LINDA GAY HUGHES
The Role of Pop Culture in the Self-development of Midlife Women
(Under the direction of SHARAN B. MERRIAM)

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. Other studies indicate that pop culture, especially mass media, dramatically affects girls and young women, but no information was available about midlife women. A question guiding this study was whether mass media influenced midlife women and, if so, what was the nature of that influence.

The methodology used for this qualitative study was narrative analysis, allowing the twelve participants to voice their own stories. The interviews took place in the summer and fall of 2002. These interviews were taped, transcribed, and analyzed using McAdams' Life Story Model of Identity and other narrative analysis methods.

The data revealed that pop culture does affect the self-development of midlife women. However, it was discovered that midlife women carefully select the pop culture sources they choose to attend to, no longer falling prey to whatever sources, like ads, that happen their way as they might have when they were younger. Midlife women choose the media they want to further their self-development. Books, nonfiction and fiction, were by far their most popular choice, although they also used the Internet, watched television, and attended to a few other sources such as self-help seminars and audiotapes. There were three primary effects of media on the participants. They experienced increased: (1) personal power, (2) cognitive development, and (3) spiritual growth.

Two conclusions were drawn from this study. Firstly, pop culture does affect the self-development of midlife women. Secondly, the three primary effects, increased personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth, intertwine to form a single developmental spiral. Development in one area led to development in others, forming one interactive self-development process for midlife women.

INDEX WORDS: Women, Midlife, Self-Development, Pop Culture, Cultural studies, Narrative analysis, Adult development, Adult learning, Personal power, Cognitive development, Spirituality, Spiritual growth

THE ROLE OF POP CULTURE
IN THE SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF MIDLIFE WOMEN

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Shirley Sullivan Hughes Lacey, who died during its writing and who was fascinated by the topic. She initiated my love of pop culture by taking me to my first movie when I was two weeks old. Some of our last conversations revolved around our favorite movies, TV shows, *National Enquirer* news, and this study. She is missed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.
Simone de Beauvoir (1949)

In my twenty years of presenting women's seminars, I have heard countless stories about the effect that television, books, movies, and music have on women's lives. Women in my seminars talk about their favorite sitcom characters as if they were discussing family members. They tell about the self-help books that they cherish and the ones that they find silly. They talk about the novels and movies that have given them new perspectives, and the ones that have filled them with sorrow or joy.

Their stories peaked my interest in what I originally thought of as the influence of our North American "culture" on the self-development of women. That led to an investigation of cultural studies, where I discovered a two-part definition of culture that clarifies what my seminar participants are talking about.

Cultural studies scholar Storey (1998) describes culture as being "a particular way of life, whether of a people, period or group" (p. 2) that can be divided into two general categories: 1) intellectual and artistic activity, and 2) popular daily practices like fashion, food preferences, music, literacy, and sports. The first category, known as high culture, is represented by the arts, theater, and academia. High culture may wield some influence on a society, but it does not directly influence the daily lives of most people. Most of us do not visit a museum, attend a play, or engage in higher education every day. We do, however, participate in the second category, low culture, which is also known as mass

culture and pop culture, short for popular culture and the most often used term. S. Hall (1992) says, “Pop culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people. It has connections with…the everyday practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folks” (p. 25).

The women in my seminars don’t talk about high culture. They share stories about their everyday practices and experiences, stories about what they think and how they behave in their daily lives, stories about how pop culture affects them. An important aspect of that sharing is the camaraderie it builds. Through their stories they become accepted as part of a group and develop a sense of belonging, just as others do in other groups (Hall, 1997). It is this process of group camaraderie that facilitates the continuation and evolution of pop culture, and the desire of most people to participate in it. It’s a cyclical process in which people influence the creation of their own pop culture at the same time they are being influenced by existing pop culture (Hall, 1999).

But even though pop culture is integral to our existence, most of us aren’t aware of the influence it wields over our daily lives. We operate within the contexts of our society without considering that we think and behave in certain ways because that is what gives us a sense of belonging. Another group with different everyday practices and experiences thinks and behaves in particular ways in order to feel a sense of belonging there.

For example, historical research indicates that in ancient times an Egyptian woman would arise in the morning, bathe in the Nile, dab Jasmine oil on her skin, and wrap diaphanous cloth around her hips. She would catch her hair up in gold clasps, encircle her eyes with kohl, and don gem-encrusted jewelry. She would not, however,

cover her breasts (Baines & Makel, 1984). It was not expected that she do so. She cleansed, dressed, and adorned herself in ways that were common daily practice amongst her peers, ways that she learned from other women, storytelling, and written hieroglyphic symbols. We speculate that she knew that using those things and presenting herself in that way would facilitate her acceptance by others, and thereby her self-acceptance as well.

The material things she used, oil, cloth, clasps, kohl, and jewelry, do not constitute her pop culture, but they do represent it. Through such artifacts, as well as hieroglyphics and other sources, archaeologists can piece together the culture, high and low, within which this Egyptian woman lived. Her material things tell a story about her daily rites and rituals, the everyday practices that made up her popular culture.

The same is true today when a Westernized woman arises, showers, brushes her teeth, and performs a number of other ablutions, like swiping on deodorant, styling her hair, spraying on perfume, and applying makeup. She slathers on moisturizing cream and dare not forget the sunscreen. She puts on a professional suit and some jewelry. When she gets to work, she's dressed like other women. She doesn't wear a diaphanous skirt and display bare breasts because that is not what her pop culture encourages. She might prefer the freedom of minimal clothing but knows that sticking to the rules will facilitate acceptance and employment. She has feelings and beliefs about that, especially a sense of belonging that makes her feel good about herself (Hall, 1997).

