. Order is created out of chaos.	Work. Growth. Individuation.
Engaging in a contest - Fighting a battle	A struggle is fought with an adversary that occupies a significant period of life. The possibility of a winner or loser is present.	Excitement then release.
Taking a journey	The journey may by physical, spiritual, or in some way psychological (such as seeking a new identity), taking place over an extended length of time. The concept of voyage or pilgrimage is present.	Restless propulsion.
Enduring suffering	Significant, extended suffering that may result in depression, disillusionment, and ongoing fears.	Mounting pressure to give up / change.
Pursuing consummation (Can be found in combination with other plots.)	A sense of ultimate fulfillment in life is found. The person "seeks and/or finds transcendence, liberation, or self-actualization" (McAdams, p. 122).	The hunt or unwavering effort in pursuit of something true or beautiful.

Note: Summarized from McAdams (1985).

Temporality. As shown in Figure 3, temporality is a second element of a story's form. In considering a narrative's development, the passing of time is of prime

importance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This passing of time is implicit in a story's typology. As noted by Ochs and Capps (1996), "Singly, each plot attempts to illuminate an experience. Pieced together over time, narrative plots attempt to illuminate a life" (p. 26). Gergen and Gergen (1983) lay out a schema for considering temporality comprised of three possibilities. First, a narrative may be described as *stable*, in which case "the individual remains essentially unchanged" (p. 258). Second, the narrative may be seen as *progressive*, one where there is movement toward cohesion and story integration (Lightfoot, 2004). Third, the narrative may move in a *regressive* pattern, characterized by unraveling and increasing incoherence (Lightfoot, 2004).

These three basic temporal tendencies can be combined to create complex story variations over time. Combinations of these terms may approximate the plot typology of mythic themes, such as comedy or tragedy. Other nuances are possible however. For example, the relative decline in events would likely be more rapid in a tragedy than in a generally regressive timeline, and they may follow a period of strong progress (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). Thus an alteration of the life path by any one of the three directional possibilities, along with the inherent rate of change, combine to create various dramatic possibilities.

While narrative analysis is concerned with the past and the present, temporal perspectives should include considerations about the future as well (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ochs and Capps, 1996). As MacLeod (2017) notes, thinking about the self in the future is a complex task, yet it is a critically important one. Psychologists have come to call this process *prospection*, defined by Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, and Sripada (2013) as "the mental simulation of future possibilities" (p. 120). Research

(MacLeod, 2017) is consistently finding "people rate future personal events as more important, personally significant and positive than past events, something that is true even in older adults" (p. 3). Relatedly, the lack of positive thoughts and feelings about the future can reflect thematic problems in a person's life story (MacLeod, 2017). If one's actions are guided by assessment of future possibilities as well as by memories of the past (Seligman, et al., 2013), then a life story analysis should attempt to incorporate references to conscious, self-prospection as a facet of temporality.

Personal myth. A third holistic form approach (see Figure 3) is to look for the personal myth (McAdams, 1993) or character arc (Savickas, 2011) embedded within the life story. This self-defining myth, states McAdams (1993), is "the kernel of the narrative" (p. 20) that characterizes most closely a person's adult identity; "It is the *central* (italics in original) story behind the various episodes" (p. 20). These myths are often anchored to more than one archetype, or imagoes, which reflects the process of the Self balancing conflicting forces in the construction of its identity. Elaborate and even conflicting imagoes are typically found in the most dynamic personal myths. Integrating and balancing one's various imagoes is characteristic of a well-developed and mature identity in mid-life (McAdams, 1993).

Two sources can be used to help find the central character archetypes in the participants' stories. The first is based upon the card deck of Hartwell and Chen (2012) utilized in the first interview. The complete card deck is shown in Appendix A. The second is a taxonomy created by McAdams (1985, 1993) (see Figure 4). McAdams archetypes can be thought of as falling into two motivational types, which at times are pitted against each other: those focused on agentic forces related to power, achievement,

and feeling strong, and those focused on communion with others, such as love, intimacy, and caring for others. Stated somewhat differently, agency is a

> tendency toward self-expression, self-expansion, self-protection, and self-development, and all other goals promoting the individual self. Communion is the organismic tendency toward sharing the self with others, merging the self in community, giving up the self for the good of something beyond the self (McAdams & Logan, 2004, p. 18).

Characters employed within the personal myth may attempt to blend both the agentic and the communal, while others may seek to avoid both. Examples of agentic archetypes are The Warrior and The Sage. Examples of communion archetypes include The Lover and the Caregiver (McAdams, 1993). McAdams (1985, 1993) taxonomy is illustrated in Figure 4.

	Agentic and Communal	
	The Healer	The Humanist
	The Teacher	The Arbiter
	The Counselor	The Rebel
Agency		**Communion**
The Maker		The Caregiver
The Traveler / Adventurer		The Friend
The Conqueror		The Lover
The Sage		The Martyr
The Sovereign		The Ritualist
The Warrior		
	Low in Agency, Low in Communion	
	The Escapist	
	The Survivor	

Figure 4: Common Archetypal Characters in Identity Stories. Compiled from McAdams (1985, 1993).

McAdams (1993) offers caveats to his taxonomy in Figure 4. First, this list is a rough guide and is not exhaustive. Second, most of these listed imagoes carry with them positive connotations, however it is important to remember negative personifications can exist as well. Negative imagoes can be thought of as opposite images or expressions of those listed, or they may be completely different. (One possibility: The Addict.) Third, each individual will express the archetype in his or her own way. For example, there is no one strict or correct way to embody or display The Warrior. Finally, imagoes may be found to fall outside the agency versus communion framework.

Similar to looking for central story plots, an imago will likely be found in multiple domains of life (McAdams, 1993). For example, simply being a mother does not necessarily equate to exhibiting a Caregiver archetype. Rather, caring will be manifest in multiple ways and settings. McAdams (1985) offers seven possible features to consider in a life story as one approach to identifying personified archetypes: 1) a series of events giving rise to the imago; 2) a significant other or role model; 3) a set of personality traits; 4) what the individual would like to become; 5) a set of associated behaviors; 6) a person's philosophy of life or macro life theme; and 7) an antiimago, as a way to identify a central life conflict. Regardless of the approached utilized, McAdams (1985) notes this process depends upon the researcher's interpretation.

McAdams (2015) and McAdams and Logan (2004) note the concepts of agency and communion relate to generativity. Generativity is summarized by McAdams (2015) as "An adult's concern for and commitment to promoting the well-being of future generations, as evidenced in parenting, teaching, mentoring, leadership, and other activities aimed at leaving a positive legacy for the future" (p. 274). McAdams and

Logan (2004) state "Generativity challenges adults to be highly agentic and communal at the same time" (p. 18), adding this demand can cause conflict and difficulties for the midlife adult. Generative-focused life stories frequently follow a redemptive sequence, where the teller highlights difficult or bad life elements followed by "Good outcomes (e.g. revitalization, improvement, growth, enlightenment" (McAdams & Logan, 2004, p. 25). Story scenes of a redemptive type often highlight sacrifice and hard work that leads to future blessings and rewards (McAdams & Logan, 2004).

In summary, the holistic approach to analysis allows a taking at face value the presented "facts" of a life story. In addition, a deeper level of interpretation is encouraged, one of "reading and reflecting on the narrative to discover meanings deeper than the surface ones" (Yow, 2005, p. 306). In this case, Lieblich, et al. (1998) states, "Such reading suspects the teller's presentation and is searching for silences, gaps, contradictions, symbols, and other clues to the underlying or implicit contents that the interviewee is concealing, often also from him or herself" (p. 76).

This interpretive philosophy is included in hermeneutic theory, which Crotty (1998) notes focuses on "the prospect of gaining an understanding of the text that is deeper or goes further than the author's own understanding" (p. 91). The reading and re-reading of the stories reflects the hermeneutic process of "tacking back and forth between part and whole" such that "meanings that had emerged earlier both contribute to, and are retroactively transfigured by, what occurs later" (Freeman, as cited in Freeman, 2015, p. 31). The review process is therefore built from both the literal, unique events which comprise a told narrative and the creative, "poetic process of

seeing-together so as to discern in and through these events a pattern, a larger constellation of meaning" (Freeman, 2015, p. 31).

The following section discusses the process used to gather the participant's stories.

Process for Narrative Story Collection

The research consisted of two phases. Ten participants comprise the study. Prior to commencing the research study, a pilot phase was conducted with five participants to test the art-card storytelling methodology. Upon completion of a successful test, the formal research study began after IRB approval. First, five newly recruited participants completed the art-card storytelling along with a discussion of their community college experiences. Second, a follow-up life story interview was conducted two and one-half years later. The pilot and the research study process are described next.

Art-card storytelling pilot (2014). Prior to the official start of the research, an art-card pilot project was undertaken to test the process of storytelling using the image-word cards. Five participants formed the pilot study. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times for the students. Participants were informed to expect the session to last approximately one hour. Each session was conducted in a private, quiet space on the college campus, utilizing either a conference room or an empty classroom where tables provided adequate space to display the deck of images. Participants were informed their responses would be kept anonymous. A request was made and granted by each participant to record the interview through use of a small digital audio recording device. The device was not used during the participant's private story creation period. The interview protocol for the pilot study is provided in Appendix B.

The card-based storytelling process followed an unstructured interview format. An unstructured interview approach allows for flexibility and helps to uncover complexity, with "follow up and clarification encouraged" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p.134). Utilizing an unstructured process "gives participants leeway in responding" (Jones et al., 2014, p.135), allows participants to be involved in constructing the flow of the interview, and is well suited for narrative studies. The ultimate purpose of using the image and word cards was to help the participants creatively explore and express their own story and goals.

The result of the pilot art-card study methodology was deemed successful based on the participant's ability to understand the instructions provided and to select a small subset of the art-cards to create her story. The time taken to privately select their art-cards and prepare their stories took between 10 and 15 minutes. Participants would point to and even pick up and wave a card to emphasize a point. Comments included there was a lot to choose from, the cards were "cool," the cards facilitated verbalizing concepts not previously realized, using the cards was enjoyable, and the cards contributed to the creation of their story. The art-card story details from each of the individual pilot participants is not included in this research, as the pilot was conducted prior to IRB approval.

The research study begins (2015). Once the pilot was completed and IRB approval was granted, five additional women participants were recruited in early 2015 in order to repeat the art-card storytelling process for this research. They participated in the unstructured art-card storytelling interview process and a discussion of their college experiences (as outlined in Appendix C). The results comprised the initial interview for

the five new research study participants. All five new participants provided consent following Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. The art-card story details from each of the individual pilot participants is not included in this research, as the pilot was conducted prior to IRB approval.

The follow-up research study (2017). Follow-up sessions were conducted two and one-half years after the initial sessions. The follow-up interviews utilized a semi-structured approach, with an interview guide similar to an oral history (Yow, 2005). Topics and specific questions were identified in advance, with flexibility built into the process. Flexibility is desired to allow for the unexpected and to balance what the researcher needs to know and what the participant feels compelled to address (Yow, 2005).

The interview protocol is provided in Appendix D. The first part of the protocol was derived from McAdams's (2008b; 1993) published approach to structuring a life story interview. Questions related to early memories and role models were from Savickas (2011). The second half of the guide added questions specifically designed to fill in the two and one-half year time gap and to address areas related to attending community college.

Following IRB protocol, three of the five pilot women were contacted and agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. One of the pilot participants had died, and other did not respond to repeated requests. All five of the initial interview participants agreed to the follow-up interview resulting in a total of eight women participating in the follow-up interviews. Participants were asked to plan on the follow-up discussion lasting approximately two hours. Interviews were audio recorded, with

the dialog transcribed word-for-word. All interviews were conducted in a private conference room in a location convenient for the participant. Each participant provided consent following IRB protocol.

Participants

The research participants were women, age 50 or over. At the time of the first meeting with the researcher, nine of the 10 women were enrolled in a degree-granting program at a community college located in the south central United States. The tenth, a pilot participant, was hoping to enroll again. The college attended by the participants is considered a "suburban-large" community college, based on classification by the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Ed., 2014), with an annual enrollment of approximately 9,500 unique students per academic year.

Participants for the pilot and the research study were chosen in a deliberate, purposeful fashion, which is common in qualitative research (Yin, 2011). The students were identified from the researcher's discussions with the college's faculty members, the director of graduation services, and the coordinator of student success services. In one instance, the researcher was invited to an evening class and spoke about the project, which lead to two of the participants. In one situation, one participant made an introduction to another possible participant. This approach is called snowball sampling and an appropriate recruiting technique so long as the participant meets all the criteria and is believed to offer an additional, worthwhile perspective (Yin, 2011).

A summary of five pilot participants is shown in Table 8. The participants were women, age 50 or older, and four were racial/ethnic minorities. All of the women pilot

participants had children over 18 years of age, and four of the five had been divorced. Two worked full-time, two chose not to work and devote attention to college, and one did not work due to disability. One was enrolled full-time (12 credit hours or more), three part-time, and one was hoping to re-enroll. Three of the five pilot participants later agreed to a follow-up life story interview.

Table 8

Pilot and Follow-up Research Study Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Raised Children	Current Children <18	Partner Status	Work Status
(1)	51	Seminole / Creek	Yes	No	Divorced/ Remarried	Full Time
(2)	62	Pacific Islander	Yes	No	Divorced/ Deceased	No
Mae	60	White	Yes	No	Married	Full Time
Mattie	50	Black	Yes	No	Divorced/ Remarried	No
Shelly	52	Sac and Fox / Kickapoo	Yes	No	Divorced	No

Note: Women students who participated in the art-card pilot exercise. Three with pseudonyms participated in the follow-up interview. (1) Did not respond to requests for a follow-up interview. (2) Deceased between art-card pilot and follow-up interview.

Summary characteristics of the women who participated in both the initial art-card and follow-up life story phases of the research study are shown in Table 9. A pseudonym was used for confidentiality. Similar to the pilot study, all were women, age 50 or older. Four were racial/ethnic minorities, and four of the five had been divorced. Unlike the pilot group, all were working full time at the beginning of the research study,

and two had a child in the household under the age of 18. One participant was enrolled in the community college full-time, and four were enrolled part-time.

Table 9

Initial and Follow-up Research Study Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Raised Children	Current Children <18	Partner Status	Work Status
Claire	50	White	Yes	No	Divorced	Full Time
Debra	52	Asian	Yes	No	Divorced/ Remarried	Full Time
Dee	51	Latina	Yes	No	Divorced/ Remarried	Full Time
Ellen	52	Asian	Yes	Yes	Married	Full Time
Sophia	51	Black	Yes	Yes	Divorced	Full Time

Note: Women students who participated in both the initial art-card and follow-up interviews. Information shown is as of the time of the first interview. Names are pseudonyms.

Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity encourages the researcher to reflect upon his or her relationship to the research and to make explicit thoughts and feelings concerning virtually any aspect of the project and its processes (Frost, 2016). Numerous forms of reflexivity have been identified (Frost, 2016). Journaling is one method of injecting a reflexive perspective on the stories told (Frost, 2016). In this study, notes were made after each of the first and second interview sessions. These notes are comprised of memorable comments made by the participants, along with feelings and observations.

Having passed his 60th year of life, the researcher shares a generational component with all of the participants of the study. Similar to the participants, so too is

the researcher coming to grips with the question of what to do in his life's Third Chapter (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2009), the period between 50 - 70 years of age, or what Erikson (1997) has labeled the generativity / stagnation stage. In this respect, the participants and researcher are reflections of each other.

Positionality

Jones, et al. (2014) defines positionality as "the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and his or her topic" (p. 26). Frost (2016) adds, "The ways in which a person positions themselves, or is positioned by others, informs the ways in which they acquire, interpret and generate knowledge" (p. 34).

Actions were taken during the study's implementation to address aspects of positionality. The researcher was dressed casually (no suit and tie) and the interview locations were conveniently accessible for the participants. In all cases a quiet and private conference room was used, not the researcher's office. Conscious effort was made to practice respectful and sound listening skills. On an encouraging note, as McAdams (1985) comments, "Every story is (a) like all other stories, (b) like some other stories, and (c) like no other story" (p. 53). Given part (a) recognizes all human beings start with commonalities, a foundation exists upon which to build understanding.

As an older adult student who works full time and has returned to formal education after decades away from it, the researcher shares both generational and other situational similarities with the study participants. These similarities may have provided a basis for establishing rapport and a comfortable, conversational environment. In addition, the researcher works in an administrative position at a community college, and

therefore has a basis established for appreciating the range of circumstances faced by many community college students. The researcher has taught a class at a community college and that experience further highlighted his awareness of the struggles community college students often face.

At the same time, the researcher, a White male, recognizes his life experiences and social identity are quite different from the study participants. These obvious differences include gender, race (for 6 participants), ethnicity, culture, education, professional and career experiences.

There is ongoing dialogue within the research community regarding the subject of insiders/outsiders (May, 2014). The term insider/outsider applies to the concept of whether it is optimal to have interviewees and researcher be of the same race, gender, or other sociocultural factor. Some scholars have argued the advantages of similarity are relevant. May (2014) summarized the potential benefits of similarity to include a sense of closeness, a belief more authentic information will be shared, and minimization of potential for exploitive perceptions.

Other scholars have stated an outsider provides a unique perspective. May (2014) discussed several examples of how "insider status, rather than creating advantages for accessing data, may make it more difficult to effectively gather data" (p. 121-122). As a Chinese doctoral student, Lee (2015) assumed interviewing other Chinese doctoral students would provide her insider status. However, it did not, and she struggled to gather the responses she required. Ochieng (2010) found "dilemmas of researching within one's own community" (p. 1733). One Latina researcher in Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2017), despite being told "she would have no

problem connecting with Latino/a migrants in her study since she is also Latina" (p. 378) found this advice to be untrue.

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) prefer a non-dichotomous perspective on the subject of insider/outsider. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) stated, "We posit that the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" (p. 59).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) raise the notion of *voice* within positionality, stating "In narrative inquiry, there is a relationship between researchers and participants, and issues of voice arise for both…As we try to capture this multiplicity [of plotlines], we need to consider the voices heard and the voices not heard" (p. 147). To address the issue of voice, the researcher asked seven ethnically diverse, non-research participant women to review all eight of the second interview transcripts. For each participant, a non-researcher of similar race / ethnicity conducted the review. Their unique perspective provides another lens through which positionality and trustworthiness can be addressed (see Appendix E).

Trustworthiness

It is important to acknowledge the study participants will know the researcher works for the college where they attend. However, working in administration and not as a faculty member, none of the participants would be in a situation where they viewed the researcher as having any control over their grades or success.

One further method this research utilized to address trustworthiness was to use a life story interview protocol published by McAdams (2008b). While this step cannot

eliminate the critical role and impact of the researcher as the instrument, it does begin with a proven process for guiding a life story interview.

Another approach to maintaining the researcher - participant balance is for the researcher to reflect on his experience of self and story analysis. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the value of this step, noting "narrative inquirers need to reconstruct their own narrative of inquiry histories" (p. 46) to assist in identifying issues and tensions. Correspondingly, in the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition, an analyst must first become a patient (Pink, 2015). While clearly this study does not in any way position itself as psychoanalytic, having had similar personal storytelling experiences as those asked of the participants can help to improve the researcher's ability to establish rapport and empathy as well as hopefully increase sensitivity to interpretive issues. The researcher's experiences in this regard include writing a lengthy, multi-chapter autobiography; writing essays to address such topics as, "A moment that changed my life;" and undertaking the study, self-administration, and written analysis of various psychological tests.

Summary

This study is based upon two methods of narrative research. The first method to solicit a narrative utilized the selection of various picture-word cards that reflected each of the participant's stories of why they were in college and their hopes for the future. The second method followed a semi-structured interview guide derived from an established approach to narrative identity research. The next chapter presents each of the participants' stories along with an analysis of the findings.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Results presented in Chapter 4 address the fundamental purpose of this study: exploring the life stories of older women attending community college. Findings offer a heightened appreciation of how each woman's identity evolved and the ways in which her unique story affected her ability to chart the next chapter in life. This research centered on eight diverse women community college students, all age 50 or older. Five of the eight women participated in an initial interview consisting of an unstructured art-card storytelling exercise addressing the participants hopes for the future along with a discussion of community college experiences. The art-card storytelling exercises in the pilot study did not have IRB approval and therefore were not available for analysis.

A follow-up interview with eight participants was held two and one-half years later, utilizing a semi-structured format, to gather a broader life history and to ascertain progress toward each participant's goals. The follow-up interviews consisted of all five initial art-card interview participants plus three women from the art-card pilot study.

This chapter is organized into six sections. The first section reports information gathered during the five women's art-card storytelling interview. This section is divided into two subsections: 1) each individual's art-card storytelling exercise and impressions about her college experience, and 2) a summary of the art-card storytelling exercise and college experiences. The second section focuses on insights gained during a life story follow-up interview with the five research participants two and one-half years after the initial interview. The second section further includes follow-up life story interviews

with three art-card pilot participants. This section features a narrative analysis of each life story interview, including an update on community college experience.

The third section addresses longitudinal changes in the women's lives occurring since initial interactions with the researcher, along with a collective synopsis of shared observations about the community college experience. Section four provides summaries of life story genres, integrated life story themes, and collective identity development goals for all eight women, along with observations about the transformational impact of education. Reflexivity and trustworthiness is addressed in section five. The sixth section is the chapter summary.

Art-card Storytelling Interviews

The first subsection presents each of the five participant's art-card stories followed by comments regarding their college experiences. Sixty different image and associated word cards (Hartwell & Chen, 2012) were used in the storytelling process. The second subsection provides a collective analysis of the art-card stories followed by a collective review of college experiences.

Individual Art-card Stories and College Experiences

Claire. At the time of her first interview, Claire was enrolled in 15 credit hours at the community college and worked full time. She looked forward to graduating the following semester with an associate degree in enterprise development. Claire recognized she would likely progress no further at work until she earned at least an associate degree. Claire realized if she should ever choose or needed to leave her job, her options were severely limited without a college degree. She mentioned she had not had the ambition to go to college after high school.

The cards Claire selected for her art-card storytelling exercise are shown in Figure 5. Claire stated her life had always revolved around two powerful forces: family and work. Family was the most important thing in her life. This priority was evident when Claire prominently placed the Caregiver card at the top of her art-card story. Claire stated she was devoted to her children, parents, and sister.



Figure 5. Claire's art-card story selection. Cards were selected from a deck of 60 cards contained in Hartwell and Chen (2012).

Claire works hard when she is at her job. She acknowledged she is dedicated to her employer and takes work seriously, tackling it with a warrior spirit (depicted by the Warrior card). Despite having a job she has enjoyed for many years, Claire indicated she envisions herself embarking on a new adventure (depicted by the Adventure card), stating she has a "hunger for a new experience" in her life. Although Claire is unsure about what the new experience could be, she expects it to be something she can feel passionate about.

Regarding her college attendance, Claire portrayed herself as a serious student. She summed up her thoughts about the community college stating, "It's been a great experience." Her comments were impacted by her two on-campus classes, as her other courses were online. Claire thought her biology instructor's demeanor and approach were geared toward students who had recently graduated high school. Claire added, "It seems like there are times perhaps when there is a communication barrier between some of the people and the older folks."

Debra. At the time of the first interview, Debra was in her fourth semester of night classes at the community college and worked full time. Her plan was to major in business administration. English is not Debra's first language. Debra was born and raised in Indonesia and still had family living there. Debra's husband worked at a municipal government agency, and Debra worked as an appointment clerk for a transportation company.

Debra's art-card storytelling exercise (see Figure 6) was focused on her ultimate goal, becoming a self-sufficient, responsible, and contributing member of society



Figure 6. Debra's art-card story selection. Cards were selected from a deck of 60 cards contained in Hartwell and Chen (2012).

(depicted by the Citizen card). She stated once she has obtained control over her life (depicted by the Sovereignty card), she planned to devote her time to helping others. Before attaining this goal, Debra shared, "I have to rescue myself first," (depicted by the Rescue card). Debra wanted to free herself from a past devoid of education. She expressed a desire to focus on learning for the rest of her life.

Debra's desire was to apply what she learned at the community college to her next stage of life, finding a new approach to a business she hoped to establish (depicted by the Innovative and Entrepreneur cards). She acknowledged one thing she hoped to gain from her associate degree was knowledge to help her "create something new."

Debra's initial comments about her college experience revealed how going back to college made her feel younger. She was, "Proud of myself because I still can catch on. This makes me feel so proud of myself and grateful." Debra stated the professors were helpful. She never utilized campus support resources due to limitations imposed by her full-time job.

Dee. Dee was enrolled in her first class at the community college during the time of her first interview. "I'm testing the waters," Dee said, adding, "I'm a slow learner." Dee had not planned on a graduation date or a goal, stating "It comes when it comes." Dee had no prior college experience, explaining, "I got married at 18, raised children, got divorced, went back to work, got re-married, had grandkids, got my GED, and here I am." She had not considered attending college after high school.

Dee selected 15 art-cards to tell her story (see Figure 7). Dee declared of her art-card arrangement, "This is my journey." She explained the art-card Shaman image signified striving for knowledge and accomplishing something positive, despite the

obstacles life presents. Dee commented her childhood had been lost. Her goal was to learn everything she missed. She was thankful for the support of her second husband, who was her dearest friend (depicted by the Companion card) and who freed her (depicted by the Liberator card) from past fears.



Figure 7. Dee's art-card story selection. Cards were selected from a deck of 60 cards contained in Hartwell and Chen (2012).

Dee demonstrated through her choice of cards now was the time in life to Dream (depicted by the Dream card), to take risks, to view life as a journey (depicted by the Adventure card), and to look for (depicted by the Seeker card) a job allowing her to help others. Dee chose the Explorer card as a reflection of her seeking the best path forward. Her philosophical approach to the future was just "letting it be; just lettin it happen." Dee predicted she would first lift herself up and move on from the past, and then she would lift other people up (as shown in the Reformer card image). Despite a traumatic past, Dee used the Caregiver card to show, "I've always been caring. I like to take care of people." Dee shared her dream of a future caring for and helping others.

When asked what her college experience had been like, Dee answered, “Scary. I felt like a little girl in kindergarten. It's almost like starting from scratch—just starting to learn everything all over again. All my life growing up, I really didn't learn much.” Despite her fears, Dee stated the community college “has helped me grow. I’ve learned a lot. I am enjoying the experience.” Regarding her motivation for starting college, Dee acknowledged she made the decision to “better myself” and prove to herself she could succeed at something. She further thought she needed a degree to get a good job and wanted to set a good example for her grandchildren.

Ellen. Ellen moved to the United States from the Philippines eight years prior to her first interview. She was enrolled in nine credit hours, six of which were developmental English and math. Ellen was married, had a 12-year-old son, and worked full-time. “So, it’s kind of hard to get three subjects per semester. I tried this semester, and it’s really hard,” she explained.

Ellen elaborated on the challenges she faced since moving to the United States, stating “It's really very hard because I'm Asian. You can actually see my accent, the way I communicate, the way I talk. So, it's kind of hard for me to apply as what I was before as office personnel.” Ellen expressed she longed for a position like the one she previously held in the Philippines. Although Ellen’s first language is Tagalog, she stated, “I 100% understand English.”

Ellen selected 14 art-cards to tell her story about the future (see Figure 8). Having selected the Rescue card, she explained first and foremost, “I want to rescue my career. I want to have a better position, not to work in a warehouse forever.” Ellen picked the Dream card to express her hope for further education. She used the Creative

card to explain how she would like new knowledge and skills for finding a job where she can feel appreciated and valued for her contributions. Ellen believed her ideal future job would involve traveling, meeting and talking to people, and possibly being a business owner once again (depicted by the Entrepreneur card).



Figure 8. Ellen's art-card story selection. Cards were selected from a deck of 60 cards contained in Hartwell and Chen (2012).

Ellen stated an important part of her future was symbolized using the Angel and Shaman cards. These cards demonstrated her desire to help others, either through philanthropic endeavors or through prayer. She admitted she would like to make a positive contribution to society (depicted by the Citizenry card). To move forward, Ellen indicated she would rely on her dear friend who is religious and faithful (depicted by the Guardian card). The final card Ellen selected was titled Everyman, whose image represented to Ellen "successful, smiling, and happy." She concluded, "I made it. At the end, I made it."

The process of going back to college had not been easy. As a full-time worker and mother, she declared, “It's really hard to make an A. It’s very challenging. Though I am struggling, but I made it.” She noted three of the first five classes were remedial and would not satisfy degree requirements. Ellen recognized attending the community college would set a good example and provide motivation for her 12-year-old son. Ellen was negative in her outlook, speculating the road ahead would be difficult due to her age. “I'm already 53, and just, you know, 60. Who's gonna hire me?" She explained she was taking things one step at a time.

Sophia. At the time of the first interview, Sophia had been enrolled at the community college for two years. After starting a new full-time job, she was currently taking the semester off to “kinda get a rhythm.” Her plan was to return to her studies the following semester and graduate within the coming year. Sophia was majoring in business with an emphasis in human resources. She started community college as an unemployed single mother with a daughter entering the first grade. Through networking, Sophia reported “A job kinda landed in my lap.”

Sophia organized her art-cards into three groups: self-perceptions, life possibilities, and inner values (see Figure 9). Regarding self-perceptions, she selected the Storyteller to signify her desire for others to understand the struggles in her life. Sophia chose the Mentor card to depict how she enjoys supporting others. Sophia laid the Servant card down next to the Caregiver card, stating "I want to be a servant to someone without wanting something back." Sophia admitted, "I've always been a Caregiver, even as a child."

To represent life possibilities, Sophia shared possessing a spirit of learning and viewed her return to college as an adventure (depicted via the Adventure card). Intrigued by the idea of opening her own retail store (depicted by the Entrepreneur card), she admitted she would happily settle for an administrative retail position. Sophia's hope for the next two years (depicted by the Vision card) was finishing her education and attain one of those options.

Sophia's inner value cards (shown on the right in Figure 9) were grounded by the Warrior card. She explained this image by saying, "You can fail, but you can also dust yourself off, and start all over again." The Child and Hero cards represented Sophia's reasons for pursuing her college education, namely to provide for and set an example for her daughter.



Figure 9: Sophia's art-card story selection. Cards were selected from a deck of 60 cards contained in Hartwell and Chen (2012).

Sophia reported the hardest part of being back in college was balancing work, studying, and home-life. She recognized her classmates characterized generational differences. Another aspect of generational difference was "The teacher talks to you like

you're 18. 'No, I'm not 18,'." Offering a comment on support services, Sophia stated, "They don't suggest a person who can identify with you as an adult."

Collective Analysis of Initial Interactions with Participants

The first subsection provides a collective analysis of the art-card storytelling exercise. The second subsection below presents a collective analysis of the women's community college experiences.

Collective Art-card Storytelling Exercise Summary. Each woman's art-card story was unique yet, shared common elements. Although there were 60 cards from which to choose, the women frequently selected the same cards (see Table 10).

Table 10

Participant Art-card Selection Frequency

Times Used	Card Names
4	Entrepreneur
3	Adventurer, Caregiver, Citizen, Seeker, Mentor
2	Angel, Child, Companion, Dreamer, Everyman, Explorer, Guardian, Innocent, Networker, Rescuer, Shaman, Storyteller, Visionary, Warrior

Four participants selected the Entrepreneur card, three of whom tied this to the possibility of eventually starting their own businesses. Two participants had previously owned a business in the past, and one had an idea for a new business she believed would successfully build on her previous work experiences.

Three women selected the Caregiver card and relayed specific insights about the ways in which this role was central to their identity. The same Caregiver women

selected the Mentor card, indicating the card represented their desire to guide and serve others. In one case, the woman explained how her spouse provided encouragement. One of two women who did not select the Caregiver card had a grown daughter, and the other a 12-year-old son.

Three women selected the Adventure card, discussing how it was a time to explore new options and fresh beginnings. The same three women selected the Seeker card, explaining they interpreted them as related concepts. Three other women chose the Citizen card, two of whom were English as a Second Language (ESL) students who moved to the United States as adults - one from Indonesia and one from the Philippines. Both ESL participants explained the Citizen card symbolized a desired identity of self-sufficiency and being a productive member of American society. Both of the foreign-born women selected the Rescuer card. One woman stated her need to be rescued from a lack of education, and the other woman from a dead-end, uninspiring job.

Motivation to attend college surfaced through the art-card stories. The five women offered a variety of reasons for attending community college in their Third Chapter. Career satisfaction and income-related factors were mentioned by all five participants, and four told stories indicating they were motivated by specific work-related issues. Only Dee had non-work issues taking priority.

Four of the five women told stories reflecting reasons other than work advancement for college attendance. Claire was singularly motived by career related factors. These reasons were providing a role model for children and grandchildren (3 participants); becoming prepared to help others (3 participants); proving to themselves they could do it (1 participant); making up for a lack of education earlier in life (2

participants); investing in herself (1 participant); following an intrinsic "spirit of learning" (1 participant); improving English language skills (1 participant); and seizing the opportunity to take chances (1 participant). Analysis showed women over 50 years of age have multiple reasons for attending college in their Third Chapter of life.

Collective College Experiences Summary. Four of the five study's participants had no previous college experience. Debra (Asian) took secretarial courses in Indonesia after high school. At the insistence of her father, Sophia (Black) received 18 months training in bookkeeping and computers after graduating high school. Dee (Latina) did not receive her high school equivalency General Education Diploma (GED) until mid-life. Claire (White) was the only women not required to enroll in remedial coursework. Only Ellen (Asian) had previous college experience, having received the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in business when living in the Philippines.

The two just embarking on their college studies, Dee and Ellen, were undecided about a particular academic program or future career. They hoped their college experience would guide them. The three women who were closer to graduation, Claire, Debra, and Sophia, were confident in their choice of a business major. Sophia had the clearest future path in mind, while Claire and Debra indicated less specific short-term career goals. Debra articulated a long-term goal to start a business.

Only one of the participants described a major health issue. Dee endured trigeminal neuralgia and joint deterioration, along with repercussions from childhood traumas. Dee mentioned her powerful medication "makes me forget." Claire vaguely referred to a negative childhood experience, something "I'd bottled up. Put away," however she did not elaborate.

All five women spoke positively about attending college, although with varying degrees of excitement. Claire was positive, stressing, "It's been a great experience." She stated no fears or reservations and expressed a "Let's do it" attitude about pursuing her education. Others couched their enthusiasm with the challenges faced. Debra, Dee, Ellen, and Sophia struggled to balance full time work and college, and Ellen and Sophia mentioned the added responsibility of raising a child further challenged their schedules. In spite of family obligations, Ellen referred to her college experience as "motivating," and Sophia stated, "It's been fun." Debra and Ellen said attending college made them feel younger, and Debra added she felt proud she was capable at her age of doing well in college. Dee admitted she enjoyed the experience despite "being exhausted," and noted feelings of fear about returning to college.

The women were generally satisfied with support services at the community college. Comments included reading faculty were compassionate, faculty provided guidance on campus resources, students were supportive of each other; and online math resources were helpful. Sophia spoke enthusiastically about the campus TRIO program.

Three women offered suggestions for support improvements from the community college. Ellen suggested additional college resources devoted to teaching English to students for whom English is a second language. Sophia thought older students would benefit from the college offering counseling and advising geared specifically to personal issues faced by older women students (e.g., divorce). Sophia advocated for academic advisors being sensitive to the length of time older students have been away from the classroom and the need to avoid overwhelming class schedules. Claire encouraged increased social interaction among students and

commented on the absence of life and career counseling. Working full-time made it difficult for three participants to utilize day-time tutoring services.

Two women discussed family support. Dee stated her husband and siblings were highly supportive. Debra shared her husband was supportive, yet not helpful. Her husband was too tired after work to help with her studies. Claire and Sophia had no spouse / partner and did not mention outside support.

Three women mentioned age-related classroom aspects. Dee noted younger students were less interested in their courses. She said younger students could be intimidating and distracting. Claire and Sophia recounted instances of professors speaking to them as if they were 18 years-old. This manner of speaking was referred to both in tone and in regard to what younger classmates had recently learned while attending high school. Both Claire and Sophia found these behaviors off-putting. Each participant expressed a desire to be respected as an individual and recognized for her life experiences.

Beyond classroom issues, Dee and Ellen viewed their age or health as factors limiting career options and their academic major. Ellen worried she would be near 60 years-of-age by the time she graduated and no one would hire her. Dee viewed health and age-related issues as factors ruling out a nursing degree. The next section covers the follow-up interview findings from the eight participants.

Follow-up Life Story Interviews

Eight research study participants were interviewed two and one-half years after their initial interviews. Collectively referred to as follow-up life story interviews, these

interviews focused on gathering a broader perspective from each participant regarding her current and life history, along with perceptions about college experiences.

Each woman's life story is summarized with a narrative analysis of life-story themes and archetypes. The figures integrate various elements of narrative identity, including past, present, and hoped-for future. Insights from the initial art-card exercise were included in the narrative analysis for the five participants for whom IRB approval was provided. As detailed in Chapter 3, McAdams's (1985, 1993) approach to classifying archetypes (or imagoes) was applied in the analysis. Archetypes in this taxonomy can be considered agentic (focused on power and achievement), communal (focused on love and intimacy), a blend of both, or low in both.

Mae (White)

Mae stated, "I had a good childhood. We were lower middle class I guess. It was good. I had a lot of friends, neighbors. I was number four of five." Mae recounted a favorite memory of the entire neighborhood snow sledding and ice skating every winter. "It was a joyous occasion," said Mae. Having been a "daddy's girl," Mae was traumatized when her father died of cancer while she was in high school.

Mae went to college for one year after high school, subsequently deciding she no longer wished to attend. Want she wanted was to be married and have four children. She married one month before her 19th birthday, had four children, and had been married for nearly 45 years. Mae noted, "My children were a big part of my life. It was sad when they had to go back to school after summer because we just did neat things together."

Mae's biggest regret in life was not going to college and earning a degree while she was younger. Knowing what she does now, "I kind of wish I had gotten one [a degree] back then. I would have liked to have been a teacher, I really would have," she added. Once her children were older, Mae returned to community college and began working. "It became more about me." Mae described her current life as "just boring. We go to work, and we go home." Mae never took a third and final class she needed to complete her transferable associate degree in liberal studies, and she has not started any classes toward a bachelor's degree.

Four significant themes appeared in Mae's life story. Foremost was *Caring About Others*. The desire to care for and help others could be found in her childhood role models. One was a "loving, giving person;" another "loved people." Mae's high point in life was when she was in fifth grade and raised money with her friends to give to a needy cause. Reflecting on her adult-self insights, Mae stated, "I've always been somewhat of a giver."

Family Takes Precedence was prominent in Mae's life. When asked if looking back and projecting forward she discerned a central life theme, Mae answered without hesitation, "Ya, I'm a family person." Mae discussed fond memories of making crafts and baking cookies with her grandmother. Regarding her children, Mae noted "I just enjoyed my kids. I really did."

The third theme in Mae's life story was the *Centrality of Christianity*. Mae often referenced her faith, beginning with a childhood role model who provided an early Christian influence. Mae's most important life turning point was "coming to know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." She feels God's presence with her all the time and had

experienced a peak moment of loving Jesus. Mae said, “I realize that one of the gifts the Lord has given me is praying for the sick. So that's my whole reason for living now.”

The forth theme in Mae’s narrative was *Can Retirement Bring Back the Past?* Mae had no specific plans for the future, other than retiring in two or three years. She acknowledged she does not help people like she used to, and perhaps this would change in retirement. She looked forward to crafting projects and helping with her grandchildren, along with spending time with friends and “just enjoying life.” Mae’s feelings embodied a growing cynicism and sadness about the state of the world.

Mae’s life story is characterized by her strong Christian faith and two communal archetypes, the Caregiver and Ritualist (see Figure 10). Both archetypes exemplify caring, compassion, and a loving approach to life. The Ritualist is typified by domestic traditions, tranquility, bringing family and friends together, and acting as the overall keeper of the house (McAdams, 1993). Mae spoke fondly of the simple pleasures in life, how they were part of childhood and remained part of her family environment.

The agentic force of the Maker appeared to play an important role in Mae’s life story. The Maker archetype includes such activities as sewing a dress and pursuing artistic crafts (McAdams, 1993), and reflected Mae’s love of crafting, sewing, fiber art, and photography projects. Mae commented, “I just love making things. That’s just part of who I am.” While Mae would have loved being a teacher or pursuing education in the arts, the Caregiver and Ritualist made sure they always retained top billing.

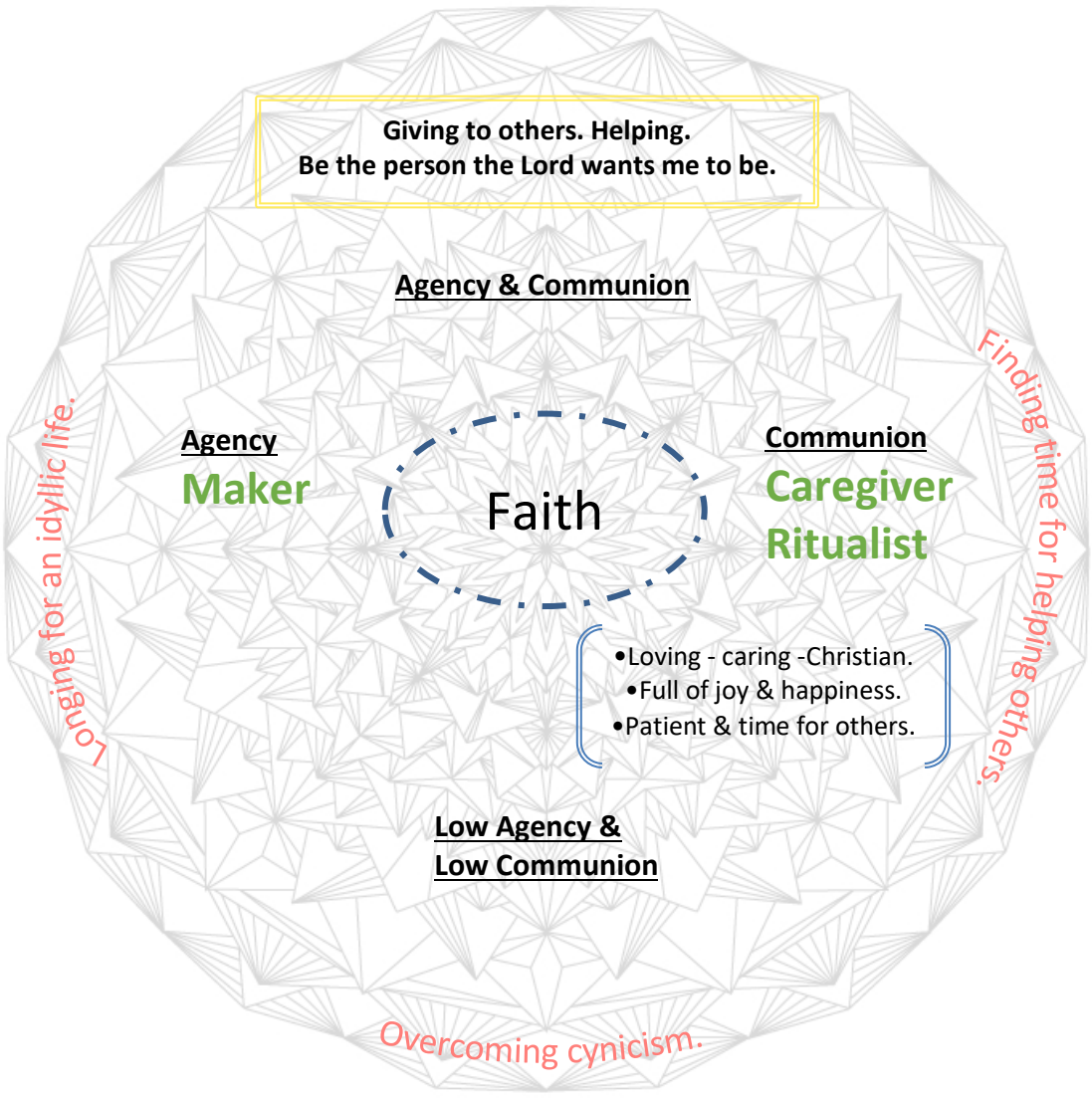


Figure 10. Mae's Narrative Identity Components. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green, large font = core, lifelong identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue center circle = faith major integrating identity; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

Mattie (Black)

Mattie grew up with four siblings and was raised in a fairly strict household. Her father had been in the military, and her mother ran a home-based day care. Mattie played the clarinet during middle and high school and joined the band. She was involved in church while growing up. Mattie said of her childhood,

> Other kids I seen where they would have to help pay their parents bills and stuff like that. I didn't have to see that type of life style. I had a good quality of life. I didn't look for trouble, and trouble didn't find me.