Her pop culture, which she is very familiar with through mass media messages like advertisements on television, has encouraged her to think of and present herself in certain ways (Gledhill, 1987). All of us are constantly inundated with pop culture

messages through a number of sources called agents of socialization: family, peers, public education systems, and mass media (Kendall, 2001). Mass media includes television, movies, books, magazines, advertising, the Internet, radio, music, and more. Those mass media messages are such a proliferate, ordinary part of life, we're not even aware of them (Christensen, 2001).

Although other academic studies do not provide information about midlife women as an audience of mass media, pop culture itself offers indications that women are an enormous audience. According to the Nielson Ratings for television, more women between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine watch television than men of that age, 16.2 percent compared to 13.7 percent of all viewers per day (Bhatia, 1999). Women over the age of fifty-five watch the most daytime television of anyone in any age group (Television, 2002), with *Judge Judy* being the number one show of any kind on daytime television with an average Nielson Rating of 7.0 in 1999. (Each rating point represents 1% of all television households in the U.S.). *Oprah* continues to be the number one talk show with an average 1999 Nielson Rating of 6.2 (Shows, 2000) and an average of 14 million viewers each day (Tannen, 2002). Nielson Media Research reports that in 2001 *Judge Judy* had a 60 percent female audience and *Oprah* had a 72 percent female audience (Chodony, 2002). In 2001, the Lifetime network, "Television for Women," was the most watched cable network in prime time (Orecklin, 2002) and had a larger female audience than any other network, 77 percent (Chodony, 2002). The Hallmark Channel was second in female audience size, 61 percent, in 2001 (Chodony, 2002). Another indicator of midlife women as an audience for mass media is romance novel sales. In 2001, 54.5 percent of all mass-market paperback fiction sales were romances and

romance led all categories—including mystery/thrillers, general fiction, science fiction, and others—in paperback and hardcover popular fiction sales at 35.8 percent (Hall, 2002, p. 23). Yet another indicator that women are a large audience for mass media, particularly advertising, is the estimation that women make 85% of "household purchasing decisions" (Orecklin, 2002, p. 65).

But even though women are a huge pop culture audience, Blumenthal (1997), Brown (1990), and Gledhill (1997), believe that some scholars diminish the value of women's preferred pop culture involvements, like watching certain television shows and reading women's fiction, simply because they are women's preferences and therefore considered to be lower on the cultural scale than male-dominated preferences. The lowest of the low is sometimes referred to as trash culture (Simon, 1999) and tabloid culture (Glynn, 2000), and is often considered to be women's culture.

Collins (1995), S. Hall (1992), hooks (1997), and West (1993) emphasize that the preferred pop culture involvements of other minorities are negated by mass media even more so than those of white women. According to hooks (1999), the "white, supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal" (p. 2) lens is that which is valued in our culture, and the viewpoints of women and especially women of color are devalued. For example, many people might deem "women's movies" to be unimportant, but movies by and about African-American women are perceived as being even less important (hooks, 1997), as illustrated in the difficulty that producers of such movies experience in attempting to secure funding (Gledhill, 1987), even though there is a substantial audience for those types of films.

Some scholars (Fried, 1994/1995; Garner, 1995; Nixon, 1997) note that the pop culture preferences of homosexuals are not merely undervalued in mainstream media;

they're ignored. When a few small publishers came out with Lesbian romance novels, they discovered a market that had gone untouched and have enjoyed enormous success as a result (Adams, 1990). The audience is there, it's just not acknowledged by mass media (Nixon, 1997).

Other scholars believe that all of us in our society are too immersed in pop culture and rely too heavily on mass media for learning and information, and that such reliance is especially detrimental to the self-development of females in our society (Auerbach, 1982; Brownlow, 1990; Douglas, 1995; Fracassa, 1999; Kilbourne, 1999; Lemish, 2000; McCracken, 1993; Penley, 1985; Pipher, 1995; Rogers, 1999; Sinclair, 1988). Often noted is the amount of violence and sexual behavior that are represented in ways that devalue womanhood and glorify manhood.

Kilbourne (2002) contends that without realizing it, girls and women take in mass media messages that devalue being female. A key factor in the influence of mass media is that it's such a common part of our lives we don't pay attention to it. Kilbourne (2002) says, "We all believe we're not influenced by advertising. The longer we believe we're not influenced, the more likely we are to be influenced, because we don't pay conscious attention" (p. 96). She believes that girls are especially affected, learning to be silent and submissive at an early age. She says, "Young kids don't have the cognitive abilities to process advertising, so they're sitting ducks" (p. 96). Pipher (1995) agrees, her research having uncovered a link between mass media messages about body image and the skewed self-images of anorexic teen girls.

Some researchers believe that although mass media influences people, with knowledge it can play a productive role. Studies on children and teens (Giroux & Simon,

1989; Kilbourne & Pipher, 2000) and college students (Gledhill, 1997; Ogden, 2001; Simon, 1999) indicate that when exposed to media education, young people become more discerning observers of and participants in pop culture.

Yet, although there is a great deal of such research literature regarding the role of pop culture in the lives of children, teen girls, and college students, no literature was found regarding the influence of pop culture specifically on midlife women. We know that women are an enormous audience of mass media but we don't know how it affects them, what they learn from it, or how that learning affects their lives. Therefore, the effect of pop culture on midlife women was the focus of this study.

There are 37 million Baby Boom women who were born between 1946 and 1964 in the United States who are either in or entering midlife. They are 14% of the population (Census Bureau, 2001) who have been avid consumers of pop culture commodities, products, all of their lives (Hall, 1999). They also have a long tradition of seeking solace and enlightenment through pop culture's mass media sources.

Midlife is a time of transition and change for women, a time when they are likely to seek information and enlightenment. "Transitions, which are precipitated by life events or even nonevents, are processes that over time can…lead to learning and change" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 115). Of course, any transition can bring with it new issues with which one must deal, and some scholars believe that we make transitions throughout our entire lives (Lippert, 1997; McAdams, 1993). But some transitions, like moving out of youth and into midlife, bring with them markers, in this case the physical marker of menopause, which makes the time of transition apparent.