After high school, Mattie tried going to college, however "I thought I could make quicker money than to go to college." She left college and tried working in retail and came to realize she was not going to be able to progress without a college degree. She recognized, "I don't want to work retail. I want to see something that's going to [have an] affect." Mattie subsequently decided to work at a shelter. "This is what I want to do. Work with kids. I want to do something helping somebody" said Mattie.

Mattie got married, started a family, and realized returning to college was out of the question. She had triplets, of which one survived. After having another child, she and her husband adopted an 11-year-old boy. Mattie remembered working in social services was enjoyable, and believed if she ever returned to college her goal would be related to helping others.

After her children were grown, Mattie started at the community college at the suggestion of her husband and friends. Mattie thought, "Well, I went to school when I got out of high school. I don't know if I can do it." She spoke with an advisor at the community college who was supportive, expressing a belief in her abilities.

Since her art-card pilot exercise, Mattie graduated from the community college and was currently attending a four-year university. She continued to not work, devoting attention to her studies. Mattie's thoughts about helping others had not changed. She described her future as, "I'm going to help battered women. It may not pay that much, but I'm going to get something done. I want to give back. I want to be an advocate for them." Mattie specifically wanted to "work in low income areas." Her source of inspiration for helping others was "It's who I am. My struggles." Mattie indicated the next chapter of her life would include devotion to her grandkids and singing in her church choir.

Four significant themes appeared in Mattie's life story. The first was *Life's a Struggle*. Mattie referred to the word "struggle" in several different contexts. One related to learning. Mattie referenced numerous times her anxiety at college, noting she experienced anxiety as far back as she could remember. She mentioned learning challenges, stating "It takes me more to get it… I know I'm not the average that can get it." Mattie further related struggling to race. "Being a Black individual - we struggle every day. Our parents struggled. I mean, we see prejudice all the time." Mattie struggled with two serious health crises, depression, and divorce. She ultimately re-married her first husband.

A second theme was *Faith in God.* Mattie spoke frequently about putting her faith in God. Going to college was "what God wants me to do," she said. Mattie revealed she talks to God every day, believing whatever happens in life, "God will take care of it." Mattie stated one of the values she lives by is faith. "We believe in God," said Mattie. "If it wasn't for God, I wouldn't be here today."

A third theme in Mattie's life was *Family is Central to Everything.* Mattie noted her values centered around "Family takes care of family" and "My value is family." The high point of her life was having children, and the most important things in her adult life are being married and her kids.

A forth theme in Mattie's life was *Helping and Caring for Others.* This theme appeared in Mattie's life since she was a child. While in grade school Mattie was so concerned about her classmates who had "no place to go" one day she asked her mom if they could adopt kids from school. When she started working at a shelter, she immediately knew it was the career she wanted. As an adult, Mattie took kids into her home who had no place to go.

Three archetypes were evident in Mattie's life story (see Figure 11). Mattie's life appeared to center around the communal Caregiver archetype. While family is still highly valued, the agentic Sage archetype has now moved to center stage. "I've cared about y'all and put me on the back burner. Now I'm on the top." Mattie finds her education directly applicable, saying, "I use things that I learn in class. I use it in everyday life." Now pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology, a new archetype is developing out of Mattie's Sage and Caregiver archetypes, namely the Counselor. "Iwant to be able to guide someone, and help them, like they helped me." The Counselor appeared to be Mattie's vision of her hoped-for future self.

Survivor was Mattie's third, underlying archetype. She stated, "I'm a survivor." Her drive and focus, part of her identity, were clearly evident in her life story and reflected in her early role models. These role models were "Very on the go" and "very

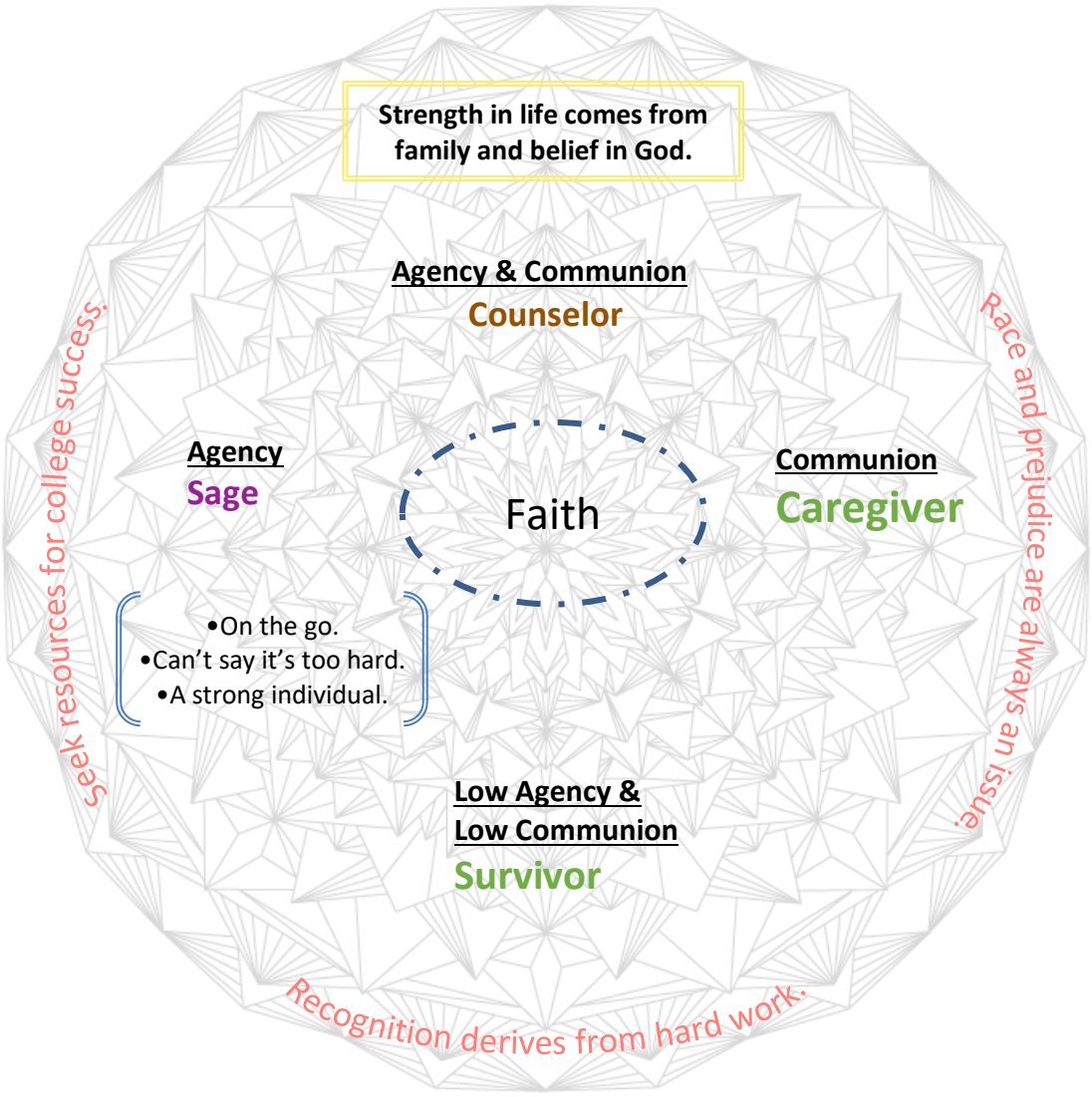


Figure 11. Mattie's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green larger font = core, lifelong identity; brown = hoped-for future identity; purple = recent identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue center circle = faith major integrating identity; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

outgoing," two qualities Mattie has demonstrated in her approach to education. Mattie's third grade role model would not let Mattie say, "I can't do it. It's too hard."

Shelly (Native American)

Shelly grew up with two sisters and two brothers. Her parents divorced when she was five years old. Shelly's first grade was a terrible experience due to her dad's departure. "That was pretty traumatic for me because once my dad left, he didn't stay in contact with us. It was terrible." After her father left, providing no ongoing support, her mother struggled to take care of the family. Her mother worked at various minimum wage jobs until, accepting a long commute, she found a higher paying job.

Shelly wished she had applied herself in high school, doing just enough to graduate. Shelly never planned to attend college, citing her mother's comment, "I don't expect anything out of you. I just want you to graduate high school." Shelly met her husband, who was five years older, while still in high school. She married when she was 21. She worked "just kind of here and there" until her two children were born and became a stay-at-home mom.

Shelly had a good marriage for 30 years, then "He divorced me. That devastated me." Already on pain pills for a knee injury, she added two antidepressants to her medications. Through it all Shelly became addicted to pills. "I didn't know if I was going to make it or not, seriously. I was just so overwhelmed." Over time she improved and weaned herself off medications.

After working at various places and hating them, Shelly's daughter talked her into enrolling at the community college. Remaining enrolled since the art-card pilot, Shelly stated, "I'm surprised I'm still there actually, because it's been a struggle. Big

struggle." One reason for the struggle was she thought she was not smart enough. “That's always been my problem. I'm my worst critic,” she said. Shelly continued to not work, focusing her attention on her classes.

Shelly stated her future happiness involved two important ingredients: a feeling of self-sufficiency and the opportunity to help others, to "Pay it forward. I'd like to do that. Maybe I can help someone out like I've had people do for me."

Four themes appeared in Shelly’s life story. First was *A Caring and Empathetic Person*. Shelly moved from California to take care of her ailing mother and regrets not being available when her mother had her stroke. Shelly sympathized with the predicaments of others, including fellow students, and felt sorry for former co-workers in minimum wage jobs. Her goal was to be thought of as a caring person by others. Shelly’s daughter acknowledged her mother’s empathy, telling her “You’re so caring.”

A second theme in Shelly’s life was *Focusing on Family*. Shelly devoted her married life to raising her two children and did not work. She said raising her children was her “greatest accomplishment,” and both children have told her what a good job she did nurturing them.

Shelly’s story surfaced a currently important theme in her life: *The Future Appears Full of Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt*. Shelly’s comments frequently reflected this theme, including “I don’t know if I’m gonna continue in school;” “I’m trying to figure out where I should be headed;” “I have no idea what I wanna to be when I grow up;” and “Right now I’m just up in the air.” Shelly’s overarching need to feel financially self-sufficient was a major undercurrent of her fear of the future.

Shelly's fourth theme was *Living Life on an Emotional Roller-Coaster*. Shelly's story was filled with emotions and strong words, such as "traumatic." As a child, she experienced guilt and loss over the departure of her father. While in grade school she was put in a special math class, which was "traumatic" and "hurtful." She lamented she was told she was "stupid" multiple times by her grandmother and a grade school teacher. Now in her 50s and looking back, she expressed her wish for a closer relationship with her mother, who "wasn't very affectionate at all." Shelly regretted not applying herself while in high school and expressed guilt over the death of her brother. She thought if she had been talkative, he would not have died in an auto accident. Shelly expressed regret for not being a "better wife" and not being an effective worker. Summarizing her feelings and frustrations with herself, Shelly said, " I'm tired of that guilt hanging around my neck. I'd like to be set free."

Three archetypes appeared to constitute central elements of Shelly's identity, the first being the Survivor (see Figure 12). This was reflected in the *Emotional Roller-Coaster* theme. Coping with a fairly constant presence of emotional suffering appeared to be an elemental ingredient throughout her life story.

Shelly's second archetype was the Caregiver, coupled with the subsidiary Samaritan archetype, which was not mentioned in McAdams (1993) communal typology. Shelly acknowledged she had a deeply caring attitude and identified the central theme of her life as striving to be thought of by others as "a good person… a thoughtful, caring person." She summed up her life story, "When I'm gone, [people say] Shelly was a really good person."

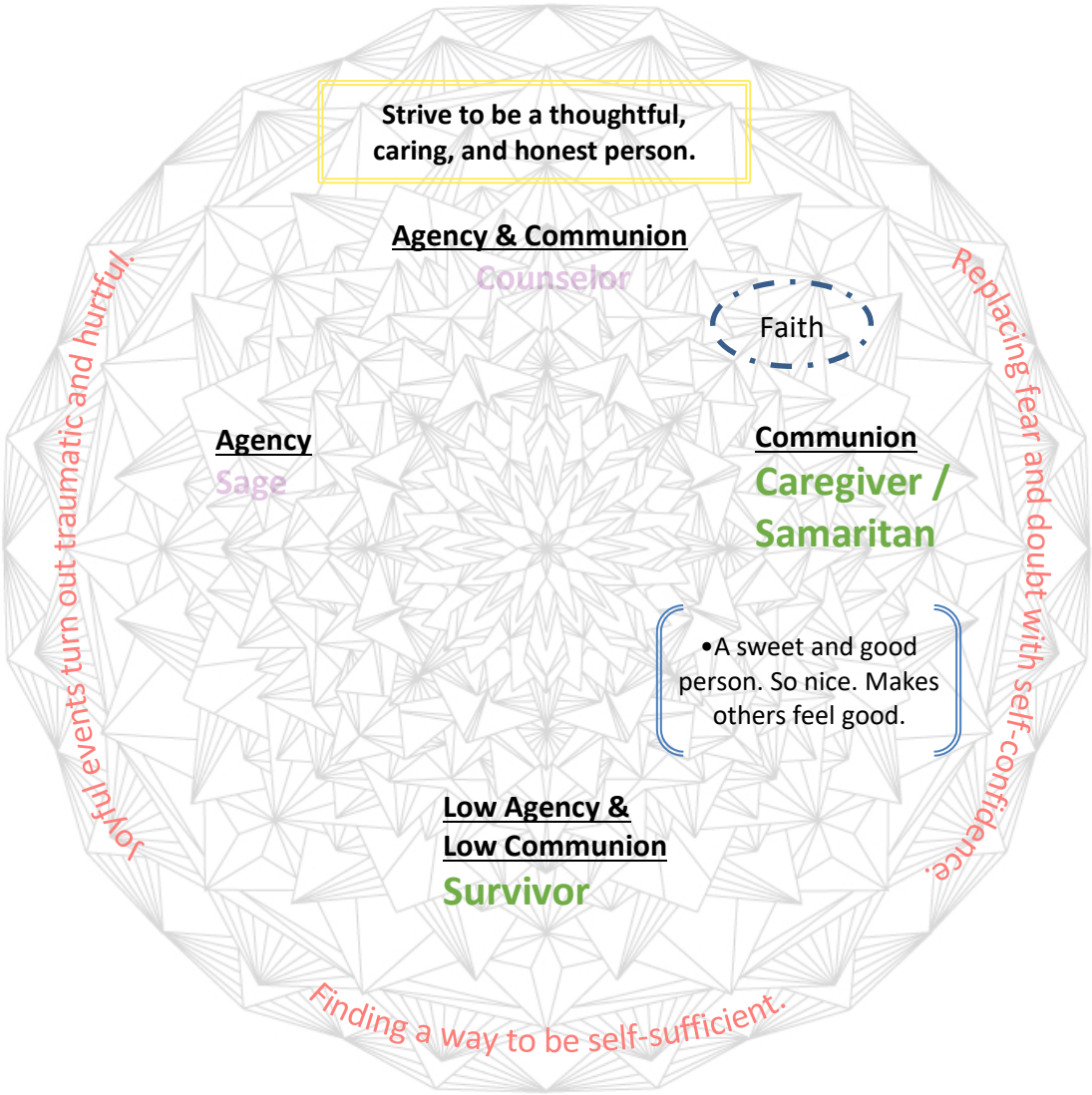


Figure 12: Shelly's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green larger font = core, lifelong identity; faded purple = currently struggling to develop and a hoped-for identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue circle = faith identity (not central); salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

Shelly's story appeared lacking in power and achievement archetypes. The Sage archetype was struggling for recognition, appearing inconsistently throughout her recent adult life. Shelly was not sure why, after two and one-half years, she was still attending the community college, "Other than my daughter suggesting it." Although the Counselor archetype was apparent in Shelly's hoped-for identity (e.g., she wanted to possibly do something in social work and liked her psychology classes), it had yet to find a meaningful way to express or exert itself.

Claire (White)

Claire grew up in a close family. When she was 10, her 11-year-old sister died from a freak carbon monoxide poisoning accident. Her death changed Claire's life forever. Claire married while in her early 20s, had two daughters, and enjoyed a wonderful relationship with her husband. Claire was hospitalized for debilitating pneumonia while in her late 30s. Although she recovered and went home, strangely the symptoms continued.

Claire then started seeing a psychologist. She began the healing process to cope with the emotions buried after her sister's death, regained confidence, and became a different person. She became disconnected from her husband and ultimately divorced, although they are still close and have a supportive relationship. Claire was in a new-found relationship.

Claire's tenacity aided her in finishing an associate degree on her projected schedule. A bachelor's degree in organizational leadership followed 15 months later. Her job duties had not changed, however due to other issues at work she lamented, "I don't feel very valued right now." Claire indicated, "Potentially, I see myself in another

career. I never in my life thought I would work somewhere else because my entire adult life has been here." Claire believed the future would be exciting, noting, "I'm the most comfortable in my skin that I have ever been." She summed up her current philosophy this way: "I've decided I'm not going to live forever. I don't want to miss any more life."

Claire's life story had three primary themes. The first was *Living Life Under a Spell*. From age 10 to 40 Claire lived in various ongoing states of nervousness and anxiousness resulting from her sister's death. She did not begin to come to terms with this incident until she experienced a serious illness at age 40. A second theme was *Caring for Family and the Security It Provides*. During her interviews, Claire often spoke about her close relationships with her family, including her living sister, her parents, and her own children. What she values most in life is family. The third theme in Claire's life is *Confidence and Ambition Can Be Reawakened*, reflected in her personal transformation at age 40, earning two college degrees, and a positive, energetic attitude about the future and a probable career change.

Claire stated, "A lot of the cards make me think of my work and my kids," and based on her art-card storytelling exercise and her follow-up interview, her two most prevalent narrative identity archetypes were the Caregiver and the Maker (see Figure 13). Claire reported using her fighting spirit (the Warrior card) to drive through two academic degrees and to risk employment by fighting for her health concerns in an environmentally threatening situation. The direction of Claire's empowered Maker is still slightly cloudy. She wondered how she should direct her newfound knowledge and spirit of adventure.

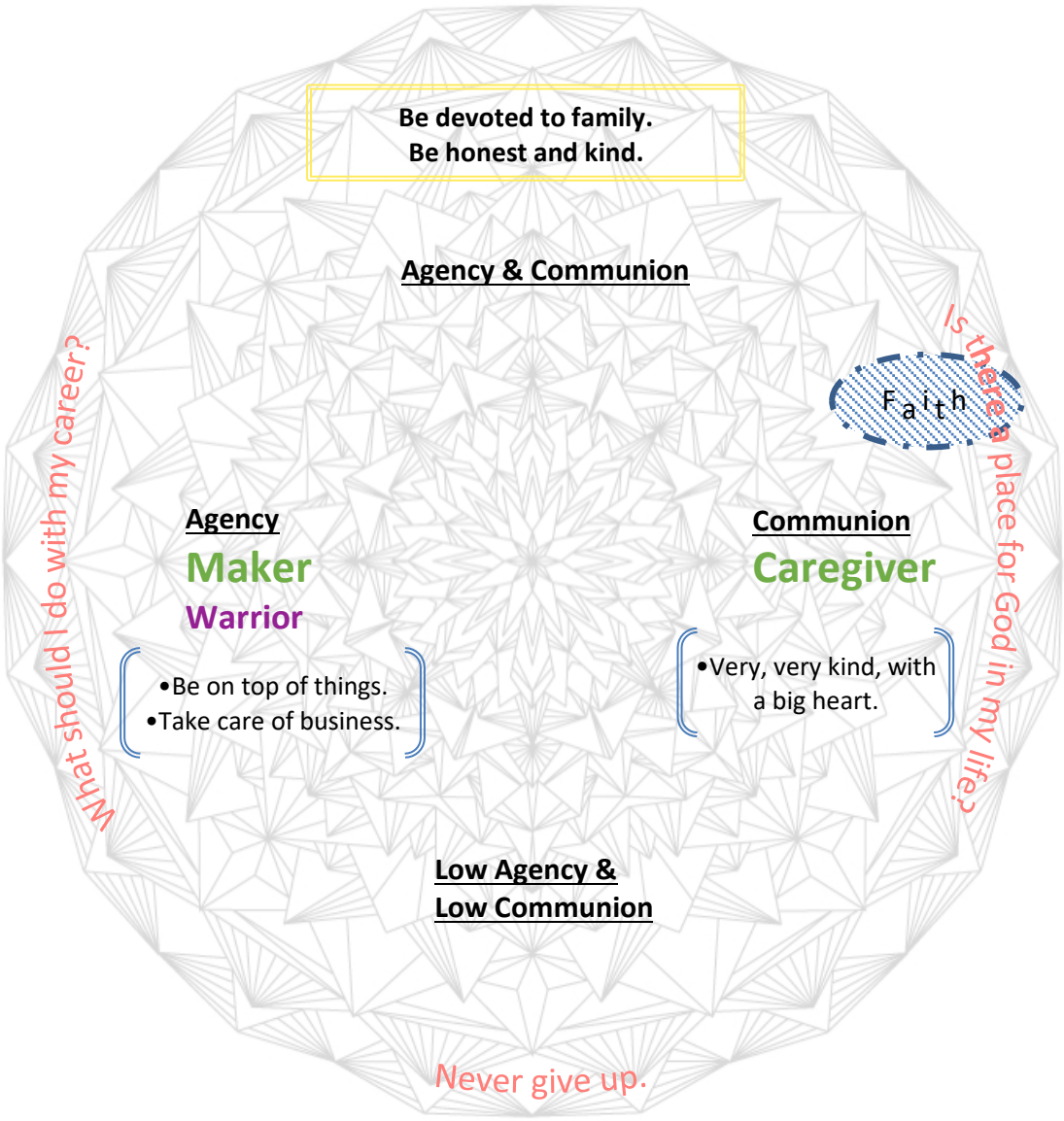


Figure 13. Claire's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green, large font = core, lifelong identity; purple = recent and growing identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue hashed circle = conflicted religious identity; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

Claire stated one of her greatest struggles was determining what role God should play in her future. Having forsaken anything to do with church or God since her sister's death, Claire wondered if there was any place in her world for God. She noted whatever the future holds, she has adopted the life theme "Claire Never Gives Up."

Debra (Asian)

Debra's grandmother is a native Indonesian and her grandfather served in the Dutch military. Her mother and father divorced when she was six years old, and her father moved to an Indonesian island two hours away by plane. After her father left the family struggled. In Indonesia, if a family lacked financial resources, the children were denied school attendance. Fortunately, Debra's mother spoke Dutch, English, and Chinese Mandarin, enabling her to obtain well-paying jobs. Debra noted her mother's hard work and devotion provided the means to send her and her five brothers to school.

Debra completed secretarial classes after high school, got married and later divorced. Her divorce "Forced me to find a life," she said. Debra opened a restaurant using her meager life savings. "I start with the smallest small business, and then in about six months, my business is getting better and better." Over time, Debra expanded her business, at one point employing 50 people. Debra later started an exercise business, met her current American husband online, and moved to the United States.

At the time of her follow-up interview, Debra was enrolled in classes at the community college, working toward a degree in business administration or accounting. She was laid off from her job at the transportation company. After being unemployed for six months, Debra found a part time job as a cashier and data entry clerk.

After finishing her associate degree, Debra envisioned starting another business, not right away as previously planned, preferring to get a well-paying job working for another company while pursuing a bachelor's degree. Debra anticipated when she turned 60 she would like to quit her company job and start a business with her husband. They discussed moving to Bali to form their business venture.

Four themes arose in Debra's life story. The most recent was *Forever Adjusting to America*. On three occasions during her follow-up interview, Debra spoke of the difficulties she experienced interacting with people in the United States. She gets frustrated knowing others judge her based merely upon her accent and difficulties speaking English. Debra's native language is Malayo. While adjusting to American culture has been a challenge, it is one she believed she could handle.

Debra was *On a Quest for Knowledge*. One of her greatest regrets was not pursuing a college education at an earlier age. "I feel like I waste my time. I'm not lazy, but - I got a job. I had enough." Debra admitted while she might be "starting over," she thought it was not too late to do so. Debra was happy she could manage her struggles attending college while making reasonably good grades. "That's my joy," she said, adding, "It's not easy for me to go to college."

Another theme threaded throughout Debra's life was *Self-Reliant Risk Taker*. Divorced and desperate, Debra acknowledged her ambition to start a successful business. She described her greatest challenge as moving half way around the world to a new culture and marrying a man she did not know well. "I have to pray and ask God everything is going to be all right," said Debra. A fourth theme in Debra's adult life was *A Focus on Helping Others - Driven by Faith.* Debra admitted her focus on helping

others became notable when she took care of her ailing mother. She thought doing kind things for others was an important value currently guiding her life.

Debra's identity elements are summarized in Figure 14. Her lifelong identity was closely aligned with the Maker. She loved knowing she could "make this" and "can do that." Her Maker identity expressed itself in the world of business and commerce. One of Debra's early role models exhibited qualities of being disciplined and taking a strict approach to getting things done on time. The Maker likewise reflects these qualities, often seeking to be efficient, productive (McAdams, 1993) and intense (Cotterell & Storm, 2013). Part of Debra's hoped-for future identity was anchored to the Maker, planning to one-day start another entrepreneurial venture.

A new element of Debra's identity was the Sage, which would rescue her from limited education. For Debra's evolving identity, she believed knowledge would provide her the power to take charge (depicted by the Sovereign card) over her life's destiny. Based upon Debra's story, the Caregiver card has been an intermittent identity, arising again only recently as a value tied to faith and securing a peaceful afterlife.

(Figure 14 is presented on the following page.)

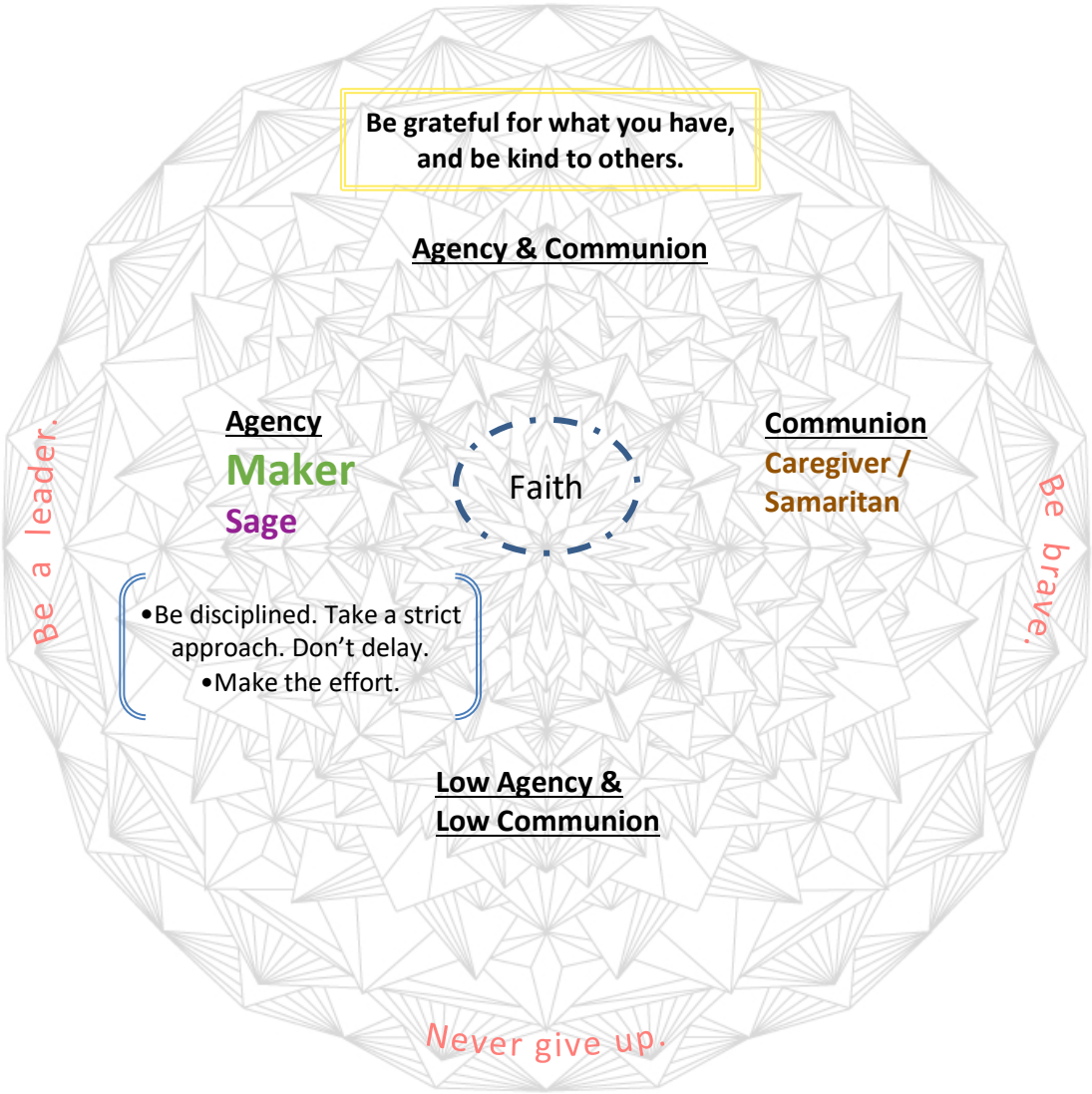


Figure 14. Debra's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green, large font = core, lifelong identity; brown, smaller font = intermittent and "hoped-for identity; purple = recent, growing identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue center circle = faith integrating identity; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

Dee (Latina)

"My dad was a very violent man. He was a very abusive man," began Dee. Dee described growing up in fear. She shared her father molested her, and she could not tell her mother, who at the time was trying to deal with the repercussions from Dee's father severely beating her sister when she announced at age 15 she was pregnant and taking drugs. Dee's sister was removed from their home and Dee was charged with taking care of her new nephew. Dee was never allowed to go to dances or movies, or even have friends. Her parents dressed her like a boy and, despite having six brothers, she was not allowed near their friends.

Dee dropped out of high school as a sophomore, becoming "one of those statistics." Although Dee had attention deficit disorder (ADD) and a hard time concentrating, she continued to be passed from one grade to the next. "I'm not learning anything because they wouldn't bother with me," she said. When she was 17, Dee married a man who worked at a convenience store in their neighborhood. Dee stated,

> I didn't want to marry him. But my mom made me. All I can think is if I stay home, I'm going to get beat up. There was one event where I thought he [her father] was going to rape me.

Dee stayed in her marriage and had "two wonderful boys," although her husband cheated on her and treated her poorly. One day, desperate, she threw a few clothes in the car and left, driving around aimlessly in search of a place to stay. The lowest point in her life was when she was handed the keys to an apartment, her heart racing. She stated, "It was like a ghetto." When she opened the door to a completely empty room, she wondered, "Is this really happening? I am all alone." Dee acknowledged "That God works in mysterious ways." She reached out to a former

neighbor for help. He “won my heart,” she said. “So we end up falling in love and living happily ever after.”

At the time of her follow-up interview, Dee remained employed by the national discount retail corporation, however her hours were sometimes reduced. She considered herself a student at the community college, although she was not currently enrolled and had skipped a semester a year earlier. Dee’s academic and career plans had evolved. Her focus changed to becoming a children’s ESL teacher. She hoped to pay off bills and travel with her husband. Dee offered a philosophical perspective on her life, stating, “My regret is I didn't make something for myself at a younger age.”

Five core themes were evident in Dee’s life story. The first was *Overcoming the Trauma of the Past to Build a Happy Future*. Dee’s childhood was filled with exposure to violence, addiction, and indifference. Her parents failed to provide a safe and nurturing environment. Dee noted, “It’s in my brain. You can never forget.” The convergence of these sad events led Dee to conclude, “I've always been a failure at life, and that's the honest to God truth.” Another main theme throughout Dee’s life was *Caring for Family and Others*. Dee stated, "I've always helped people, because I get a thrill out of that. It makes me feel good." She shared she has to remind herself to consider her own needs.

Three other themes underscored Dee's story. One was *Coping with Disease*. As a child, Dee struggled with ADD and later received a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She had suffered from depression and suicidal thoughts. She currently suffered from degenerative discs and arthritis along with a painful neurological disease affecting her face, with even basic daily tasks triggering great pain.

Another subsidiary theme for Dee was *Faith is Always with Me (Even if The Church is Not)*. Dee no longer attended church services, however she retained her faith in and reliance upon God, believing in angels, especially the one constantly guiding her.

The theme *Discrimination Limits Life's Opportunities* was apparent throughout Dee's story. Dee experienced gender discrimination at home during childhood and adolescence. She was promoted from grade to grade with seeming indifference to her ADD; she was abused by one of her teachers. Language barriers were an impediment during childhood. Now in her 50s, Dee indicated she experiences age discrimination at work.

An integrated view of Dee's identity components is shown in Figure 15. Dee's core identity was seemingly tightly bound to the Survivor and Caregiver. Trauma and living in survivor mode characterized multiple chapters of Dee's life. Dee described herself as always caring about others, be it her family, the elderly, or fellow students. "I like to believe that I am an angel to help others," said Dee. Integrated with Dee's caring identity was the Lover. Her past was overcome with the help of her "Beautiful husband," and she spoke of a charitable form of selflessness.

For Dee, the Sage represented two important identity forces: 1) a desire to believe she could succeed at something; and 2) faith she could acquire knowledge to achieve her hoped-for identity as a Teacher. Dee's identity was bound together with a strong faith in God, angels, and the power of prayer.

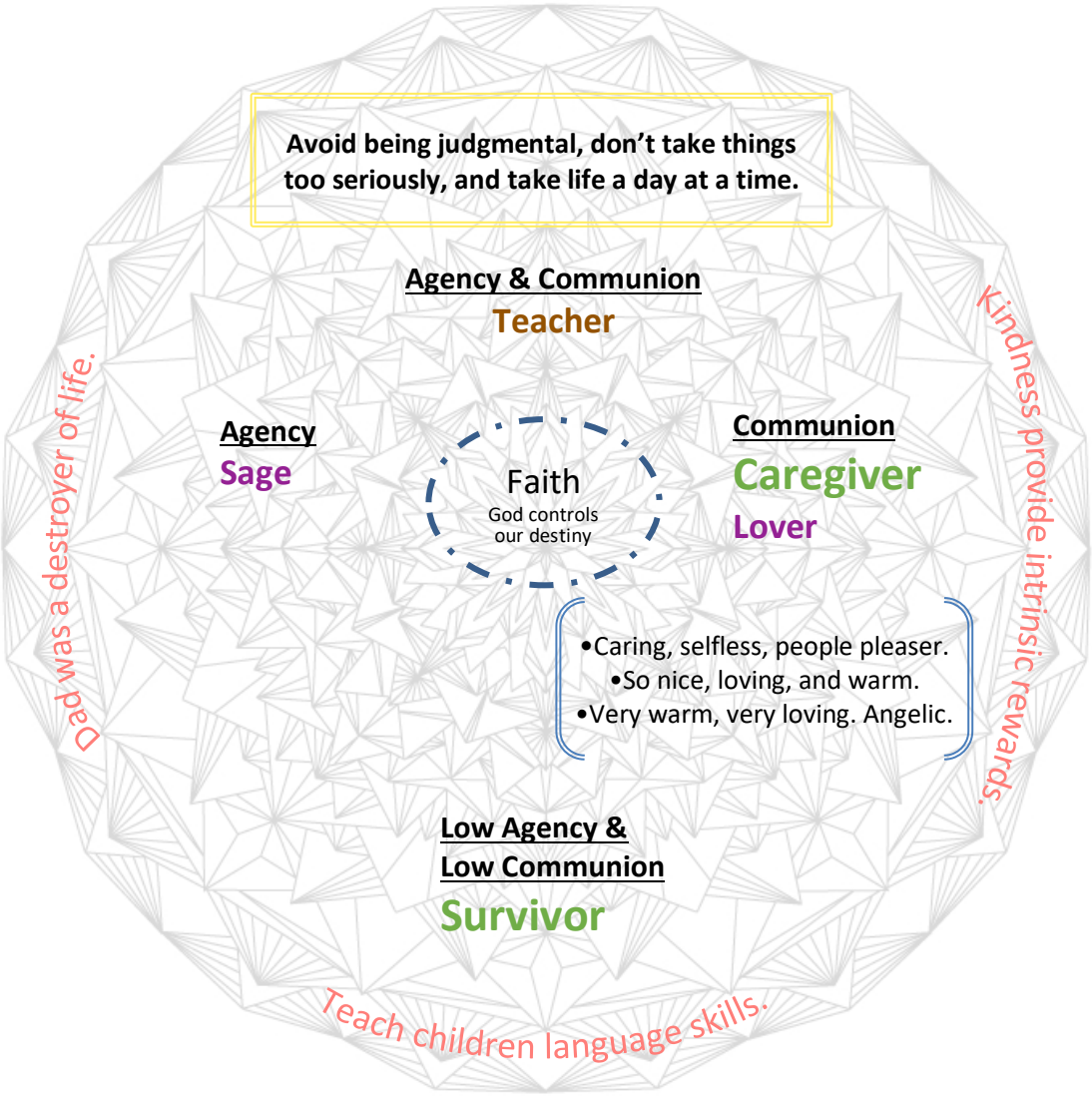


Figure 15. Dee's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: larger green font = core, lifelong identity; brown = beginning and hoped-for identity; purple = recent identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue center circle = faith integrating identity; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

Ellen (Asian)

When first approached about scheduling a follow-up interview, Ellen stated six months after her initial interview she had been diagnosed with stage-4 ovarian cancer. She was later diagnosed with another type of cancer. Illness had prevented Ellen from returning to community college, and she stopped working. Ellen indicated in spite of this, she was willing and happy to conduct an interview.

Ellen's parents were separated when she was one-year-old. She did not live with either parent. Living with an aunt, Ellen explained, "I really want to go to school but we were poor. I was eight when I got into first grade. It's very hard for me. I don't have books. I don't have pencil. I don't have anything." Despite her circumstances, Ellen did well and received scholastic honors. Fluctuating financial situations caused her to bounce between bad and good schools. She dropped out of high school, went to work, and then returned to finish high school at age 27. Ellen noted due to her childhood, "I've learned how to fight. I've learned how to hide my feelings."

After Ellen graduated from high school she enrolled in a two-year secretarial and office management program and took computer-programming courses. Unfortunately, Ellen was financially unable to continue her computer studies and accepted a job processing invoices. She was promoted after three months, and later completed a bachelor's degree. After graduation, Ellen went to work as an administrative secretary, a job she noted was the highpoint of her professional life.

After serving five years in her administrative position, Ellen moved to the United States. Ellen lamented despite her educational accomplishments, her degrees had not been acknowledged in the United States. "I need to start at the bottom," she said,

accepting a grocery store clerk job, where “It's like your mind is stagnant. It's like water that wouldn't flow.” Ellen later found a low-level material handler job. She then met her husband through someone at work. "It's the right thing. It's a good thing", she said, given she met her husband through prayer.

Ellen's sole focus was getting well and "getting myself back to a normal life." Ellen acknowledged faith was driving her, stating, “I couldn't really think of the future plan because Jesus said don't worry about your future. Trust everything to the Lord.” Reflecting on her life, Ellen noted its central theme was "Never stop hoping. Never stop dreaming. Never stop aiming."

Five themes appeared throughout Ellen's life story. The first was *The Bedrock of Life is Faith*. She reported a dream encounter she had with God when she was four years old. She remembered always wanting to pray, beginning when she was a child. Ellen summarized her life, stating "I'm a very religious person."

A second lifelong theme for Ellen was *Improving Life Through Learning.* Ellen recalled entering first grade, thinking "I really want to go to school and I'm enjoying it. I get into the higher section. The star section." As Ellen aged, she appeared to overcome each roadblock or unsatisfying job with education. Ellen summarized her feelings, saying, "We're not supposed to stop learning.”

Ellen’s third lifelong theme was *Disadvantage Comes in Waves and Many Forms.* Ellen's early precarious socioeconomic position affected her abilities and interests, leaving them underdeveloped and unfulfilled. Once in the United States, Ellen was judged based on her accent. Fellow employees treated her poorly, made fun

of her religious beliefs, and left her to cope with constant jealousies and harassment. Such feelings made her work environment intimidating.

Ellen's life reflected two related and growing themes over the years - *Working Hard Is Serving God* and *Always Seeking Meaningful Work.* Ellen noted, "I'm a very hard-working person. I just work, work, work." She followed Biblical instructions, "You have to work hard" and "When you work, do your best." A recent life theme for Ellen was *Helping Others.* Ellen's dream was to "help those people who are really in need."

Ellen's identity was highly integrated with her religious faith (see Figure 16). Her identity was closely tied to two innate, achievement-oriented archetypes: the Sage and the Maker. Ever since childhood she sought out educational experiences. She has lived her life based upon her philosophy, "We're not supposed to stop learning." Ellen's idealized, hoped-for identity was of a successful career woman who travels and interacts with others on a daily basis. Communal archetypes had lesser influence on her identity, "because, look. I feel like being just a mom, I don't achieve anything. Achievement for me is something new in knowledge." Her secondary hoped-for identity would allow her to serve others in the role of Healer and Shaman, where she planned to help others "find Jesus" and "focus on their soul."