Besides physiological changes, women transitioning into midlife deal with changes in cognitive development, relationships, professional roles, and spirituality. Cognitive development assists a woman in constructing knowledge in order to make new meaning out of her life (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Many researchers have also found that relationships are vital to a woman's self-development (Baruch & Brooks-Gunn, 1984; Merriam & Clark, 1991; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1991) and relationships change when, for example, the kids move away. Work roles shift when women assess their lives at midpoint and decide to do something else or decide to continue to do what they're doing but in a new way (Bergquist, Greenberg, & Klaum, 1993). And spiritual growth is a possible outcome of looking at life from new perspectives (H. L. Cohen, 2001; Marston, 2001) and proved to be so for the participants in this study.

New perspectives are often the outcome of transition. Some theorists describe transitional times of change in stages or levels (Bee, 2000) and other theorists, especially more recently, describe them as continuous cycles of development (Gilligan, 1993). In any case, most theorists agree that times of change can be disorienting, a state that can motivate a person to learn and grow or lead a person into despair. However, women can use even the despair of transition to learn about and create new ways of living if they realize that, "Dissatisfaction and self-examination are essential to navigating this passage of life successfully" (Marston, 2001, p. 9). A goal of adult education is to provide learning opportunities that will allow women in transition to gain new perspectives that will help them find new meaning in this new time of life. In describing midlife transition, Bee (2000) paraphrases William Bridges as saying that there is, "simply and clearly, first an ending, then a middle, and then a beginning" (p. 324).

Considering that, as Marston (2001) says, "Midlife is a time when we are ripe for significant change" (p. 11), it's natural for women to turn to mass media sources with which they are familiar, like television and books, to learn about the biological, emotional, and other changes that are sweeping over them. Informal learning, learning that is not planned through a formal education system, is the preferred method of learning for all adults (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Marsick & Watkins, 2001) and mass media is the epitome of an informal source. Women often don't have the time, money, or desire to become involved in a formal system of education and mass media provides a quick, handy source of information. The problem with informal education sources, unfortunately, is that they often are neither reliable nor accurate (Livingstone, 2001). For example, even though there is mounting evidence to indicate that most women do not experience permanently debilitating ramifications from transitioning into midlife (Lippert, 1997; Marston, 2001; McQuaide, 1998), popular literature still projects an image of midlife women as being miserable. McQuaide (1998) says, "The cultural narrative provided for women at midlife is either medical and menopause oriented…or socially devaluing…. Without alternative images these demoralizing cultural stereotypes can become a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 21).

An examination of the role that pop culture's narratives play in women's lives exposes stereotypes and provide occasion for alternative images. Based on studies about the effect of pop culture on other age groups, it was assumed that being aware of what is learned through pop culture is of paramount relevance to the successful transition into midlife and self-development throughout midlife for women. Midlife presents an enormous opportunity for self-development, for learning and evolving—physically,

intellectually, socially, professionally, and spiritually. As McAdams (1993) says, midlife is a time "to put the many pieces of our life story together into a more integrative and generative whole" (p. 220).

Statement of the Problem

There is a great deal of research literature indicating that popular culture is an integral part of the lives of human beings. Pop culture is the way that people think about and experience their daily lives, and how they respond to those thoughts and experiences. By participating in pop culture's everyday practices, like dressing in a particular way, a person develops feelings of acceptance and belonging to a group, and can thereby acquire feelings of self-acceptance as well.

It is in this way that pop culture can affect the self-development of midlife women. But, even though there is a plethora of literature regarding this issue for children, teenaged girls, and college students, this researcher could not find literature that specifically addressed the role that pop culture plays in the self-development of midlife women. Consequently, based on other studies, we assume that pop culture plays a role in the lives of midlife women, but we have not known the nature of that role or its ultimate effect on their self-development.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. The questions guiding this study were:

1. What mass media sources of pop culture—like television, movies, magazines, self-help books, novels, the Internet, and advertising—do midlife women attend to?

2. What motivates them to attend to these particular sources?
3. How do they learn from these sources?
4. What do they learn?
5. How does what they learn affect their self-development?

Significance of the Study

By examining the role that pop culture plays in the lives of midlife women, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the body of research literature on adult development, adult learning, and pop culture studies. Although midlife women have been studied, previous literature focuses on their biological developments and changes, especially menopause. There was a need to identify midlife women with more than their reproductive organs (McQuaide, 1998).

Furthermore, there was a need to consider pop culture's role in the development of midlife women, which contributes to the existing literature about adult development. Fodor and Franks (1990) noted that "…there is a lack of an integrated body of developmental theory and research from prior studies that is relevant to today's midlife women" (p. 446). Lippert (1997) says, "Considering the major studies on adult development at midlife, Gergen (1990) observed that it seems only men survive past the age of 40" (p. 16). There is a dearth of literature that addresses the adult development of midlife women.

This study also adds to the literature about adult learning for midlife women. Informal and incidental learning, the learning acquired through pop culture, is a primary source of information for most learners (Marsick & Watkins, 2001); yet, there are gaps in

the literature regarding informal and incidental learning, including that of midlife women (Livingstone, 2001). A better understanding of that learning adds to psychosocial understanding of how women let go of past roles, self-concepts, and daily practices, and how they reconstruct their lives.

Another theoretical contribution is to augment traditional pop culture studies, which have hitherto excluded this segment of the population. Giroux and R. K. Simon (1989), R. I. Simon (1999), and Ogden (2001) contend that there is much yet to be learned about the influence of pop culture on people of all ages. Gledhill and Williams (2000) believe that pop culture studies would benefit from more studies about women, which would expose the reality of our culture's male-dominated ideology and hegemony, and the consequent need for cultural negotiation (p. 347).

From a practical perspective, a contribution of this study is to offer useful information for adult educators, program planners, psychotherapists, life coaches, and others who work with midlife women. Educators and practitioners can use the findings of this study for designing and implementing strategies, classes, and learning materials that recognize, respect, and reinforce the common practices used by midlife women as they use pop culture to develop new life meanings. Discovering women's favorite informal learning sources, like watching television or listening to audiotapes, allows practitioners to make better use of those sources.

The second practical contribution is that the women in this study, the participants, identified resources and strategies that have helped them negotiate their development and that have worked for them in integrating new learning into former thoughts, feelings, and

everyday practices. This proved to be a useful reflection for them and a valuable resource for their peers who are also learning to negotiate their midlife development.

Definitions

These definitions are provided for better understanding of this study:

Culture is "a particular way of life, whether of a people, period or group" (Storey, 1998, p. 2) that can be divided into two general categories: 1) intellectual and artistic activity, and 2) popular daily practices like fashion, food preferences, music, literacy, and sports. These two categories connote high culture and low culture.

High culture is that part of culture that is represented by the arts, theater, and academia. Most people do not participate in high culture on a daily basis.

Low culture is the same as pop culture.

Midlife can be defined in terms of age, social status, family roles, health, and attitude. For this study, two factors will be used: age and attitude. Subjects will be women between the ages of 40 and 60 who self-define themselves as midlife.

Pop culture, short for popular culture, according to S. Hall is "the everyday practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folks" (1992, p. 25). It is the way that people think about and experience their daily lives, including what they wear, how they communicate with one another, the music they like, what they read and watch, and their preferred forms of entertainment. It is considered to be low culture, the opposite of high culture. Pop culture is represented through mass media sources like television, movies, advertising, and current books, and is the foundation of this study.

Self-development, also referred to as adult development, psychological development, psychosocial development, and personal growth, is a process of learning and evolving—physically, intellectually, socially, professionally, and spiritually.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"She is too fond of books, and it has turned her brain."
Louisa May Alcott (1873)

A review of the literature related to this topic, *The Role of Pop Culture in the Self-development of Midlife Women*, reveals that no literature could be located that combines pop culture, self-development, and midlife women. There is, however, a plethora of literature involving the effect of pop culture on the self-development of children, teenaged girls, and college students. Those resources indicate that pop culture plays a key role in the self-development of those groups. Consequently, based on studies with younger women, it can be assumed that pop culture plays a role in the lives of midlife women, although the nature of that role or its ultimate effect on their self-development is not known. This gap in knowledge provides the research problem for this study.

The bodies of literature that were searched in order to address that problem included academic peer-reviewed journals, professional journals, non-fiction books, and textbooks. And popular culture literature such as magazines, self-help books, and novels were reviewed. Television, movies, and websites also informed this study.

In this literature review, a variety of scholars' viewpoints are covered. After all of the information is analyzed, contradictions amongst those points of view become clear. Some scholars believe it is detrimental for anyone to rely on pop culture for self-development (Douglas, 1995; Fracassa, 1999; Lemish, 2000; McCracken, 1993; Pipher, 1995; Raymond, 1990; Rogers, 1999). But others believe it can be useful as long as

people know what they're doing and do so selectively (Apfelbaum, 2000; Jenkins, 1991; Minh-Ha, 1999; Modleski, 1982; Ogden, 2001; Simon, 1999). One more thing is clear: while midlife women pay attention to and are influenced by pop culture (Christensen, 2001; Gamman & Marshment, 1989; Popcorn, 2000), the result of that influence has not been known. Although the topics of self-development and midlife women sometimes intersect in the literature, and pop culture intersects with self-development for girls and young women, never do pop culture, self-development, and midlife women intersect. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to understand the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. In an effort to clearly address this problem and purpose, and to sort through the variety of viewpoints, this review is divided into two major sections, popular culture and self-development for midlife women.

Popular Culture

Popular culture affects every aspect of our daily lives (Fiske, 1996; Giroux & Simon, 1989; Hall, 1997). We get up in the morning and go through rituals to prepare for the day, rituals of cleansing, dressing, and breakfasting that we have performed all of our lives. We care for our homes, communicate with others, conduct business, tend to our children, and entertain ourselves using common, popular methods that are constantly reinforced in our culture.

We also educate ourselves in ways that are popular in our day and age (Champoux, 1999; Simon, 1999). We don't sit at the knee of a philosopher in white robes; we don't ask the storm god for a thunderbolt of enlightenment; we don't sacrifice animals and wait for inspirational messages from a burning bush. We go to school, talk to our friends, and watch TV. And that's just the beginning. We take in messages through

advertisements, books, movies, music videos, sermons, fashion, websites, games, and an endless list of pop culture images that confront us everyday (Christensen, 2001; Fishwick, 1999b).

Popular culture not only confronts and surrounds us, it permeates our being. Without it, we wouldn't know how to define ourselves as a society and many people wouldn't know how to define themselves as individuals (Banta, 1987). Therefore, an attempt to understand our pop culture is an attempt to understand us.

Definitions and Models of Pop Culture Theory

A definition of pop culture is hard to pin down. Carlson and Vichcales (in Fishwick, 1999a) say, "Suggesting that someone define Popular Culture [caps in original] is like asking a fish to explain water" (p. 169). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) state, "A fish discovers its need for water only when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water to a fish. It sustains us. We live and breathe through it" (p. 20). Pop culture is so much a part of our lives we don't even realize we're in it and therefore have a hard time objectively describing what it is. That must explain why there are as many definitions of popular culture as there are people defining it.

Even considering the study of pop culture in a broader sense and looking to its parent, cultural studies, is problematic. Canonist Fiske (1998) says, "Cultural studies is such a contested and currently trendy term that I must disclaim any attempt to either define or speak for it" (p. 359). However, he goes on in this case to give an example of "audiencing" (p. 359), how people watch television, and to explain how that falls within cultural studies. So, although a definition is difficult to conjure up, examples are easy to access because they're all around us.