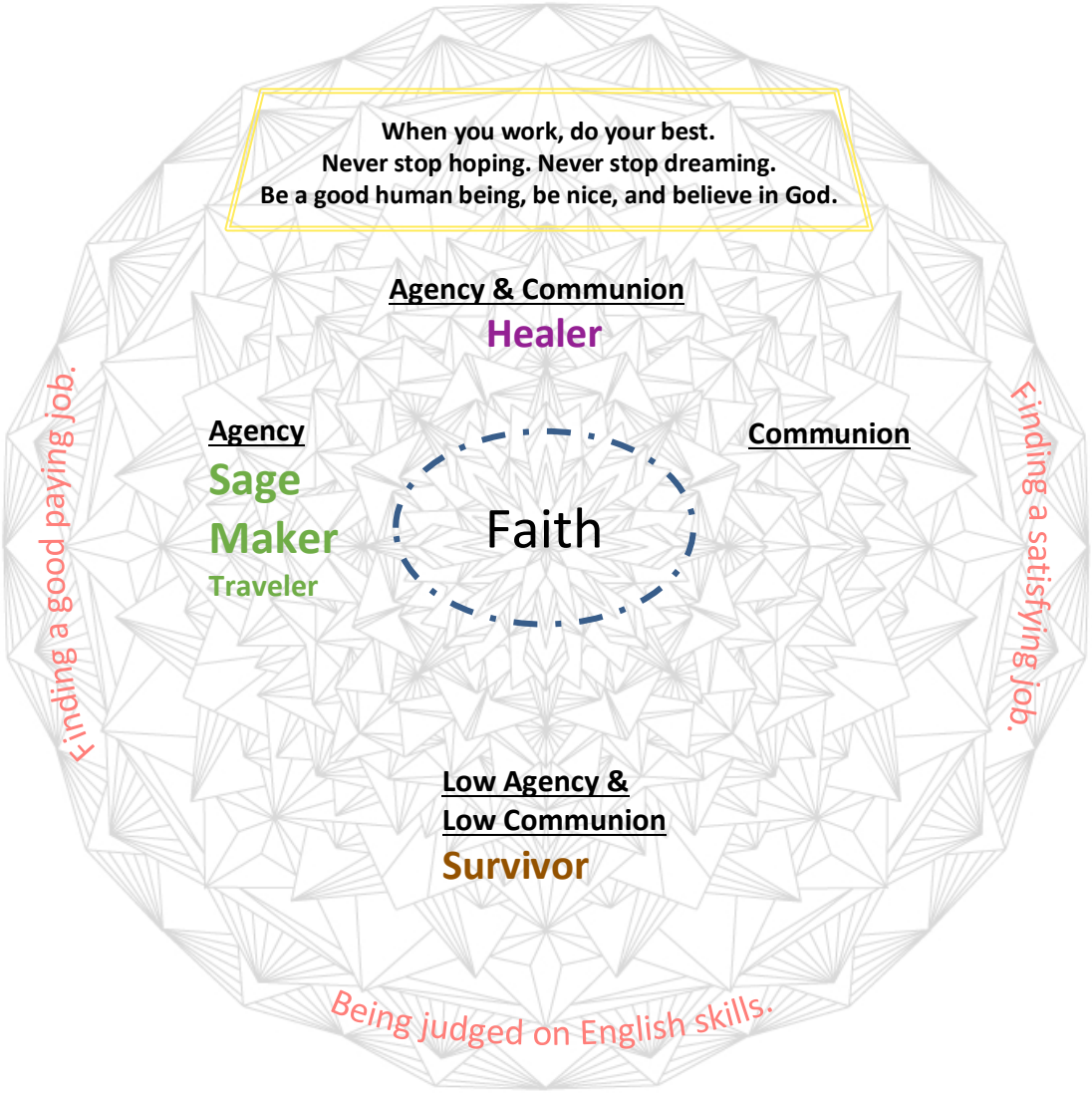


Figure 16. Ellen's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green = core, lifelong identity, with largest font most pronounced; brown = intermittent identity; purple = recent and hoped-for identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue center circle = faith major integrating identity; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced.

Sophia (Black)

Sophia's father was an alcoholic during her childhood. Her mother worked at night, so Sophia was responsible for looking after her two younger sisters, caring for them until their mother returned. "I didn't have a child childhood," she said. "I was always the protector. Someone had to be aware of what was going on in the house." Sophia attended a newly integrated school in first grade, which made her feel unique. When she moved to a new state in fourth grade she was surprised to find "a lot of division in the school." Sophia said her "mama" tried to explain the situation, saying "No, you can't go to that school. That's only for white kids." Sophia did not understand why this was happening, stating the situation impacted her "because I thought people were just mean for no reason." Fortunately, Sophia's teachers noticed how the school environment was affecting her shyness and helped her adapt and grow.

After graduating from high school, Sophia did not want to attend college. Her parents insisted she learn a trade, so she enrolled at ITT Technical Institute and studied computers and bookkeeping. Sophia said while at ITT, "My dad went from alcoholic to great dad. We become a more core family."

Sophia was married when she was 19 and the first four years were good ones. When her husband returned from overseas military duty they went through a bad divorce. Sophia said, "I lost who I was and I was just existing. This is when I start drinking." Her drinking addiction was followed by attempted suicide. "I just spiraled. I mean, really spiraled. I ended up in the psych ward for about two weeks." Sophia subsequently focused on work, stating, "I took stores that was low number stores, turned them into top stores."

Nothing had changed regarding Sophia's employment. She was enrolled in six credit hours. She continued to attend community college at night due to work. Unlike the initial interview, Sophia now largely ruled out starting any type of business, stating she might have thought differently if she could have finished her degree faster. Asked if she detected a central message in her life, Sophia paused for a moment and quietly said, "Never Give Up. There were times there I did want to give up, but the thread is finding the strength to continue on."

Five themes appeared in Sophia's life story. The first was *Committed to a Brighter Future*. Sophia was determined to get her degree and pursue a higher paying job, building on her past retail successes. A critical aspect of her educational commitment was her goal of providing a lifetime of opportunities for her daughter.

The second theme was *Caring for Family and Others*. Sophia cared for her sisters at an early age, looked after her relative's children as she got older, and now hands out hats and gloves to those without, "just because." A third theme evident in Sophia's story was *Knowledge and Education Are Important*. Sophia's parents instilled in her the belief life required continued learning. Sophia acknowledged, "Education is very important" to her future success.

Sophia's life story carried the heavy burden of *Living with the Effects of Discrimination*. Sophia discussed the effects of attending segregated schools, noting in junior high school, "I couldn't comprehend, and I don't know if it's because I was scared in school." She mentioned her uncle was a role model, challenging the status quo and risking his life by being outspoken about civil rights.

The fifth theme in Sophia's story was *Surviving Life's Onslaught*. Sophia stated, "I'm a survivor of alcoholism. I'm a survivor of being suicidal. I'm a survivor of being a mama. Education - going back to school at my age." Sophia was proud she graduated from high school, despite being told numerous times she would never graduate.

Sophia's archetypal identity was underscored by the Survivor (see Figure 17), reflected in the *Surviving Life's Onslaught* theme. One of her early memories highlighted a likely continued preoccupation with the "messy" phases of her life and her deep-seated concern they never resurface and affect her daughter. For Sophia, her self-proclaimed Warrior-Hero identity was present in various life phases, and her philosophy centered on knowing it's okay to fail and get back up to try again. Sophia wanted her daughter to know her mother fought and never gave up.

Being a Caregiver and a Sage appeared to have been part of Sophia's identity early in life, however these had been largely cast aside during periods of "doing things I shouldn't be doing." The Caregiver and Sage archetypes later reemerged in powerful ways. In Sophia's first early memory she commented, "I didn't learn how to cook until late in life," a subtle reminder to herself it is never too late to pursue an education. Despite the Sage's current importance, the role remained somewhat subservient to the Caregiver. Sophia admitted being a Servant to others without attached expectations was part of her current and planned identity.

This concludes the eight life story interviews and their identity figures created based upon the analysis. The next section will cover a collective assessment on changes in the participants' life stories and college experiences.

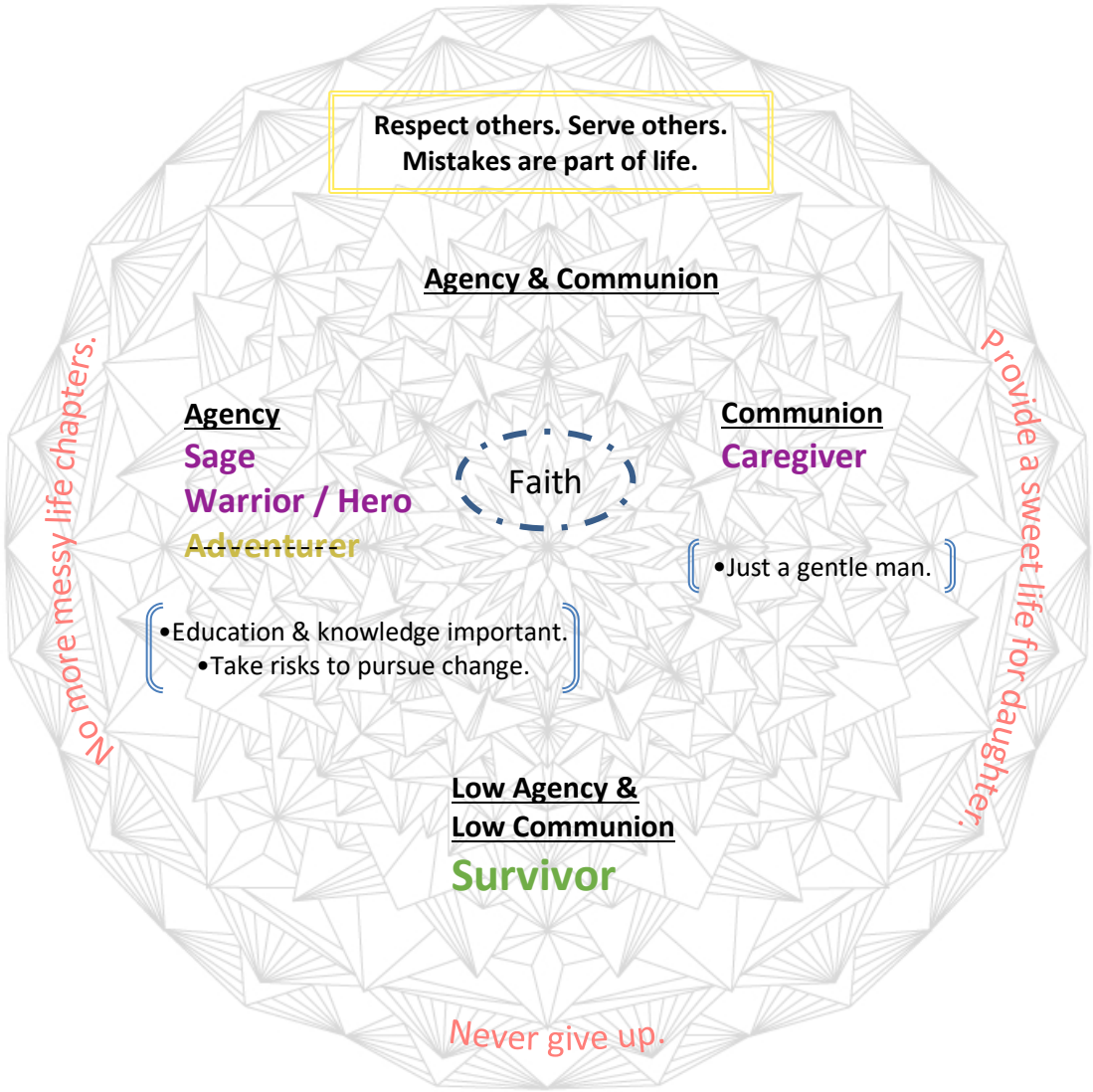


Figure 17. Sophia's Narrative Identity Elements. Background mandala Ukususha (2017). "The mandala was Jung's symbol for the unity of self - an accomplishment usually saved for midlife - in which all dualities were dissolved in psychic harmony" (McAdams, 1985, p. 180). Color guide: green large font = core, lifelong identity; purple = past and current identity; gold with dashed line = past shadow identity; yellow box = central ideology; blue center circle = growing adult emphasis on faith; salmon = preoccupations or problems repeatedly faced; light blue brackets = identity components from role models.

Collective Longitudinal Changes in Life Stories and College Experiences

There are two subsections. The first subsection summarizes participant changes with regard to community college enrollment, work and health. This subsection includes a collective comparison of the temporal direction of the women's life stories and how personal goals may have changed. The second subsection addresses collective community college experiences. Of the initial ten participants, the researcher learned one pilot participant had passed away and another pilot participant did not respond to further requests for a follow-up interview. The community college indicated there was no record of her having enrolled since the pilot study.

Collective Life Changes

Two and one-half years later, the researcher learned that Claire and Mattie had graduated from the community college. Claire went on to complete a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership, and Mattie was over half-way toward earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. Debra, Dee, Shelly, and Sophia continued to be enrolled at the community college, in various stages of progress toward an associate degree. Debra and Sophia were planning to continue their business major studies. Dee changed her major from business/human resources to pre-education, and Shelly remained undecided, although she indicated social work was of interest.

Four of the women never returned to take classes following their initial contact with the researcher. Mae lost interest, deciding she could no longer justify the time and expense of attaining a bachelor's degree. She was planning to retire in several years and continue self-directed learning related to her sewing and craft interests. Ellen became too ill battling ovarian cancer to attend college.

Five of the eight women shared ongoing health concerns. In addition to the Dee's previous health challenges, she was planning major stomach surgery. A university psychologist had recently diagnosed Mattie with anxiety and learning disabilities. Mattie revealed she has Crohn's disease and lived with the complications from a previous surgery. Claire had been diagnosed with emphysema and struggled with significant cough-induced throat damage as a result of exposure to environmental hazards at work. Ellen had two forms of cancer. Shelly discussed issues of guilt and self-doubt.

Five women had no change in their employment status. Claire, Mae, and Sophia continued to work full time for their same employer. Mattie and Shelly were focusing on their studies and remained not employed. Debra was laid off and working part time as a cashier and data-entry clerk. Dee was employed with the same national retailer, although her work hours had been reduced to part time. Ellen's cancer prevented her from working.

Based on stories told by eight women who participated in the follow-up interview, there is a wide variety of starting and ending points. The researcher decided on the use of a temporal map which indicates a need to appreciate unique life circumstances and personal desires (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). Figure 18 summarizes the temporal direction of each participant's narrative life story over the two and one-half year period. Having a progressive life narrative does not imply a worry-free life or life without obstacles, rather it indicates a life story showing strong evidence toward reaching goals and building a hoped-for life. For example, a progressive narrative might

embody, “I am really learning to overcome my shyness” (Gergen & Gergen, 1983, p. 259).

As depicted in Figure 18, Claire and Mattie’s life story momentum was progressive, starting from a relatively positive position. Despite health challenges, Claire had graduated with associate and bachelor’s degrees. She looked forward to the

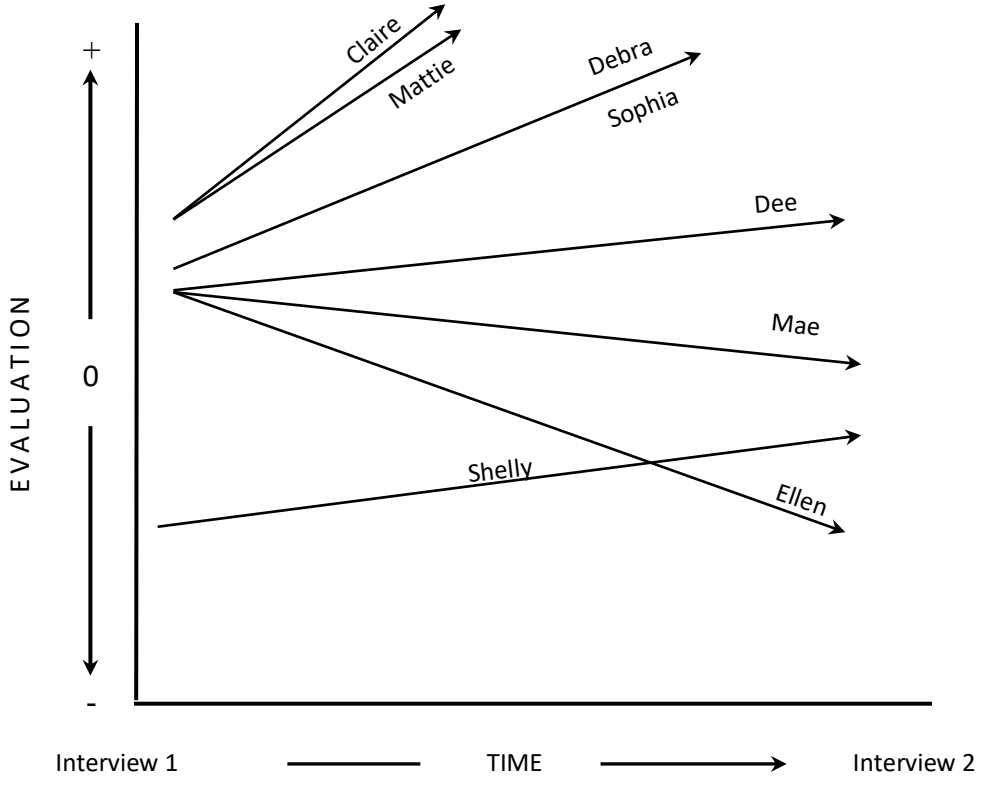


Figure 18. Temporal Direction of Participants’ Life Narratives. The starting point on the vertical axis represents the degree of relative positive or negative aspects of the life story as told by the participant. The ending point and slope represents the degree of progression, regression, or stability in the movement of the story plot, based upon the participant’s stated goals and life desires (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). Graphical depiction adapted from “Narratives of the Self” by K. Gergen and M. Gergen, 1983, in T. R. Sarbin & K. E. Scheibe (Eds.), *Studies in social identity*. New York, NY: Praeger.

adventure of finding a new work opportunity along with developing a new relationship. Mattie graduated from the community college, and in spite of challenges she faced while working toward her bachelor's degree, she was progressing toward her goal. She was resourceful and highly focused. Claire and Mattie's goals were unchanged.

Debra and Sophia's narrative was mostly progressive. Debra had made significant progress toward her associate degree. She had a new (albeit part time) job and a thoughtful plan for the future. Her husband was supportive and she did not have any health concerns. Working against her progress was her English language skills and foreign accent. Sophia continued to progress toward her goal of a degree and a higher paying job, although at a slower pace. She modified her career goal to focus on a full-time retail management position. She was employed full time and devoted to her daughter.

Dee and Shelly's temporal movement was slightly progressive. Dee continued to take classes, yet missed two semesters due to her sense of duty to her employer. While hoping to do so, she could not afford to quit working given her husband was unemployed following knee surgery. Dee's upcoming major surgery will further slow her progress. Dee changed her long-term goal from human resources to teaching ESL classes. She was happy and loved her family. Although starting from a relatively negative position, Shelly confirmed she continued attending the community college. She did reasonably well in her classes. Although plagued by a lack of self-confidence, these feelings had improved slightly. She continued to be uncertain about what career to seek or what subjects to study.

Mae's trajectory appeared slightly regressive. Mae expressed an evolving cynical attitude about life. She commented life was "boring." Mae lamented the loss of the person she used to be, always "happy-go-lucky" and helpful to others. She no longer planned to pursue formal education. She had a full-time job she liked and friends she enjoyed. Ellen's path was mostly regressive, primarily due to her life-threatening battle with cancer. Her goals were on hold.

Collective Community College Experiences

Of the five art-card study participants, four provided no new recommendations for college support services. Claire continued to praise her prior community college experiences and offered no further suggestions. Debra likewise offered no new suggestions for campus services. Her husband remained supportive. Having a computer, printer, and Internet connection at home, she rarely used the campus library or computer labs. Debra continued to feel she was struggling alone. No one on campus was considered a mentor. She met with her academic advisor from time-to-time.

Dee reported her employer had become insensitive to her class schedule, something she attributed to age discrimination. She expressed frustration with her employer's greater concern for the needs of younger workers. If Dee did not respond to her employer's scheduling requests, "They cut your hours dramatically." Unpredictability in work hours made scheduling classes difficult. Dee considered her reading/English professor a mentor, describing her as "so compassionate, so friendly, so caring. She never once made me feel I was stupid or slow." Dee loved the community college, was happy with the professors, and offered no new suggestions for support services.

Sophia expressed mixed feelings regarding her overall community college experience and provided added insights. She offered praise for the faculty, who were accessible and responded quickly. The TRIO program was viewed positively. She developed a close relationship with two English professors, and always found at least one fellow classmate with whom she could partner. However, Sophia was unhappy certain classes she wanted or needed were offered only occasionally, a fact her advisor did not mention. She was disappointed when classes did not meet required enrollment and were cancelled, sometimes just two days before the semester started. Both of these realities contributed to the length of time it was taking for her degree completion. Sophia wished accounting tutoring was available in the evening. Ellen did not return to the community college and therefore was unable to provide new comments.

Two pilot participants offered positive comments about their community college experiences at the end of their life story interview. Mattie, now enrolled at a university, reflected on her community college experience with great fondness, offering high praise for the quality services received, including the Trio program. Her educational planning class professor was a mentor and an example of a highly dedicated person who "Didn't look at my color." Mattie contrasted her positive community college experience to the frustrations she was experiencing at the university, where "I'm just a number."

Shelly praised the community college's support services. She found a particular librarian helpful and considered her educational planning professor a mentor. Like Sophia, she sought out at least one fellow student in each class for moral and academic support and was comfortable asking and receiving assistance from younger students. Shelly was in the campus TRIO program and praised its positive contributions.

Debra, Dee, and Sophia reiterated the challenges they faced balancing work and college attendance. Sophia reinforced her earlier feelings about the added challenge of being a mother.

Sophia offered a new observation about classroom generational differences, stating "Some days I'm frustrated, and some days I'm not. You know, the younger generation, they see things totally different from us." She and other older adults thought offering classes exclusively for Baby Boomers might be a good idea. Nevertheless, Sophia acknowledged, "I'm learning a whole lot from the Millennials."

The challenges of balancing work, school, and children did not get easier over time. Conflicting time pressures are a continual impediment to educational goal attainment. Only one woman offered new support suggestions, however her suggestions regarding course availability appear to be broadly applicable to community college students.

Integrated Identity and Narrative Stories Analysis

This section analyzes the women's life stories in a collective fashion. The first subsection reviews mythic story genres and plots derived from Frye and Elsbree's taxonomies (Frye, 1964; McAdams, 1985, 1993). As further delineated in Chapter 3, these taxonomies aid in understanding the structural similarities and differences in the women's stories. The second subsection addresses common life story themes derived from narrative analysis, and the third section provides a holistic analysis of common identity development paths. The final subsection addresses participant's transformations. An integrative summary concludes the chapter.

Mythic Story Genres and Plots

A summary of the mythic story genres and subplots for all participants is shown in Figure 19. Similar to the temporal direction analysis, Figure 19 highlights each woman's unique narrated life story while demonstrating commonalities among a subset of the women. Mae, Claire, and Mattie had stories with comedy as the principle mythic story form, with consecrating a home as a major plot. Their stories frequently highlighted joys accompanying home and domestic life. Claire and Mattie had the fighting a battle plot. Claire spent decades dealing with the effects of her sister's death, and Mattie shared daily experiences battling prejudice and discrimination. A potential for finding consummation was apparent for Mattie. Her story implied she could attain something glorious for herself and others.

Debra, Ellen, and Sophia had stories with romance as the principle mythic story form and shared the journey plot. Their stories were filled with continuous struggles and victories, accompanied by a generally positive and optimistic tone. They shared a restless propulsion to rebuild their careers and start new businesses, complete with various battles. Sophia's story was characterized by an additional subplot of enduring suffering during intermittent periods of her childhood and adulthood.