Warren (1994) also has difficulty with a solid definition, saying, "The word 'culture' may well be one of the most complicated words in the English language. Constantly changing in definition, it has its own social history" (p. 175). However, Storey (1998) pins down a definition by saying that pop culture is "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group" (p. 2) that can be divided into two general categories: (1) intellectual and artistic activity, and (2) popular daily practices like fashion, food preferences, music, literacy, and sports.

Some scholars also offer definitions of popular culture, even if those definitions are inconclusive. Ogden (2001) says, "Popular culture…while we can be clear about the polemical meaning of culture, 'popular' remains determinedly evasive" (p. 500). She states that although fraught with inherent problems, there are two widely accepted definitions of popular culture: "One is a category comprising those popular elements of culture that are produced *for* the people (for instance, Britney Spears, reality television programs, and Internet shopping.), the other a category comprising those popular elements of culture which are produced *by* the people (for instance, street fairs, self-help groups, and unofficial celebrity Web sites)" (p. 502).

There are pop culture scholars, like Fiske (1998), who take this two-part definition of popular culture, *for* and *by* the people, and expand it to three parts. Payne (1997) details those three definitions as follows:

The first is a market definition. "Popular culture is defined as that culture which is produced for the people. The 'people' in this approach are thus taken to be a sector of the market, a body of consumers, and 'popular culture' describes certain commodities" (Payne, 1997, p. 415). In this definition, popular culture's "industrial means of

production" (p. 415) is important, as it's the quality as well as the quantity of the product that matters. We tend to think of it only as quantity. For example, movies usually need to be of some quality before a quantity of people will go to see them.

Payne's second definition offers a cultural approach that puts the emphasis on how people interpret commodities and products, unlike the market approach that emphasizes the production of commodities and products for the people. It's the interpretation that results in popular culture formed by the people.

Payne states:

> The marketplace approach overlaps with another definition of popular culture as the culture of the people, as those symbolic objects and practices which somehow express or give shape to popular beliefs, values, and traditions….what makes a commodity 'popular' is not for whom (or for how many people) it is produced (the market definition) but how it is interpreted. The cultural meaning of a commodity, in other words, is determined in the social processes of consumption….Popular culture, in short, is that culture which expresses the aesthetic, ideological, hedonistic, spiritual, and symbolic values of a particular group of people…. (p. 416)

The final Payne definition describes a political economy model, contending "popular culture is commodities, activities, and institutions that produce a particular form of collective identity, including a set of attitudes and values, and a sense of belonging. This definition is often what is used in political terms, especially when attempting to mobilize a group of people" (p. 417). In late 2001 we witnessed an example of this in our

government's plea for support of the United States' war against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Some scholars, like S. Hall (1997) and Gramsci (in Mayo, 1999), take the latter definition to the extreme, declaring that the ruling class engineers pop culture in order to spread their ideology into the common sense and everyday practices of the masses.

Fiske (1998) describes their theory like this:

> Hegemony theory (Gramsci's contribution) argues that ideology has to work by means of negotiation and struggle to win the consent of the subordinates to the system that subordinates them. It does not impose itself on them, but has to take some account (as little as possible) of subordinate social interests in order to secure temporary consent. Such points of consent are never fixed, but can be shifted in one direction or another according to historical conditions and the conjuncture of forces within them. Hegemony is thus a constant process of unequal struggle between unequal social forces. (p. 376)

According to Warren (1993), there are three aspects of Gramsci's concept that are important in terms of the study of popular culture. Warren says, "First, Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony hinges, above all, on its dynamic nature" (p. 176). The groups of people involved, the people in power, are always changing in a democracy. So, renegotiation of definitions and cultural meaning is always changing. This concept allows S. Hall (in Warren, 1993) to assert that culture is "neither dominance nor resistance but the ground upon which the transformations are worked" (p. 176).

The second aspect of Gramsci's concept as reported by Warren (1993) is that "various ruling-class alliances are at odds among themselves, and not one subordinate group is united in its resolve but a collection of oppositional groups" (p. 176).

Warren (1993) goes on to note:

> In short, Gramsci spoke of the possibility of discussing *cultures* in place of culture, and of recognizing the distinct vantage-points from which these subcultures experience the totality of cultural practices. This multi-faceted perspective makes possible a more fluid examination of cultural phenomena…. (p. 177)

The third aspect of Gramsci's (in Warren, 1993) concept is that "outright domination is frowned upon" and "a tenuous mix of approval and apathy, resistance and resignation" (p. 177) is necessary on the part of those being subjugated in order for subliminal domination to succeed. In this case, the subjugated are aware of and eventually willingly accept their exploitation by authorities, hegemony and coercion being completely interwoven into their lives.

Gramsci's concepts are important to this study of midlife women for two reasons: (1) He points out the changing nature of culture and power, and illustrates the negotiating that women in this culture have done all of their lives in order to survive and thrive in a patriarchal society, and (2) he brings to light the notion of willing subjugation. His inference is that those being dominated are too apathetic to do elsewise.

But others believe that women knowingly allow themselves to be dominated sometimes because they're intelligent, streetwise, and know from experience that they must pick their battles (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Gilligan,

1993). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986/1997) found that, "While some of the women we interviewed most certainly saw authorities as the source of the 'right answers' and 'truth,' they did not align themselves with authorities….This world of 'Authority-right-we' was quite alien to many women" (p. 44). Midlife women may be influenced by popular culture, but that doesn't mean they are apathetic, naive, unresponsive, or stupid.

At the opposite end of the definition continuum from Gramsci and S. Hall is Browne (in Fishwick, 2000), with Brown declaring, "Popular Culture is the way of life in which and by which most people in any society live. In a democracy like the United States, it is the voice of the people—their practices, likes and dislikes—the lifeblood of their daily existence, a way of life. The popular culture of the United states is the voice of democracy" (p. 157).