A significant part of Dee's life story began in tragedy and was transformed into the romance genre since meeting her second husband. In the tragic phase of her life, Dee could not trust a world filled with fears and danger. The main plot was one of enduring suffering and disillusionment. The second part of Dee's life transformed from the pessimistic tragedy to the optimistic romance. In this phase, Dee was constantly adapting and moving forward, despite changing circumstances. Accompanying Dee's

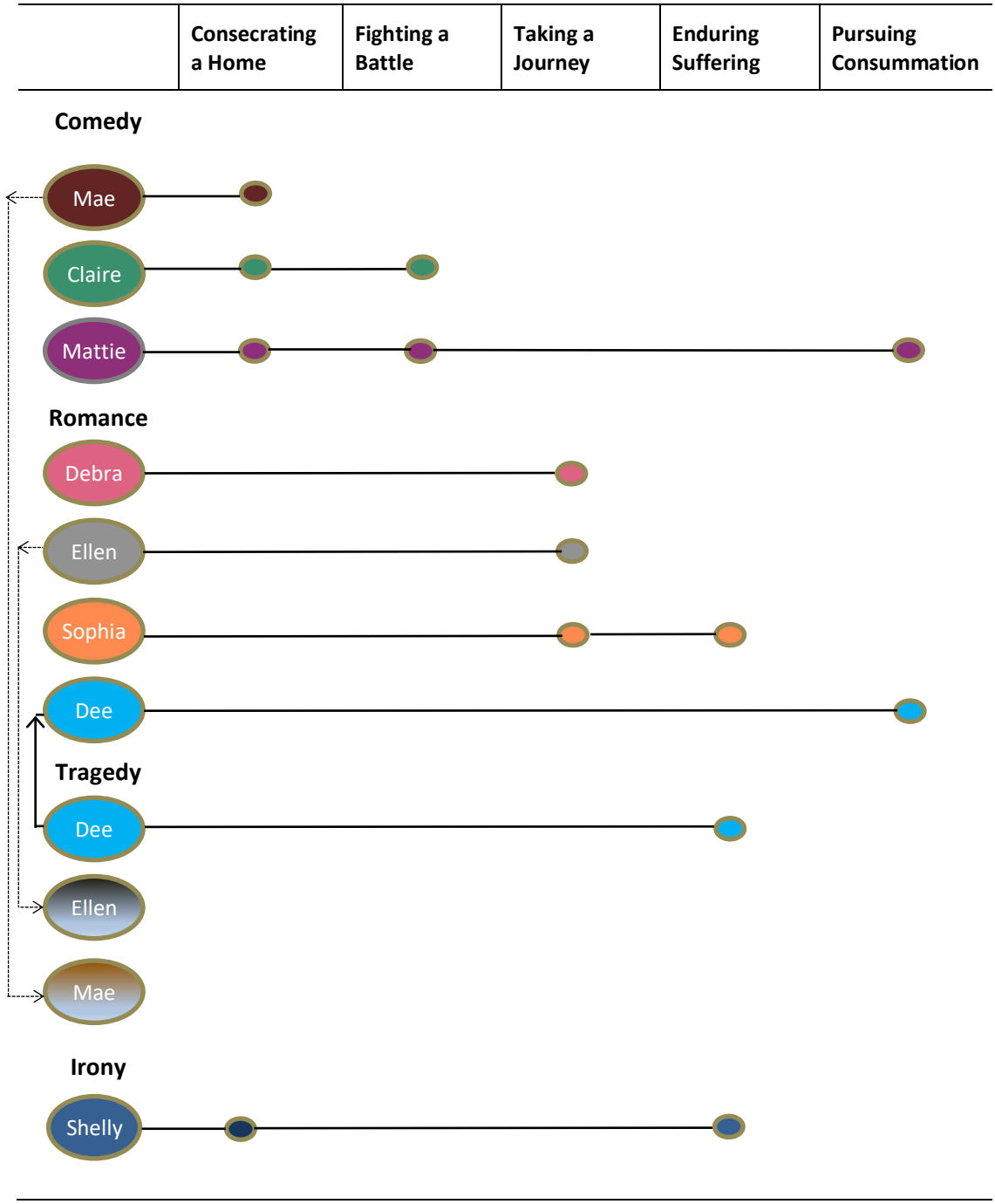


Figure 19. Mythic story types and related sub plots. Solid arrow shows change over time. Dashed line and arrow shows potential change in mythic story genre in the future.

romantic typology was a plot focused on pursuing consummation. Dee was in pursuit of the ultimate expression of what life could mean for her and others, teaching ESL to children.

Shelly's story was a mythic irony, interspersed with the plot of seeking to establish and consecrate a home. A secondary plot was enduring suffering, as a degree of sadness and pessimism predominated her story; she would "like to be set free." Ironies included getting two jobs she liked and then losing both. She enjoyed being in college, yet was not sure why she was there. She received good grades overall, yet suffered from feeling everyone else was more capable. She was living with her ex-husband who had her hurt her deeply after their divorce. She stated despite all her life difficulties, she had been fortunate.

Mae and Ellen had mythic genres potentially redirecting. Mae's alternative path could continue downward, filled with cynicism, culminating in a comedy turned tragedy. The pinnacle of Mae's life may have occurred when her children entered adulthood; ensuing life chapters Mae chose to start with the word "horrible." Ellen's romance story had a hint of transforming to mythic tragedy. Having sacrificed and studied hard to earn a job she loved as an administrative secretary, Ellen's work life since moving to the United States had fallen from this zenith. Her illnesses and self-expressed concerns over age and language deficits were pushing strongly against the goals she held dear.

Figure 19 is useful in addressing the topic of narrative complexity. As McAdams (1985) notes, complex or differentiated stories appear to present variety in plot forms, often attempting to integrate disparate modes of action. Other stories might

appear simpler, with fewer characters and a straightforward line of action. Applying this perspective, Mae's narrative fell into a simpler category, with one mythic type and one subplot. By contrast, Dee's story had two strong mythic components and two subplots, and Mattie's story had three subplots. Notably, it should not be assumed a complex life is satisfying, "though it is not necessarily less satisfying, either" (McAdams, 1985, p. 128).

Common Life Story Themes

Themes previously identified in the eight individual stories, answers to specific interview questions, and art-card stories from the five initial study participants were analyzed in holistic fashion to produce a set of seven life themes held by the majority of the women community college students. Common life themes are *Coping with Struggles and Challenges*, *Education is Highly Valued*, *Seeking a Generative Path in the Third Chapter*, *Centrality of Family*, *My Religion and Faith are Integral to My Life*, *Age Affects Thoughts About Life's Plans*, and *Never Give Up* (see Table 11). Generation of narrative, holistic themes was based upon repeatedly reading the story material until macro themes emerged (Lieblich, et al., 1998; Wells, 2001; Yow, 2005). These themes are explored starting with the first theme.

Theme 1: *Coping with Struggles and Challenges* was a theme common to every life story. Struggles were varied, and upon further narrative analysis surfaced five subsidiary themes. Six of the 8 women had *Emotional and Financial Struggles Related to Divorce,* and the seventh expressed frustrations with her current spouse. Six life story narratives presented *Multiple Forms of Physical and Mental Wellness Challenges*. These included: cancers, degenerative disks, trigeminal neuralgia, Crohn's disease,

Table 11

Participant Common Life Story Themes

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7
	Struggles/ Challenges	**Value Education**	**Generativity/ Caring**	**Family Focus**	**Faith Central**	**Time Sensitive**	**Persistent**
Claire	√	√		√		√	√
Debra	√	√	√		√	√	√
Dee	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Ellen	√	√	√		√	√	√
Mae	√	*	√	√	√	√	
Mattie	√	√	√	√	√		√
Shelly	√	**	√	√		√	
Sophia	√	√	√	√	√		√

Note. The √ indicates presence of theme. *Emphasis on informal education. **Intermittent.

emphysema, alcohol and prescription medication additions, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and depression.

Six of the women's stories exhibited *Coping with Discrimination and its Affects.* Dee (Latina) presented a story filled with childhood gender discrimination and a terrifying home life affecting her schoolwork. A teacher abused her at school, yet no one at home cared. Dee described issues learning English, and implied the public school system failed to help. She had "a hard time concentrating." Dee was passed along from grade to grade and did not experience learning, stating "They wouldn't bother with me." She dropped out of high school as a sophomore.

Sophia (Black) was fortunate she found teachers who helped. Nevertheless, she was emotionally distraught and perplexed when, after attending an integrated school, her mother told her she could not attend a new school given it was strictly for white kids. She found the tension inherent in attending school affected her learning, and she was told she would likely never graduate high school. Sophia then decided she did not want to attend college. Sophia recalled the civil rights challenges of her youth, and how her uncle risked his life speaking out for equality. She was in her mid-30's when she adopted her present attitude, stating "I stopped seeing color in people a long time ago."

Mattie's (Black) school segregation experience was reflected in her early memory, "It was just only black kids on this car" transporting her to school. She spoke of how race affected her parents. Mattie indicated prejudice was something she dealt with every day.

Shelly (Native American) experienced a racially motivated comment when told she was stupid in grade school and suffered consequent damage to her identity development and her self-confidence (Lara-Cooper & Cooper, 2016). Her mother never expected any success from Shelly, which stuck in her mind. As an adult, Shelly endured her husband's snide and prejudicial comments regarding Native Americans.

Debra (Asian) noted how people in the United States would not make an effort to listen to her due to her accent. She identified this issue as a low point of her life, and worried how it would affect her future job prospects. Ellen (Asian) likewise stated people judged her competence based on her foreign accent. She suffered from harassment at work due to her heritage, faith, and work ethic.

The fourth struggling subsidiary theme noted in three stories is *Overcoming a Lost Childhood.* Sophia and Dee spoke of losing their childhood and teenage years, stating they were required to help raise younger siblings and a nephew. Claire lost her remaining childhood (and 20 years of adulthood) due to her sister's death.

A final struggling theme found in four stories is *Acknowledging the Hurt and Struggles of Childhood.* Dee's childhood was so traumatic she could barely recall one positive memory. She learned at an early age, "I can't trust anybody." Shelly was traumatized at age five when her father left. Debra's father left her family when she was six years old and the lack of her father's presence was her stated greatest loss in life. Ellen's parents separated when she was a child, forcing her to live with an aunt who was poor. Ellen stated her greatest challenge in life was coping with childhood.

Theme 2: *Education is Highly Valued* for six of the women. Three women indicated the greatest turning point in their lives involved education. For Dee, this meant enrolling in GED classes. For Mattie and Claire, this meant going to the community college after they turned 50 years old. Three women did not reference education as their greatest life turning point, yet they highly valued education. Ellen described being devoted to learning her entire life. For Sophia and Debra, education was seen as crucial for future success. Shelly mentioned community college as one of her turning points, however she expressed uncertainty regarding why she was attending. While Mae was ambivalent about pursuing additional formal education, she acknowledged she loved to learn and would continue to do so informally on her own terms.

Theme 3: *Seeking a Generative Path in the Third Chapter*. Seven women's stories focused on helping others. Mattie desired a job helping others, Ellen wanted to help others "focus on their soul," and Sophia handed out gloves and hats to those in need, "just because," adding she wanted to be a servant to others. Mae expressed a desire to find time to help others as she had in years past. She intended to deliver meals to the elderly and disabled. Debra viewed herself as less greedy and focused on others, and Dee wanted to support children by becoming an ESL teacher. Shelly hoped to "Pay it forward."

Theme 4: *Centrality of Family* characterized six of the stories. Claire devoted her entire life to family. Mattie's values were centered on family. Shelly considered her kids her greatest accomplishment, and "worships" her grandson. Mae acknowledged the core theme "I'm a family person" existed throughout her entire life. Sophia cared for her two younger sisters and was devoted to her daughter. Dee remained in a stressful marriage to raise her two sons, and cared for her dying sister. "My grandkids are my world now," said Dee.

Theme 5: *My Religion and Faith Are Integral to My Life* was found in the narratives of six women. For Mae, coming to know Christ was the turning point in her life. Ellen stated she was religious and working hard was serving God. Debra, lamenting the lack of traditional Indonesian Christian worship in the United States, regularly sought Indonesian gospel music and church services online. Mattie prayed all the time, and Sophia tried to be Christ-like, helping others "get to God." Dee saw the presence of God in her life and believed her destiny was in God's hands.

Theme 6: *Age Affects Thoughts About Life's Plans* impacted six women who held the perspective of life is short and shared philosophical comments. For Claire, the notion of aging was motivating, "I've decided I'm not going to live forever. I don't want to miss anymore life." Debra stated, "Only a little time left. Don't waste your time." Dee explained, "I live my life one day at a time. I would like to do this [college], but sometimes I don't know if I'm going to live long enough to even fulfill my goal." Shelly had doubts about school and aging, stating, "Sometimes I think, why am I going to school? I'll be 55 by the time I get my degree, if I get a degree - I'm going to be even older." Ellen enjoyed learning and found college motivating, yet she wondered if anyone would hire her after she graduated. Mae, approaching her mid 60s, no longer saw the point of further formal education.

Theme 7: *Never Give Up* was the mantra for five women. Debra and Sophia specifically said, "Never give up;" Claire referenced herself in the third person, "Claire never gives up;" Ellen said, "Never stop hoping, never stop dreaming;" and Mattie stated, "I can do anything through Christ."

While story details and circumstances surrounding each person's life were unique, it is notable the number of themes shared by the eight participants (see Table 11). Five of the eight participants exhibited six of the seven themes, two women exhibited five themes, and on woman exhibited four themes. This degree of commonality is a finding that can impact the design of practical solutions to assist older women in their goal attainment, a topic addressed in Chapter 5. Commonalities were found among the identity paths of the participants, a topic addressed in the next section.

Common Identity Development Paths

Holistic analysis was conducted on the identity paths of the participants. Four different desired paths were noted (see Figure 20). Three participants were focused on

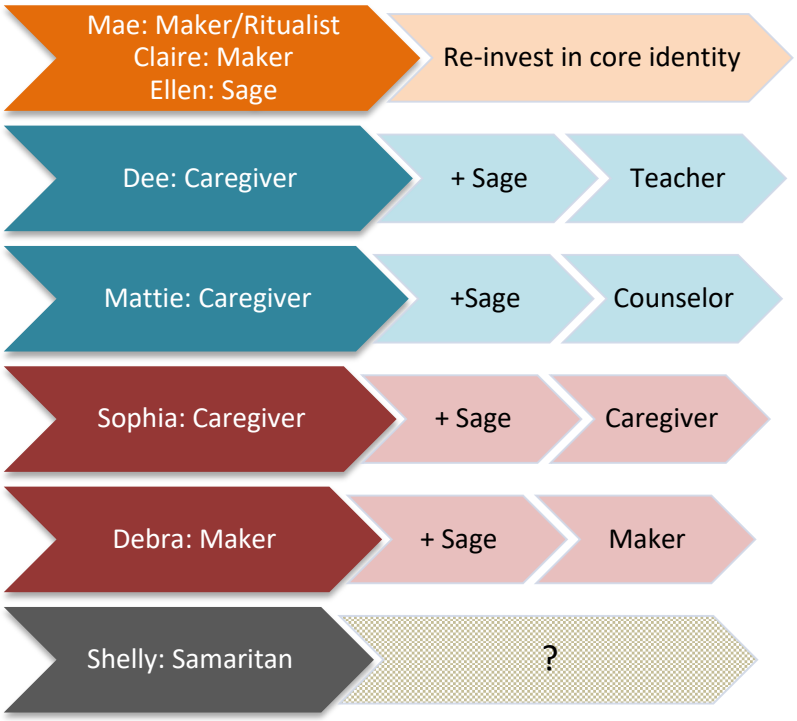


Figure 20. Differing identity goals of eight women participants. Identities group into four categories.

continued investment in identities traced to childhood. Mae's most desired identity was the Maker (crafts and art) and Ritualist, Claire's Maker focus was on a productive business career, and Ellen's greatest desire was to continue her lifelong pursuit of new knowledge.

Two participants were leveraging their recent Sage identities to build new identities. Dee's hoped-for identity was the Teacher archetype, and Mattie's was the

Counselor archetype. Two additional participants were leveraging the Sage archetype for purposes other than creating a new identity. Sophia's newly revived Sage was focused on developing her past and recent Caregiver archetype. Debra's newly arisen Sage was focused on developing her longstanding Maker identity, tied closely to her innovative business desires.

Shelly exhibited identity confusion. Her desired future was unclear and her sense of self was confused, as indicated in her statement, "I'd like to be set free."

Reviewing the narrative analysis of each woman's story through the lens of transformative learning is addressed in the next section.

Participant Transformation

Mezirow (1978, 2000) provided a theoretical lens for the transformative impact of education in the life story narratives of the women participants. Mezirow's (2000) transformational learning theory is largely concerned with epochal experiences, meaning a change in identity or worldview (Tisdell, 2012). This framework was applied to further understand the women's stories. Insights about the participants' transformation were based on the totality of each woman's story experiences, including questions about the greatest turning point in life; how, if at all, life and related attitudes changed over the period between interviews; and the reasons for pursuing an education in their Third Chapter.

Each life story found the process of furthering education coupled with a disorienting dilemma, the starting point for transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000). For example, Shelly had recovered from medication addiction and depression and was searching for a way to create a self-sufficient future. Claire became concerned about job

security and potential for new career options, deciding she needed "that piece of paper." Ellen faced the critical challenge of how to rescue her career from a dead-end job. Debra reflected on her need for knowledge to obtain a desirable job along with preparing to start a new business. Mattie experienced depression and suffered from a disability; education became an outlet for her healing. Sophia was determined to provide a brighter future for her young daughter. Dee's dilemma focused on remedying learning injustices of the past. Mae realized she would not have new career options without pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Claire's narrative provided evidence of following the ten steps inherent in Mezirow's (2000) transformational process. Her steps included a critical assessment of assumptions, planning action, acquiring new knowledge, and integrating new perspectives. Claire's college degrees were transformational in two respects, based on Mezirow's (2000) criteria. First, she expressed being comfortable with herself and confident, attributing this confidence in part to her education. Second, she spoke of having a heightened sense and expanded perspective of the world. The analysis revealed changes in her frame of reference in relation to both her self-concept (Mezirow, 2000) and her overall worldview.

Sophia discussed a transformational change in a frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000) with regard to her intergenerational understanding. She had experienced four generations of students in one class, which offered her new perspectives on life based on what she observed and learned from other students. The impact was profound and helped her understand and communicate with her adolescent daughter. It was not stated if there was a specific dilemma precipitating this transformation, nor where details

provided on a step-wise reflective process. Following Mezirow's (2000) final process step, Sophia integrated this new worldview into her life.

Outside of her educational experience, Sophia offered brief explanations of two important life-changing decisions. Sophia transformed a point of view (Mezirow, 2000) when she addressed how she changed since the first interview. "One of the biggest changes," said Sophia, "is allowing people to being themselves." When asked how she came to develop this way of thinking, Sophia said, "One day, I just made up my mind," adding her new attitude came from "Inner peace." Nevertheless, Sophia's explanation appeared tied to an incident with a coworker who would never say hello in the morning. This irritated Sophia greatly. Sophia also appeared to have been reflecting on the issue of how people differ, asking herself, "Is that [people being different] going to sour your day?" Sophia's comments would thus indicate that she faced a disorienting dilemma, and did follow at minimum two aspects of Mezirow's (2000) theory: a critical assessment of assumptions and an adoption of a new perspective.

Sophia's decision to not take medication for the rest of her life after her attempted suicide was a transformational one in Sophia's mind. She stated that her decision came down to "I had to dig deep into my soul" and realize "I'm better than that." While a disorienting dilemma appeared at this point, Sophia provided no indication of planning, exploring options, or trying new roles. Her decision was a soulful, warrior-like one. In this example, little evidence was offered of following Mezirow's (2000) transformational learning process.

Mattie's experience of attending community college provided an example of a transformational decision process existing outside Mezirow's (2000) theory. Cranton

and Taylor (2012) note Mezirow's theory of transformation (Mezirow, 2000) relies on cognitive, critical reflection, discounting faith, vision, and desire. Nevertheless, Mattie's process of committing to community college attendance relied on faith, as well as encouragement received from her husband and friends, not on cognitive reflection and planning. She stated she had no idea why she was returning to college. After graduating, however, Mattie's educational experience proved transformative with regard to her own sense of self-confidence (Mezirow, 2000). "I have changed because I know I can do it," she said.

Ellen attended community college for only one semester, making observations about transformative learning in this context difficult. Disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000) have surrounded Ellen's lifelong decisions to pursue more education. These dilemmas generally occurred because the work Ellen was doing did not align with her interests and Maker archetype. Her story indicated she followed four of Mezirow's process steps on multiple occasions: 1) facing a significant personal dilemma, 2) reflecting on her options, 3) planning her next steps, and 4) taking action, often limited by time or financial considerations. How Ellen's various educational experiences led to transformation is unclear. When asked if she could identify a notable change in her perspective, Ellen said nondefensively, "I don't need to change. Your attitude is your attitude." Ellen's focus centered on continual self-improvement, defined as setting a good example, treating others well, and being respectful.

Dee had earned one-third of the credit hours necessary for an associate degree, and her narrative story provided insufficient insights to determine if transformative learning had taken place as a result of her college experience. Evidence was provided in

Dee's narrative regarding previous learning transforming her self-concept (Mezirow, 2000). Dee stated, "I had to fight through it" to get her GED, adding, "I accomplished that." Dee had noted she regretted "not making something of myself," yet after her GED graduation, she stated, "I think I have." Her sense of accomplishment was followed by her comment to her husband, "I would like to go to college."

Shelly's transformation, if it occurs, will likely be found in her self-concept (Mezirow, 2000). She described a growth in self-confidence and recognized she was "capable of learning." Regarding her college experience, she stated, "I learn a little bit I guess about myself every semester." Nevertheless, indications were these beliefs remained fleeting. Shelly continued to doubt her academic ability, stating, "I always question myself."

The following section addresses the researcher's reflections on the follow-up interviews and the feedback provided by outsider transcript reviewers.

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Personal reflections were recorded by the researcher in a journal immediately after the follow-up interviews and are addressed in the first part of this section. A discussion of trustworthiness follows.

Although the follow-up interviews averaged two hours in length, none of the women appeared impatient with the process or expressed fatigue. Based on the frankness of the conversations, the researcher believes the participants were comfortable telling their stories. No one hesitated or refused to answer questions. Many sensitive and highly personal issues were mentioned. For example, when asked about a low point in her life, Sophia spoke freely about her attempted suicide.

Researcher reflections pertaining to the follow-up interview included the mechanics of the interview process. Covering a comprehensive interview protocol in two hours while not rushing participants required constant focus. A delicate balance was needed between probing questions to gain additional understanding or moving on to the next question. Being sensitive to the tone and emotion of the participant was of the utmost importance. The researcher was mindful of the need to prevent the interview from migrating into a therapeutic session. Accordingly, extensive story details regarding participant behaviors was neither necessary or appropriate. Participants provided a reasonable amount of context for their life stories.

Given the number of sensitive issues raised, emotional moments sometimes arose, which were highlighted in the researcher's notes. For example, Claire mentioned had it not been for therapy, she would not have been able to share parts of her story. Dee revealed therapy had helped her cope with her struggles. Dee expressed happiness during her interview. She was positively joyful and smiling as she spoke of her marriage to her second husband. After her interview, Sophia mentioned although the discussion resurfaced old wounds, she was not concerned. Sophia said she would soon share portions of life story at church and the interview helped her prepare. Mattie's emotional moments came during discussions about her divorce and her mother's death. Shelly was emotional when talking about her divorce. Despite their life struggles, Sophia and Ellen specifically mentioned their desires for others to know their personal stories.

The women's composure did not diminish the fact their stories were emotionally gripping. Memorable moments were plentiful, and many stuck solidly in the

researcher's mind. For example, Dee started her story, "My dad was a very violent man." Claire used powerful words to paint a vivid picture of her father carrying the body of her dead sister. Shelly expressed "if only…", wondering if her brother would still be alive if she had been interested in talking. Mattie commented, "Being a Black individual - we see prejudice all the time. I can feel it."

As a White man, the researcher wanted to test for trustworthiness in his analysis of such a diverse group of women. The researcher sought to test for trustworthiness of the information gleaned from the interviews and the manner in which the researcher conducted the interviews. Word-for-word audio transcriptions were provided to seven outside reviewers, each charged with critically evaluating the interviews for instances of insensitivity or bias in the questions, the manner in which they were presented, and how the dialog unfolded. Transcript reviewers were matched with the race / ethnicity of each participant. Although not requested, interviews with the two Black participants were read by both Black reviewers. The transcript reviewer's responses and self-disclosures of race are provided in Appendix E.

The feedback provided indicated no instances were found of bias or insensitivities in the transcripts of five of the eight participants. However, the reviewer for Shelly's interview (Native American) stated that on several occasions the researcher used potentially confusing words, and additional time for debriefing between instances of sharing of negative experiences would have provided welcome emotional support. Notably, the reviewer was unaware of a 30-minute conversation between Shelly and the researcher following Shelly's interview. This informal conversation provided the emotional space the reviewer suggested, albeit not during the interview in real time.

The reviewer for Debra's interview (Asian) commented the researcher could have displayed greater sensitivity when Debra spoke of her mother's death. The reviewer further noted language fluency issues were present, however the questions were "pretty good." This same reviewer commented on Ellen's (Asian) transcript and noted three examples of "little" insensitivities in the way the question was asked. These were following up Ellen's comment on the emptiness she felt in childhood with a question on the absence of her parents, posing a question where Ellen re-iterated her current illness, and relatedly discussing Ellen's subject interests.

Reviewers for interviews with Dee (Latina) and Claire (White) each identified one potentially leading question. In Dee's case, when the researcher and Dee were discussing how race and gender may have affected Dee's life, he added a reference to events in life not being fair. Dee's reviewer noted adding this short statement was not necessary, however she doubted the statement altered Dee's answer. Claire's reviewer provided one example of where the flow of the questions may have led Claire to believe a different response was more appropriate.

Outside reviewer input provided insights for future research recommendations, covered in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Summary

Between the initial meeting with the researcher and the follow-up interview (two and one-half years), two women graduated from the community college, four were currently enrolled in courses, and three had withdrawn. One participant had passed away. One woman had completed her bachelor's degree, and the other community college graduate was continuing to progress toward her bachelor's degree. Four of the

eight women were on a progressive or mostly progressive path toward their stated life story goals. Two women were on slightly progressive path, one was on a slightly regressive path, and another was on a mostly regressive path (see Figure 18).

The women shared positive comments about their community college experiences. They valued the tutoring services although course-specific assistance was limited to daytime hours, making it difficult for full-time workers to utilize. The women appreciated faculty who demonstrated concern, yet there were instances of faculty insensitivity toward older students. The federal TRIO program consistently received positive remarks from all three TRIO members. Three women noted the benefit of relationships with fellow students. Four women considered at least one faculty member a mentor.

The participants identified areas for improvement such as sensitizing faculty and academic advisers to the unique life experiences and advising needs of older students, providing expanded services for ESL students, encouraging student socialization outside of class and inside class through teamwork assignments, demonstrating appreciation for generational differences, and offering career and life counseling for older adults.

The participants faced an extensive list of impediments to their goals of graduating with an associate or bachelor's degree. Debra and Ellen, both of whom moved to the United States as adults, shared racist challenges tied to English as a second language and accents based on their nationality. Debra, Dee, Ellen, and Sophia experienced difficulties balancing work demands and college. Ellen and Sophia were raising a child, adding to their time demands.

Health issues played a central role in six of the eight older women's life stories, and in four cases presented severe challenges to college completion. The significant health impacts were cancer, degenerative joints, trigeminal neuralgia, Crohn's disease, emphysema, and severe throat damage due to environmental hazards. Mental health concerns included anxiety, feelings of guilt, and a lack of self-confidence. Mattie specifically referred to a diagnosis of a learning disability, and Dee mentioned diagnoses of ADD and PTSD. Dee, Mattie, and Shelly mentioned feelings of fear of returning to college.

Eight women discussed life histories filled with haunting challenges in developing and maintaining an identity. These life histories included childhood experiences of trauma, poverty, segregation, and parental absence, discrimination, medication and alcohol addiction, physical and mental health issues (including attempted or contemplated suicide), mental and verbal abuse, spousal neglect, and divorce. Nevertheless, each woman maintained a strong sense of her lifetime central identity elements. These elements included enjoying caregiving, enjoying business, wanting to attend school, and loving to make things.

Prior life struggles greatly influenced and diminished seven of the women's opportunities for earlier educational accomplishments. Six of the eight women, all representing a racial/ethnic minority, were required to enroll in remedial classes, imposing significant added burdens of time and expense to attending community college. One woman, Claire (White), lacked the confidence to attend college after high school, which she related to her sister's death. She was not required to enroll in remedial coursework. Mae (White), lacked the interest and motivation for college at an

earlier age. Once she did pursue her associate degree she was a straight "A" student, requiring no remedial classes.

All the women expressed concern of what would come next in their lives. Being over 50 years old did not diminish their motivation or need for a good job. None were attending community college solely or primarily for knowledge. Career satisfaction and income-related factors were mentioned by seven of the eight women as a reason for college attendance, and six told stories indicating they were highly motivated by work-related issues. Mattie knew exactly what she wanted to accomplish in her career and was focused on a goal. Opposite of Mattie, Shelly exhibited identity confusion, both about the way forward and the way to overcome her past. Four women continued to ponder future career options while dealing with illness and balancing work and college. Claire, who had completed a bachelor's degree, was deciding what career path to take next, and Mae decided to look forward to retirement.

Although none of the participants were attending community college solely or primarily for knowledge, seven of the eight women told stories reflecting non-work motivators for college attendance. Other reasons than work for college attendance included: providing a role model for children and grandchildren, proving to themselves or others they could be successful in college, investing in self-development, pursuing a desire to learn, and making up for a lack of education.

The narrative analysis revealed the women's lives were evolving in three ways: the development of core identities, the creation of new identities, and a focus on helping others. Three women were focused on long-held identities, continuing their devotion to making things, exhibiting productivity in business, and learning. Two women

demonstrated a desire to combine new knowledge with a longstanding caregiver identity in pursuit of a new identity, in one case a teacher and the other a counselor. Two women planned to apply a new devotion to education to long-held identities, in one case business and the other caregiving. Seven women spoke of generative concerns, whether it was saving souls or teaching children's ESL classes, regardless of their limited financial resources and time.

Faith in God proved an extremely powerful and relevant force in the lives of six women. Any accounting of identity must include the role faith played in their approach to facing life's challenges and decisions. Mattie believed she was on the path God planned for her, and Mae lived to pray for the healing of others. Dee's life experience demonstrated her destiny was in God's hands. Ellen stated, "I trust everything to the Lord."

Only Claire and Sophia expressed a transformation in worldviews due to their educational experiences. Claire and Mattie transformed their self-confidence and developed greater self-understanding due to their college education, and evidence was found for a self-concept transformation due to Dee's completion of her GED. Shelly's understanding of her "self" due to community college attendance resulted in momentary transformation. Seven of the women's stories indicated education would be a powerful and valued means to an end; a way to achieve hoped-for identities. One woman's story reflected more emphasis placed on informal learning. Outside of education, Sophia transformed a point of view utilizing three of Mezirow's (2000) transformational steps.

The following chapter will address research findings related to the literature, discuss study limitations, and present recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this narrative inquiry based research was to unearth older women community college students' life stories, and in so doing raise awareness of their unique life experiences - indeed their unique self-identities - and the role education may have played in creating their future selves. The research posed the overarching question, "How do older women students describe and define their life stories, and consequently, key elements of their central identities?"

Chapter Five is comprised of five subsections. First, a summary of findings relative to the literature is presented, followed by implications for practice. The third and fourth subsections address study limitations and recommendations for future research. Concluding observations mark the end of the chapter.

Summary of Findings and the Literature

Findings from this research aligned with published literature regarding the similarities between nontraditional age students and older women attending community college. Areas of alignment include barriers to completion, motivations for seeking a degree, socioeconomic factors, and faith. Findings also aligned with published literature indicating older community college women are unique relative to younger college women when considering life stage identity, generativity, and time perspective.

Community college students frequently possess multiple degree completion risks factors (Sorey & Duggan, 2008), and this study found (excluding Mae who already had an associate in applied science degree) seven of the eight original participants had at least two college completion risk factors, based on the seven total

risk factors identified by the U. S. Department of Education. These risk factors are delayed enrollment into postsecondary education, attended part time, financially independent, worked full time while enrolled, had dependents other than a spouse, was a single parent, or did not obtain a standard high school diploma (U.S. Ed., 1998). Dee had five risk factors (all except had dependents and a single parent) and Sophia had six risk factors (all except did not obtain a standard high school diploma).

The research findings concur with previous studies of adult students across the age spectrum (Cunningham, 2009; Peters, 2010; Schaefer, 2009), wherein job and income factors stand out as the single most important motivator for college attendance. Women age 50+ remain concerned about work, income, and providing for others. This study found older women are similar to nontraditional age students in that they enter a community college with multiple motivating, mutually reinforcing factors that transcend work and income (Cunningham, 2009; Miles, 2009; Kartje, 2000).

The women described in this study, with two exceptions, came from working class families. Similar to Adickes and Worthman (1976), many of the older women were either not encouraged to consider attending college after high school or briefly attended before deciding their preference was to get married and start a family. Seven of the eight follow-up interview participants were married immediately or shortly after high school. This research revealed that working class cultural expectations had some influence on participants' thinking and self-expectations.

Both foreign-born students (Debra and Ellen) expressed challenges due to their English communication skills and believed others judged them as less capable. These findings corroborate those by Artiaga (2013) and Chavez (2015). Artiaga's (2013) study

of Hispanic immigrant women at a community college noted a lack of high-level English proficiency led to feelings of marginalization. Chavez's (2015) study of first-generation Hispanic women found ESL students struggled with the pace of college classes, especially English composition classes.

Faith played an important role in the lives of community college students (Bates, 2012; Dominguez, 2010). Six of the eight follow-up interview participants' emphasis on religion aligns with this previous research. Three women heavily emphasized the centrality of faith in their everyday actions.

The literature highlights how age uniquely affects older women community college students. Six of the participants had children at an early age. Such a family-life pathway typifies the concept of goal and identity postponement (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000). Five of the six women who had children at an early age indicated strong caregiver identities. In some cases, the women's postponed identities appear to now lie beyond their reach.

Research highlights an increasing focus on generativity in middle age (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2000; McAdams, 2015) and indications of generative concerns were found in the lives of seven of the eight women participating in the follow-up interviews. The women's stories contained references to first lifting herself up, rescuing herself from the past, and achieving career success prior to a focus on others. Thus, time constraints and limited economic resources may limit the women's generative desires.

Bluck and Habermas (2001) have noted midlife individuals develop a new appreciation for the shortness of life, a perspective that appeared in six of the eight participants' stories. For example, Claire acknowledged the finiteness of her life, Debra

conceded time remaining in her life was short, and Dee admitted she might not live long enough to achieve her goal.

Indications of transformation as defined by Mezirow (2000) was found in four women's life stories. Two women expressed a transformation in their worldviews due to their educational experiences, and three expressed a transformation in self-concept as a result of their education. Outside of education, one participant transformed a point of view. Two stories told of decisions based on faith and courage in ways that did not follow Mezirow's (2000) process (Dirkx, 1997; Taylor, 2000; Tisdell (2012).

This study also expanded the body of knowledge about Third Chapter women attending community college by exploring their identity quests, struggles, and preoccupations. The women's stories revealed their identity development is built upon a range of ingrained identities, life experiences, and goals. In the stories expressed by Mae, Claire, and Ellen, they focused primarily on developing long-held core identities. Debra, Dee, Mattie, and Sophia were similar in the way they focused on investing in a new component of their identities. Shelly was unique given the degree to which she was struggling with her identity.

This study's findings also highlight the importance of understanding the impact childhood has on older women community college students' lives. Participant's early memories, along with life story details, reflected current significant concerns and preoccupations. In addition, the women in this study faced present-day struggles and obstacles to reaching their goals. Five follow-up interview participants were managing significant and chronic health challenges, which in some cases modified career plans and in other cases impeded academic progress. Collectively, the women mentioned

academic learning challenges, difficulties in mastering technical subjects they had not studied in decades (e.g., biology and math), and problems acclimating to classrooms full of younger students and professors. Five women struggled to balance college and life commitments, including varied work schedules and, in some cases, caring for older adolescents and grandchildren. To varying degrees, all the women at some point in their college experiences struggled to answer, "What should I do with my life in the Third Chapter?"

In summary, both the individual and collective stories addressed the purpose of this research. Each women's struggles and goals were evident within a larger context of life experiences. Greater understanding for how to advise, support, and teach in ways that positively impact each woman's unique life journey can be found through an immersion in their life story narratives.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to this study may have impacted the findings. All of the research participants attended the same community college, which is located in the south central United States. This geographic location may have altered the women's life stories. A participant's choice of life incidents to discuss might also be influenced by regional perspectives. Different community colleges, characterized by variations in location, size, and financial resources, might influence how women describe their community college experiences.

Shelly's (Native American) outside reviewer commented there were instances where the researcher used words that may have not been understood by the participant. How this impacted responses to questions is difficult to assess. Debra (Asian), one of

the two foreign-born participants, needed additional time to formulate answers to questions due to English language skills. The outside reviewer commented language skills may have prevented some "deep answers."

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted when approaching narrative ways of knowing, "interpretations of events can always be otherwise" (p. 31). The researcher for this study is an older White male. Participants were older women, and two participants were White. It is reasonable to assume a different interviewer (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, etc.) would create a different interviewer / interviewee experience. Different researchers might derive alternative observations and conclusions. Lieblich, et al. (1998) addressed this issue, stating, "Reaching alternative narrative accounts is by no means an indication of inadequate scholarship but a manifestation of the wealth of such material and the range of sensitivities of different readers" (p. 171).

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for practice for the community college environment arise from the participant's experiences. While these findings cannot be generalized to other community colleges, it is appropriate for other colleges to consider the following suggestions when reviewing and building support services and academic programs for older women students.

1. The first recommendation is to create faculty development training focused on the unique needs and challenges of older women students. Knowledge of their life stories, including past and current struggles and fears, will heighten recognition of learning challenges and related special services older women require in their efforts to progress through the rigors of academic life while

balancing work, family, and their sense of a dwindling time horizon. Due to regular contact, faculty are often in the best position to identify a need for services such as tutoring and counseling for their older students. Life stories and identity goals will further provide valuable input to teaching pedagogy.

2. Faculty training and development sessions should be created to address how to facilitate learning in a classroom of divergent generations. Faculty should recognize older students want their life experiences to be appreciated. Faculty need also to be aware of potential generational conflicts. The older women students in this study generally enjoyed interactions with younger students, however points of contention existed.
3. Staff training, particularly with academic advisors, should emphasize a greater understanding of the fears and emotional struggles older women students experience when they attend community college. A thoughtful, confidential exchange of information should inform class scheduling and support plans that reflect each woman's reality. Relevant concerns include the distance the older student travels to campus, responsibilities for children or grandchildren, work schedule complications, areas of academic weaknesses, fears and insecurities, and how course management and scheduling can positively address such varied concerns.
4. Academic advisors need to be mindful older women returning to community college are often confused about their ambitions for the next phase in their lives, especially since they have a narrow window of time for economic opportunities. Older women require different advising support than younger

women (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). Community college campuses should strive to have a full range of expert life and career counseling available and promote these services to older women students. Older women students should be encouraged to utilize counseling services before building an academic plan.

5. Older women students often need a thorough introduction to technology necessary for academic success. Online learning platforms can be daunting and cause confusion. Several students expressed a preference for in-class instruction as opposed to online classes, especially in subjects they deemed difficult.

Recommendations for Future Research

A number of alternative studies could supplement the findings reported in this research.

1. One option would be to study the lives of Third Chapter women who had completed a community college degree and achieved their stated personal goals. These life stories could be compared with those told by women who had not successfully completed their degree or attained their personal goals. The purpose of this research would be to gain greater understanding of how and in what ways the life stories differed, as well as factors that affected different outcomes.
2. A study with older women students of the same race or ethnic groups could provide a different perspective on participants' life stories. Findings could be viewed through various culturally-based frameworks. For example, the

Native American transcript reviewer for Shelly's transcript noted Shelly's mother's approach to parenting could have been learned, even indirectly, via her own Indian boarding school experience (see Appendix E).

3. A longitudinal examination of older women's life stories over a greater length of time could report on later life Third Chapters and how the women transitioned from one to another, exploring identities, goals, and their attainment. Questions pursued could include whether or not academic choices were considered supportive of identity goals and what regrets, if any, were expressed at a later stage in life.
4. Further research into the use of imagery for narrative studies could be conducted. This study found the art-card exercise produced meaningful insights regarding the participants' lives. Stories were told in poetic fashion. Images elicited comments that would not often be part of normal discourse, and revealed concepts never mentioned during the follow-up interviews. The relative ease with which the exercise can be delivered in a short amount of time (typically 10-15 minutes plus discussion) could make it a useful and practical tool for college career and life counselors who are helping students visualize who they are and what they want to accomplish.
5. To further investigate the applicability of the art-card process, the researcher recommends conducting studies to test for the effectiveness for qualitative research with card decks including depictions of negative life experiences (e.g., Victim and Addict). Also, cards could be designed and tested with images only, avoiding single word associations. Participant's stated they

often looked at both the images and words. Testing images for cultural sensitivity would be useful.

6. Input from outside transcript reviewers provided two recommendations for future researchers. Meeting with identified outside reviewers prior to the life story interviews could provide useful insights when implementing the interview protocol. Increased awareness of researcher word choices is also warranted.

Conclusion

This study sought to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the life histories, struggles, and hopes of women age 50 and older who were seeking a community college degree. The women shared stories of how they postponed higher education, often tinged with some regret for not pursuing a college degree earlier in life. The women's life stories were built from a myriad of struggles, many rooted in childhood and social norms prevalent in their early year experiences. The women participants were motivated to build a future different from the past, one with increased compensation and intrinsic satisfaction. Yet, despite their struggles and sacrifices, the participants did not believe life going forward was just about what they wanted for themselves. The women expected satisfaction in life to also be derived from generative concerns and efforts. For the women in this study, life continued to hold opportunities for new pathways and experiences, notwithstanding their recognition of the scarcity of time remaining. A focus on learning embodied each woman's hope for the future, one pursued on faith and dogged determination rooted in the human spirit of never giving up.

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Appendix A - Words Used on the Image Cards

Activist	Explorer	Patriarch
Adventurer	Gambler	Pioneer
Advocate	Generalist	Provocateur
Alchemist	Guardian	Rebel
Ambassador	Healer	Reformer
Angel	Hedonist	Rescuer
Artist	Hero	Romantic
Athlete	Idealist	Ruler
Caregiver	Innocent	Sage
Child	Innovator	Samaritan
Citizen	Jester	Scientist
Clown	Judge	Seeker
Companion	Liberator	Servant
Creator	Lover	Shaman
Detective	Magician	Shapeshifter
Dreamer	Matchmaker	Sovereign
Engineer	Maverick	Storyteller
Entertainer	Mentor	Translator
Entrepreneur	Muse	Visionary
Everyman	Networker	Warrior

Appendix B - Interview Protocol for Art-card Story Pilot

The session began with some light conversation to get acquainted.

After this discussion, the story exercise utilizing the provided archetypal images was presented. Blank cards a color pencils were provided so that participants could create their own images, however none did. Pipe cleaners of different colors and lengths were also provided in event someone wished to more visually create connections among cards, but again none were used.