Although there may be some truth in each of these definitions, at least to some extent, those most relevant to this study are offered by the scholars who expand upon the meaning of pop culture to include individual input by the people, such as Payne's second definition, the cultural approach that integrates interpretation. Giroux and R. I. Simon (1989) expound on this concept by defining popular culture as "organic sociality" (p. 32). They say that no matter what is produced for mass consumption, by the time it reaches the consumer its purpose, uses and interpretations are dispersed depending on the experiences of the users (p. 33). They see "popular culture as a terrain of possibilities" (p. 227).

Giroux and R. I. Simon (1989) say that they:

> …consider commodities in their circuits of distribution, focusing on the commodity not as text but as event. We are stressing that popular cultures are constituted not just by commodity forms but by practices which reflect a creative and sometimes innovative capacity of people. Popular cultures may contain aspects of a collective imagination which make it possible for people to surpass received knowledge and tradition. (p. 227)

There are a variety of other definitions of culture and pop culture. Geertz (1973) wrote that people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge by means of culture. Warren (1993) said, "Culture is the social circulation of meanings, pleasures, and values" (p. 367). Popular culture is defined too narrowly in our culture, according to Penley (1985), and should include not just a collective history that leads up to a present culture, but the ability of people, especially women, to fantasize and create a future culture. She believes we respond to that as much as past learning. "The subject positions of women consumers of popular culture can be multiple and shifting," she says (p. 495). Women use culture to interpret their lives, guide their decisions, and create their futures, which is important to this study.

In addition to all of the definitions, it is important to this study to delineate between "high culture" and "low culture." These terms have long been used to distinguish between the elite and the working class. "High culture" distinguishes those who are more serious, such as art lovers, from those who buy in mass markets. High culture has also come to be tied to commerce, with the idea being that institutions of

learning, especially literature, music and arts departments, must preserve high culture from demise (Payne, 1997). This is not a study of high culture.

Rather, this was a study of what is defined as low culture. Low culture, pop culture, and mass culture are all terms that are often used interchangeably and mean essentially the same thing. They all are often used with the term mass media, which is not pop culture itself but a delivery system, a vehicle that distributes the ideas and trends that make up low, pop culture (Ogden, 2001). Pop culture, with its close ties to mass media, is commonly thought of as unscholarly, crass, trashy, and crude (Cobb, 2001; McCabe, 1986).

Glynn (2000) calls pop culture "tabloid culture" and R. K. Simon (1999) calls it "trash culture," saying that it is, for example, "the love of movies and television programs" (p. 3). Simon contends that contemporary trash culture equates to what is now considered to be the high culture of the classics. He says, "Many of the differences between trash culture and high culture show only that storytelling adapts to changing economic, social, and political conditions" (p. 2). What was once considered to be trash, like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in the 1800s, is now a classic that is studied in university classrooms to gain insight into the people of that time and place. Likewise, what is considered to be trash today might someday be considered to be classics worth study. "Rambo is contemporary American's Iliad…" (p. 509). In fact, R. K. Simon believes that if viewed in the right light, current trash culture is worth studying now as it can offer insights into our own culture and therefore into ourselves.

So, taking this variety of viewpoints into account, I combined definitions of popular culture to come up with a simple working definition for this study: Popular culture consists of current trends that can influence how women think, feel, and behave.

Historical Perspective

We tend to think of popular culture as modern, something that exists only for us today. Yet people of each era throughout history have had their own popular culture and their own learning delivery systems with their own artifacts and texts, which are the treasures of archeologists today. Just as we can learn about other cultures by examining their goods, we can learn about ourselves by examining ours (Eisler, 1987).

There are many artifacts and texts, like clothes, books, diaries, letters, newspapers, paintings, photographs, furniture, homes, and so much more that tell us about the changes in popular culture over the two-hundred-year history of our country. These things tell us how people went about their daily lives, what were their habits, what they believed, their likes and dislikes, how they interacted with one another, what they spent money on, what was of value to them, what were their religious beliefs, how they entertained themselves, and how they learned. Out of all of that history, there are a number of pop culture phenomena that have especially impacted how women live their lives today, including advertising; film; magazines, radio, and television; and women's fiction.

Advertising

It is interesting that one of the most often cited examples of early advertising is the story of a three-thousand-year-old papyrus found in Thebes that offered a reward for a runaway slave (Williams, 1993), considering that some of North America's oldest

surviving print ads are early 1700 newspaper notices offering rewards for runaway slaves (Costa, 2001; Goodrum & Dalrymple, 1990). According to Costa (2001), because such notices were common and tended to give great detail about the physicality, skills, and attitude of each slave, they are our best available record of what slaves might have been like in early America. These ads "provide an excellent window on the African population…and can aid us in understanding the lives of the historically inarticulate bondsmen and women (p.2)." Costa believes that by tracking runaway slaves through ads, a starting point can be constructed for telling their human stories, stories that give us insight into that era.

Likewise, a brief review of twentieth century North American ads in newspapers, magazines, and eventually on television can provide a window that will help us hear the human stories of women in this culture. Although people of another era can never experience the exact same reaction that people had during the ads' eras (Costa, 2001), we can use ads to educate ourselves about how things were and therefore how they got to be the way they are. Of special interest to this study is how advertising affected attitudes about and images of women.

According to Kurtz (1997), "Advertising unintentionally has served as a recorder of the century's cultural revolution in the external and internal lives of women" (p. 1). He adds, "From the 1890s to the 1990s, women have played the starring role in America's drama of consumption" (p. 1), primarily because they made the majority of household purchases. During the 1980s through the 1910s, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, advertising encouraged women to "buy rather than make" (p. 1). As a result, stereotypes of women as either giggling girl consumers or mothers providing for their families

became popular. Williams (1993) agrees that the Industrial Revolution caused advertising to become an organized enterprise for the first time because of that era's new "'monopoly" (p. 416) corporations which introduced large companies with huge amounts of money into the economic system. Highly-funded, organized advertising galvanized particular images of women, like the girls and mothers that Kurtz discusses. Kurtz (1997) says that during the 1920s women were depicted as more independent, a reflection of the times, but were still encouraged to hone domestic skills. During that era, "advertisers learned to wrap products in 'the tissue of dreams'" (p. 1). Instead of selling cosmetics, for example, they sold happiness, placing the emphasis on the consumer rather than the product. The 1930s saw the rise of "a carnival culture, as the public craved escapism" (p. 2) during the Great Depression. During World War II in the 1940s, advertisers "suggested that victories could be won…through beauty and patriotic shopping" (p. 2). The 1950s witnessed "barriers between the daily world of women and that of men" (p. 2), when the division between the sexes that began during the war were continued and exacerbated during the '50s with women being encouraged to stay home so that they wouldn't occupy jobs that men could have. During this time, television offered up new consumers for advertisers, where "the women they created to sell their wares were artificial creatures with exaggerated, off-balance, and tentative poses" (p. 2). In the 1960s, advertisers used "lures of sex, youth, liberation, and personal expression" (p. 3). The 1970s brought about a dramatic change in the depiction of women in advertising.

Kurtz (1997) contends:

> Advertising continued to plumb popular culture to find selling power. Ironically, women's lib, celebrations of ethnic heritage, critiques of

> capitalism, and the draw of the 'natural look' all were adopted by advertising to bolster arguments for consumption. True individuality, it promised, could be found only in the mass market. (p. 3)

The result of such mass media messages during the '70s was a difficult transition for women, one that demanded they excel in their personal and professional lives, and that they somehow miraculously blend the two. In the 1980s and 1990s, advertisers often tried to combine the interests of progressive women with "beach babe" (Kurtz, 1997, p. 3) images that didn't sit well with large numbers of women.

Although the image of beauty has broadened to include a wide variety of ages, ethnicities, and accomplishments, "advertising's prevailing model of beauty remains young, white, and emaciated" (Kurtz, 1997, p. 3). African American women in advertising have become lighter-skinned and more Anglo-looking over the years (Leslie, 1995) Even Betty Crocker has become younger, blonder, and more blue-eyed during her eighty-one years of existence (Goodrum & Dalrymple, 1990).

Advertising often does not accurately represent our culture, yet Kurtz (1997) notes, "Skillful alignment with popular culture gives advertising resonance. Today, many marketers have learned to ally themselves with feminist sensibilities. Advertising even steals from itself, inviting jaded viewers in with a self-referential "knowing wink" (p. 3). Kurtz concludes that "Whether they [women] are portrayed as homemaker, independent woman, love tutor, sex kitten, or superwoman in the ads, the aim in the same – to sell a product to the public" (p. 1).

Goodrum and Dalrymple (1990) report a long-lasting debate regarding advertising, using the Coca-Cola Company as an example. From its very beginning,

Coca-Cola used beautiful women to sell its product. Ever since they and others have been trying to determine whether everyday women "worked to look like the Coca-Cola girl, or the Coca-Cola image was simply the perfect reflection of the ideal 'mid-American' woman" (p. 29). Some scholars argue that too many women today are still working to look like the images they see in advertising (Kilbourne, 1999; Pipher, 1995) rather than considering how to be their own best selves.

Film

Some scholars believe that film has impacted our lives more than any other pop culture phenomenon (Brownlow, 1990; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Sinclair, 1988). Becoming popular around the turn of the century in 1900, films, first called flickers and later called movies (Sarris, 1998), predate radio and television. Today we're so inundated with TV and radio, as well as movies, it's hard to imagine a time without them. But there was a time when information was passed along on the written page or verbally, without benefit of mass marketing and visual images as we know them today. That all changed when French filmmaker Georges Melies had the foresight to produce *Le Voyage Dans La Lune (A Trip to the Moon)*, the first flicker with a storyline rather than just flashes of people moving around. A 14-minute masterpiece, it was inspired by Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (Dirks, 2002). Unfortunately for Melies, cohorts of Thomas Edison stole the actual film footage. Edison released it in the United States under his own name (Brownlow, 1990; Hanks, 2000). People clamored to see that and subsequent short story flickers at Nickelodeons.

This is relevant to this study because for the first time in the history of this country, thousands of people, in fact an estimated daily average of 25 million people (25

percent of the population), were seeing the same images (Brownlow, 1990). Unfortunately, those images were neither realistic about nor kind to women and have carried over throughout the years in radio, television, and other forms of media as well as movies, setting the skewed standards that are still with us today.

Women in the first flickers were portrayed as vamps. Apparently it took just five minutes after the invention of film for someone to see the possibilities for pornography, and consequently many early films displayed naked women (Kendrick, 1996; Williams, 1999). But when the medium quickly became popular and went public, women in silent films were portrayed as victims (Gledhill, 1987; Sarris, 1998; Sinclair, 1988). Hordes of people saw and apparently accepted that behavior.

This was especially important for urban working-class men, hundreds of thousands who were immigrants yearning to learn about their adopted country. Silent films were a quick, inexpensive form of education, and there was no language barrier (Sarris, 1998). They watched and undoubtedly thought, "So, this is what my new country is like..."

With all of this clamoring to see flickers, the movie industry quickly became the fifth largest industry in the U.S., surpassed only by railroads, textiles, iron and steel, and oil (Brownlow, 1990). This success helps us understand how movies had such an impact and how they were able to solidify skewed standards about women as vamps and/or victims that are still with us.

Media analyst and film scholar Gledhill (1987) believes we've fallen so completely for those standards because the first movie producers were and still are revered like gods, not necessarily because they were the best but because they were the

founders, males in a patriarchal society, of revered direct European descent, uneducated gamblers willing to take risks, and brilliant streetwise salesmen. They weren't the best choices for solidifying American standards about women, but they were the ones who did it. Their beliefs may have been skewed, but those beliefs became prolific through the movies.