The data collection process was described to the participant as follows:

Interviewer:
"For this part I will give you about 20-25 minutes to create your personal story of why you are in college at this point in your life and what your hopes are for the future. To do this you will use these cards, each with pictures and a word on them. You can select any number and combination of the picture / word cards that represent or speak to this question. There are 60 cards from which to choose. You can also arrange them however you prefer. The cards each have a word on them, but you may find another meaning embedded in the image, which is fine. The picture or word may also evoke a sense of absence of some quality, so you can look at it that way too. I'll come back in about 20 minutes and we can talk about the cards you selected and your personal story."

At this point the interviewer left the room, allowing each participant 20 minutes to privately construct his or her personal story. The interviewer's mobile phone number was provided in event the participant had questions, however none called. Upon returning, the remainder of the session followed a conversational, unstructured interview format, asking questions and engaging in a dialog based upon the respondent's story as told by referencing the cards selected.

Appendix C - Interview Protocol for Art-card Story Initial Interview

The session began with some light conversation to get acquainted. Next, questions were asked regarding what the experience has been like being in college and what comments they had about the college, specifically what the college could do to make it more likely they would complete their course of study. These broad, open-ended questions were intended to both gather useful insights and to help participants feel comfortable and establish some rapport (Matteucci, 2013).

After this discussion, the story exercise utilizing the provided archetypal images was presented. Blank cards a color pencils were provided so that participants could create their own images, however none did. Pipe cleaners of different colors and lengths were also provided in event someone wished to more visually create connections among cards, but again none were used.

The data collection process was described to the participant as follows:

Interviewer:
"For this part I will give you about 20-25 minutes to create your personal story of why you are in college at this point in your life and what your hopes are for the future. To do this you will use these cards, each with pictures and a word on them. You can select any number and combination of the picture / word cards that represent or speak to this question. There are 60 cards from which to choose. You can also arrange them however you prefer. The cards each have a word on them, but you may find another meaning embedded in the image, which is fine. The picture or word may also evoke a sense of absence of some quality, so you can look at it that way too. I'll come back in about 20 minutes and we can talk about the cards you selected and your personal story."

At this point the interviewer left the room, allowing each participant 20 minutes to privately construct his or her personal story. The interviewer's mobile phone number was provided in event the participant had questions, however none called. Upon returning, the remainder of the session followed a conversational, unstructured interview format, asking questions and engaging in a dialog based upon the respondent's story as told by referencing the cards selected.

Appendix D - Interview Protocol for Follow-up Interview

[Introduction]
There are two parts to what I would like to cover today. The first part is focused on discussing your personal history and more about YOU. I have six categories of questions to address this. Then second I would like to revisit your thoughts about education and your future plans, and get caught up on what you have been doing the past several years. I will guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours.

Before we begin I would like to review with you each section of an updated confidentiality agreement. Let me know if you have any questions. If you are okay with the agreement, please sign before we begin.

[Part One] It has been said that to be a person is to have a story to tell. So I simply want to explore a bit more about your life. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are obviously no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life. We'll discuss how you imagine your life developing in the future in part two. [*Note*: *All questions in Part One are derived from McAdams (2008b, 1993) except a revision of the early memories question in B4 and the insertion of role model question C, both from Savickas (2011). McAdams asks for one positive and one negative early memory; Savickas just asks for early memories without any qualifiers.]*

Please know that my purpose in doing the interview is NOT to conduct a clinical or psychological analysis. The goal of the questions is merely to understand more deeply the different ways in which people - in this case of course you - understand who they are *and* the role education may play in their development. Everything you say is voluntary and confidential.

Do you have any questions?

A. **[Life Chapters]** I'd like to start with you thinking about your life as if it were a book or novel, complete with a table of contents. To begin, please describe very briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please tell me just a little bit about each chapter, give each chapter a title, and say a word or two about how we get from one chapter to the next. As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter. You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest having between about 2 and 7 of them. We will want to spend no more than about 15-20 minutes on this first section of the interview, so please keep your descriptions of the chapters relatively brief.

[*Note to interviewer: The interviewer should feel free to ask questions of clarification and elaboration throughout the interview, but especially in this first part.*]

B. **[Key Scenes From Your Life Story]** Now that you have provided an overall outline of your life to date, I would like you to focus on a few key scenes that stand out in your story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your life story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. For each of the seven key events we will consider, I ask that you describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular scene is *important* or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person? Please be specific.

1) **High point.** Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be *the* high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person. (Note: This is a particularly useful question. McAdams, 1993, p. 259.)

2) **Low point.** The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not *the* low point in your life story. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it. What happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so bad and what the scene may say about you or your life. [*Note: If the participants balks at doing this, tell him or her that the event does not really have to be* ***the*** *lowest point in the story but merely a very bad experience of some kind.*]

3) **Turning point.** In looking back over your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life wherein you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

4) **Two early childhood memories.** Please describe two early memories. For each, discuss the setting, the action, and the result. If you have a recollection of what were you thinking or feeling, you can add that as well. Once told: Now let's go back and give each of these stories a title (with a verb). What do these memories say about you or about your life?

5) **Vivid adult memory.** Moving ahead to your adult years, please identify one scene that you have not already described in this section (in other words, do not repeat your high point, low point, or turning point scene) that stands out as especially vivid or meaningful. This would be an especially memorable, vivid, or important scene, positive or negative, from your adult years. Please describe this scene in detail, tell what happened, when and where, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

6) **Wisdom event.** Please describe an event in your life in which you displayed *wisdom*. The episode might be one in which you acted or interacted in an especially wise way or provided wise counsel or advice, made a wise decision, or otherwise behaved in a particularly wise manner. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you and your life?

7) **Religious, spiritual, or mystical experience**. Whether they are religious or not, many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify - if you can - an episode or moment in which you felt something like this. This might be an experience that occurred within the context of your own religious tradition, if you have one, or it may be a spiritual or mystical experience of any kind. Please describe this transcendent experience in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

C. **[Significant People]** Every person's life story is populated by a few significant people and relationships. For this question, I want you to think back to when you were growing up. Maybe around age 5-8. Please let me about 3 people or figures that you looked up to or admired. These would not be your parents; rather others in your life who you enjoyed and respected. They can be real or fictitious characters; famous or not famous. For each, please describe the person in some detail. What type of person were they, not through your eyes today but back then?

D. **[Challenges]** This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life. I will begin with a general challenge, and then I will focus in on three particular areas or issues where many people experience challenges, problems, or crises.

1) **Life challenge.** Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced in your life. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or deal with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

2) **Health.** Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe a scene or period in your life, including the present time, wherein you or a close family member confronted a major *health* problem, challenge, or crisis. Please describe in detail what the health problem is or was and how it developed. If relevant, please discuss any experience you had with the health-care system regarding this crisis or problem. In addition, please talk about how you coped with the problem and what impact this health crisis, problem, or challenge has had on you and your overall life story.

3) **Loss.** As people get older, they invariably suffer losses of one kind or another. By loss I am referring here to the loss of important people in your life, perhaps through death or separation. These are *interpersonal* losses – the loss of a person. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest interpersonal loss you have experienced. This could be a loss you experienced at any time in your life, going back to childhood and up to the present day. Please describe this loss and the process of the loss. How have you coped with the loss? What effect has this loss had on you and your life story?

4) **Failure, regret.** Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest failure or regret you have experienced. The failure or regret can occur in any area of your life – work, family, friendships, or any other area. Please describe the failure or regret and the way in which the failure or regret came to be. How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your life story?

5) **Sociocultural aspect**. We all live within a community and broader cultural environment that includes things like gender, race, and social norms or expectations. Looking back over your life, how have these types of things impacted and influenced you?

E. **[Personal Ideology]** Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning and morality in your life. Please give some thought to each of these questions.

1) **Change, development of religious and political views.** Please tell the story of how your religious, moral, and/or political views and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways? If so, what may have led to the change? Please explain. (This would get at transformation.)

2) **Single value.** What is the most important value in human living? Please explain.

3) **Other.** What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world? What else can you tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?

F . **[Participant Self Reflection]** To conclude part one, I have a final question for you. Given that most people don't generally share their life stories in the way you just did, I'm wondering if you might reflect for a moment about what this part of our interview has been like for you.
1) What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview?
2) How do you think this interview has affected you?
3) Do you have any other comments about what we just completed?

[Part Two] I would like to shift gears now so to speak and pick up where we left off from our first meeting. Back then you were pursuing _____ at the Community College, with the thought of doing _____. I have some questions to bring me up to date.

[*Note to interviewer. Some of these questions may need to be modified slightly if they were discussed in any way in Part One. Probing for more details or insights to follow up on Part One is a possible approach.*]

A. Did you graduate, are you currently attending the same or a different Community College, or did you leave and not complete your studies? If still enrolled, what are you studying, and if not, why not? (Discuss future education plans in C.)

B. What, if anything, has changed regarding your employment / career since we last spoke? What accounts for any change?

C. I am interested in your thoughts about the next chapter of your life. What are your hopes and plans for the future at this point? These may include, work, family, or even a hobby or avocation. How have these hopes and plans changed since we last spoke? How does completing your education or pursuing possible further education fit in with these plans? (This question is derived from McAdams, 2008b; 1993.)

D. How do you think *you* have changed, if at all, since we last spoke? The type of change I am interested in is significant, for example have you revised your personal assumptions about anything that you would consider central to your view of yourself or the world. If there is anything, to what do you attribute these changes (e.g. your college experiences, your life experiences, family, etc.)?

E. Looking back (if you graduated), or, based on what is going on today, what changes in the process of attending college would make it easier or more likely for you to

graduate? By process I mean all of the things about the college campus that make it possible for you to be a student here, such as the cost, the faculty, the facilities, and the student support services that are offered, to name a few. Similarly, what aspects of attending college are working / did work well for you?

F. Has there been anyone, either at the college or elsewhere, that you have developed a relationship with that you would characterize as particularly helpful or supportive in your prior / current academic pursuits? (Not a family member.)

G. **My final question!** [**Life Theme]** Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story? Can you explain? **AND:** How might this theme connect with your desire for a college education, if at all?

THANK YOU! I greatly appreciate your time and your sharing a bit of your life story with me.

Appendix E - Letters from Outside Transcript Reviewers

Dear Mr. Cain,

My name is Angelica [redacted]. I am musician (violinist) and educator, currently working for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and El Sistema Oklahoma. My country of origin is Colombia. I came to the United States of America pursuing a bachelor's in music performance at Oklahoma City University. I also have a Master's in Violin Performance and an additional bachelor's in music education from the same institution.
Here are my observations and suggestions after reviewing the written transcript of the interview you conducted to a Hispanic community college female student:

- All questions were sensitive to gender, race/ethnicity, or sociocultural elements
- There were no social biases present in the questions
- The interviewer appealed to ask what was obviously important to the participant
- There is a hint at suggesting that because of her racial background things were not fair to the participant. The initial question "Do you have any thoughts about how…race and gender and your social environment that you were part of, how those affected your life?", (in my opinion) did not need the follow up of "we're faced with racial issues, gender issues, cultural norms… maybe looking back weren't all fair…). I think the initial question was clear enough and did not need the pointing out different issues making her life fair or unfair. However, I do believe the outcome of the question was not affected by the follow up; the participant would have answered the same way either way.

John Cain Research Interviews

There were no insensitivities to gender, race/ethnicity, or sociocultural bias found in the transcripts for Mattie and Sophia. The interviewer allowed the interviewees to speak their stories with only prompts to expand their stories and give their story a title.

I am a 57 year old African American female, married 35 years and have one daughter. Upon marrying at the age of 22 and moving to Oklahoma, I obtained a position at Rose State College and worked there for six years. I had completed one semester at Kilgore Junior College and continued my education at Rose and completed additional hours for a total of 30-45 hours and was unable to continue because of math. I have been fortunate without a degree to have worked at some top corporations where I continued to take classes offered by those corporations. That enabled me to become highly proficient as an administrative assistant and/or accounting clerk. Interestingly, the interviewees' stories could have been mine.

Because of my race, gender, age, and background I can give an outside perspective. If your research requires outside reviewers as official readers for bias, then yes I am relevant to your research. Depending on your research focus, disclosure of my identity may lend strength to your argument.

I did have a hard time reading without wanting to correct the grammar. I highlighted minor spelling corrections in red which had nothing to do with syntax or structure.



Deena read transcripts from Mattie and Sophia, and sent two emails.

Hello Mr. Cain,

Thank you for the opportunity to read your research – Amazing. I did not find any bias information.

Best to you always,
Deena

Good morning Mr. Cain,

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to read your research – Outstanding! I am a 58 year old African American female educator, and I can certainly relate to the experiences the women faced within your transcripts.

Your work is invaluable.

Best to you always,
Deena [redacted]
Outreach Coordinator

Interview Transcript Review for John Cain
Compiled by Edwina [redacted], Ph.D.

I reviewed the transcript of an interview with "Mae" and am happy to provide feedback. Following, are my answers to the critique questions.

1. All of the questions were asked in a sensitive manner and the interviewer appeared to be focused on setting a comfortable tone for the process as well as providing an unbiased atmosphere. "Mae" appears to thrive on being of help to others and she seemed very comfortable explaining her views on her need to be a supporter of people and her very pronounced religious views.

2. I did not detect any bias in this interview. In fact, I was impressed by the unconditional positive regard (Rogers) shown to "Mae" by the interviewer. Even in areas where I suspect the interviewer has diametrically different opinions, he did not show any disagreement or discomfort with her answers. At one point, "Mae" even says she doesn't know where he stands with everything she has said, and he assures her that he is very open to hearing everything she wishes to say.

3. I don't believe that any issues of obvious importance to her were overlooked by the interviewer but I found myself wishing there had been more time allotted to discussing some of them. Her stories produced a bit of a conundrum for me and it would have been interesting to know more. The interviewer allowed her ample time to think through and report on each aspect to her satisfaction.

4. The interviewer did not appear to lead "Mae" into answers; rather, he asked the question, waited for the reply and then asked follow-up questions as needed. He did use encouraging phrases when necessary to help her "open up" and possibly recall more detail to some of the incidents. I did not detect any attempt to stifle her answers or lead her in a different direction. The interview appeared to be authentically her.

5. "Mae" was an interesting dichotomy. She values education highly both for herself and at least two of her children. I may have missed her comments in the interview but I didn't find mention of the educational progress of two of her children. However, she talks about her son who has a bachelor's degree and has worked at Chesapeake and her daughter currently pursuing a degree in petroleum engineering. She is encouraging her son to return to college for a master's degree. Yet, she eschews a formal degree for herself, saying that she is to old, it will not get her anything at work and she doesn't wish to take the one class needed for an associate degree. However, she is eager to take non-

credit classes in areas of interest. It does appear that she has not created formal goals for herself throughout her life and this has probably led to the aimlessness she has experienced. She appears to be sustained primarily through her religious beliefs and acts accordingly.

I received my Ph.D. from OU in 1994 and my area of study was Educational Technology with an emphasis in Instructional Design. I served as a counselor and later Director of Student Support Services at Oklahoma City Community College for 12 years, Director of Training for the City of Oklahoma City for 5 years and Network Director of Organizational Development at SSM Healthcare (St. Anthony, Bone and Joint Hospitals) for 7 years. I then started my own organizational development consulting business, Partners in Peak Performance, and continue to work in that role. I have served as adjunct faculty in psychology at OSU Oklahoma City and Oklahoma City Community College. I am currently serving as adjunct faculty at OU teaching graduate courses in the College of Education Workforce Development program. I am Caucasian.

February 18, 2018

Mr. Cain:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the written transcript of the interview with Claire. As a licensed attorney and human resources professional, I found the interview to hold a unique perspective on the various benefits and challenges of higher education for the non-traditional student. My career spans more than 25 years and has given me the opportunity to work in the three branches of Oklahoma education: common education, careertech and higher education. Recently, I currently work as a personnel analyst for the largest department (Utilities) of the City of Oklahoma City – a department that employs over 750 individuals and has an operating budget of $163 million. In addition to my juris doctorate, I have a Master of Education and a Bachelor of Science. I am a white female over the age of 50.

Was any question asked or stated in a culturally insensitive manner? The manner in which you gently asked follow-up questions to the circumstances surrounding the death of Claire's older sister were commendable. The facts slowly unfolded and provided me a glimpse into the family dynamics that occurred after this tragedy. In addition, Claire's description on where she sought solace immediately after her sister's death – her grandmother and at her grandmother's church – reinforced her description of a strong family unit where religious beliefs were interwoven in everyday life. In addition, it provided explanation on why she has been angry at her higher power. As a child she saw this tragic event as an event that could have been stopped by God – and He chose not to intervene.

Did I detect any type of gender or cultural bias in how the questions were asked or how the conversations unfolded? I did not observe any gender or cultural bias in how the questions were asked. I found that you provided positive reinforcement to Claire when she asked if her answers made sense. You simply responded that they made perfect sense – this reinforcement could be made to either gender who were answering questions. Another example where bias was not observed was when clarification was needed in how Claire was using the word "forfeited." By asking for clarification in a neutral, non-judgmental manner, Claire shared how she felt that her family would not experience additional suffering since her older sister had died – an event that caused immeasurable suffering to her parents and siblings.

Were any issues seemingly of obvious importance to the participant ignored by the interviewer? There was only one answer in which I felt your follow-up questions may have led Claire to answer with an example she felt was more appropriate. This was the question regarding a highlight of her life. She quickly noted her recent dating relationship with a man and how her anxiety had decreased immensely. It appeared that your questioning may have triggered her to rethink what she may have believed to be the more "appropriate" response – her graduation from Southern Nazarene University. A very proud moment in her life that was recognized by family – one in which she described as an "event." However, I must say I am curious about her quick response

about her new relationship. I was left to wonder if Claire, a woman in her 50's, and who has spent the majority of her life pleasing others, has engaged in a new relationship completely on her own and with no one else's approval.

Did the interviewer appear to suggest or provide answers to the questions posed to the participant? The mirroring of Claire's answers to show your understanding was an excellent technique. I did not see any suggestions given only clarification sought when her answers were incomplete or vague.

February 21, 2018

Osiyo John,

Thank you for the opportunity to review Shelly's interview. Her past educational experiences supported what I have found reading the research regarding indigenous students K-12 experiences and at the college level. I am a citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian, raised in Oklahoma. My BS is in Special Education, MEd in Educational Administration and I am currently completing my General Exams in hopes to begin my PhD dissertation this summer in Higher Education Administration – Community College with a Native American Studies perspective. Currently I am a Fellow with the Native American Community Academy (NACA) Inspired Schools Network (NISN), out of Albuquerque, to establish a tribal charter school with the Pawnee Nation here in Oklahoma. The Fellowship is funded by a grant from the Walton Foundation. I have taught special education, reading, algebra and middle school math and Indian Education Coordinator at the K-12 level. At the higher education level, I been an advisor at Rose State College and a professor with the Pawnee Nation College. Relevant recent associations I have been involved with includes my having been a board member with the Oklahoma Council for Indian Education and a member with the National Indian Education Association, attending several national conventions.

Regarding the interview, I believe the questions could have been indigenized, but your interactions were positive within the experience. The concerns, I mentioned in the comments attached to your document, were the choice of some of the higher-level words you used while communicating to her. Many of the words were what, I believe, tripped her up in her responses. Her experiences are the motivation for my passion to establish tribal charter schools here in Oklahoma. If the Pawnee Nation does not desire to have such a school, my next destination is actually Shawnee as I am friends with the Governor of one of the tribes and have other connections with a second tribe there in Shawnee.

The other concern I had was the flow of questioning after she had opened up with her negative experiences. She would give her response, then instead of allowing her to debrief from those feelings, the next question would be posed. I realize that allowing her time to debrief would have taken additional time, I just feel that interjecting some sort of transition for her would have provided some emotional support and allowed her time to debrief. There were several responses, as someone focusing on education and indigenous peoples and a past special education teacher, I would have appreciated academically, elaboration on.

I believe you had a sincere and respectful interaction with Shelly and gained rich and informative data from this experience.

Please let me know if you require any additional information or if there is anything else I can do to help you with your academic journey. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to

review your interview, this experience will help me with my dissertation in the near future.

Sgi,
Starla [redacted]

My name is Sophia [redacted]. I was born in Seoul, South Korea. I moved to US for continuing my higher education after I graduated from Kae-won arts high school in Korea. My highest degree is the doctor of musical arts at University of North Texas in violin performance. I teach the applied violin as an adjunct violin instructor at Oklahoma City University since 2013. Also, I am a regular member as a section violinist at Oklahoma City Philharmonic since 2013 as well.

In Debra's interview, I found two things that you can be more sensitive about asking questions. At page 22, "does any of your family member have a health crisis? It could be you…" Since it's her mom's illness, you can be a bit sensitive about approaching the questions. It sounded like that you forgot about her mom's illness from previous interviews.

Also, you continued the question about her significant loss after her mom's death. At page 23, you said " what about a loss?...Of course you just mentioned your mom.." this would have made a situation little uncomfortable since she just mentioned that her mom passed away. The most significant loss will be her mom's death. It would be a direct question like "have you lost any other close friends or family members except your parents?"

In Asian culture, our funeral ceremony is totally different from one in US. Most Koreans will wear blacks with Korean traditional costumes. Funeral ceremony is really dark and sad. US funeral seems more peaceful than mourning. I am 38 years old with healthy and alive both parents, so I don't know exactly what that would be like, but just my thought.

At page 28, you said " I am tying to decide if I want to ask you about…" And you asked " any other comments about what we just discussed?"
Does this mean you decide not to ask though you have something to ask from the previous discussion?"
Communication in English seems tough for Debra since you don't get deep answers though your questions are pretty good.

In Ellen's interview, at page 11, you said "so I may be able to guess the answer.."
I think that you were little insensitive to say this instead of answering directly. I can see that too much information was mentioned back and forth. But you can just say computers.

Also at page 11, Ellen said "I told you the other day, that I was started getting sick.."
Little bit of insensibility- This can be handled better since you made her say her illness instead of you restating it.

Page 15, Ellen talked about her emptiness and depression, yet you continued to ask about her father since she never mentioned before. In Asian culture, kids are very close to parents, and probably she is one of a few children whose parents are separated in her early generation (I assume). Then you intensified the pain of depression by asking what

her greatest regret is. This also can be little insensitive since she is trying to bring her bad memories.