Most of the first movie moguls, such as Louis B. Mayer, D. W. Griffith, and Mack Sennett, weren't well educated. In the '20s, screenwriter Anita Loos (in Sinclair, 1988) said "With the mental equipment which allows me to tell the difference between hot and cold, I stand out in this community like a modern day Cicero" (p. 16). Regardless, these men came to be worshipped for their monetary success and others proliferated their attitudes throughout the years.

This is telling in light of the three basic popular culture definitions and models discussed earlier on pages 14 through 16. The early movie moguls, undoubtedly totally unbeknownst to themselves, combined these models, demonstrating the models' conjoined validity. The producers adhered to the market model by producing a product *for* the people. But they also adhered to the cultural model by paying attention to interpretation *by* their mostly male audiences, subsequently producing more of what was wanted. As a result, they ended up with power, adhering to the political economy model to the point of becoming hegemonic, although influencing ideas, values, and culture hardly seems to have been their primary goal. That was to make money and wield power over one another. They wanted to influence the masses in order to accomplish that goal and saw the American public as an easy mark for doing just that.

Griffith (in Sinclair, 1988), one of the first successful producers, said, “The American movie-going public has the mind of a twelve-year-old child” (p. 16). And it seems that, like unthinking children, audiences accepted women as victims in early films. Classic silent films like *Broken Blossom*, *The Love Flower*, and *The White Rose* are all named after helpless child-women. Early producers often depicted women on the screen as childlike and helpless. A female character needed the protection of a good, wise man because another violent man was trying to harm her (Gledhill, 1987; Sarris, 1998; Sinclair, 1988). This popular new medium allowed those distorted views to be shared with multitudes of people and, therefore, to wield influence over those people.

Some film scholars used to argue that films wield influence for psychoanalytic or semiotic (language signs, symbols, syntax, etc.) reasons. Those theories have fallen out of favor in film studies and now it’s conjectured that films wield influence because they are a language, a form of communication, of their own (Flayhan, 2001; Newhagen, 2000; Perez, 1998). However they do it, they do influence audiences. And distorted views of women have long been a part of that process.

Film scholar Mulvey (1989) describes another angle on the distorted view of women by quoting another film scholar, Boetticher, who said, “What counts is what the heroine provokes … the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance” (p. 97). Gledhill (1987) writes of early films, “... female figures ... do not represent women, but the needs of the patriarchal psyche” (p. 87). Loos (in Sinclair, 1988) reported that even the producer Irving Thalberg, an educated exception, wasn’t immune. He said to her, “When you write a love scene, think of your heroine as a little

puppy dog, cuddling up to her master, wagging an imaginary tail, and gazing up at him as if he were God" (p. 5).

After all of the initial vamping and victimizing of women in films, some producers began incorporating plots into their storylines. The first movies with plots were often taken from 18th century European literature, when a new, shocking kind of book had emerged, the historic novel. The combination of romance and realism caused these books to be banned in some places so, of course, they flew off the shelves. Those Victorian ideals returned on the screen and therefore continued to thrive into the 20th century (Auerbach, 1982; P. M. Cohen, 2001). Later versions of some of those early movies taken from historic novels, like Alexander Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* or Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, are still around today. They and other books like them are very important to our culture because by being made into movies, they made the romance/realism theme a staple of American fiction, on the page and on the screen (Sarris, 1998). Gledhill (1987) says, "...historical investigation leads to American culture, and Hollywood in particular as the place where European melodramatic traditions were remolded in such a way that they could return in the twentieth century" (p. 53).

But not all women fell for those traditions. There were many women at that time, like Susan B. Anthony, Margaret Sanger, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Harriet Tubman, who publicly espoused very different concepts of women's well-being (Stephens, 1992). However, these women were ignored by the movie industry. Early producers portrayed grown women, like Mary Pickford, as victimized and childlike. Then it became popular to depict women as helpless creatures who needed men in order to survive. In the '30s,

little girls, like Shirley Temple, were portrayed as womanlike children (Sinclair, 1988). In the ‘40s women generally became stronger characters in films, but with men still at the helm in the movie industry, that didn’t last into the ‘50s (Sarris, 1998). Disney entered the melee by glamorizing fairy tales (Giroux, 1999). Today, movies for grown women are rare, as if we’re invisible and don’t want to see movies, even though we grew up with them.

Chocolat is a recent (2001) exception. The main character is a midlife woman who has the ability—through intelligence, humor, caring, and mystical power—to positively influence the lives of others. But a midlife woman with positive power, as opposed to being either non-descript or evil, in a movie is seldom seen. Usually, the same passive woman/vamp/victim/vixen/ invisible messages are recycled time and again for women of all ages (Douglas, 1995; Fischer, 1989; Kitch, 1997; Minh-Ha, 1999).

Magazines, Radio, and Television

Part of that recycling has taken place in magazines, and on radio and television. In the early 1900s, with wide circulations for the first time, magazines picked up on the unrealistic romance themes that were so popular in novels. The magazine articles were the precursors of later soap operas on the radio and then TV by running love stories in serials, thus ensuring the continuous purchase of more magazines (Blumenthal, 1997). The articles’ message was that a woman needed to behave herself so as to be supported in marriage.

Sometimes there were fascinating fluctuations within that message. For example, the popular 1930s radio serial, *The Romance of Helen Trent*, offered “hope” to “middle-aged” women. A man with a tremulous, deep voice said, “The real life drama of Helen

Trent, who when life mocks her, breaks her hopes, dashes her against rocks of despair, fights back bravely and successfully to prove what so many women long to prove in their own lives—that because a woman is thirty-five or more, romance in life need not be over...” (in Maxwell, 1995). At least the woman is depicted as being brave.

Television conjured up its own version of female characters as being passive. “A man’s home is his castle, and in that castle you’re the king. Tomorrow afternoon when Agnes says, ‘I do,’ that is the last decision you allow her to make.” That was Ralph Kramden, played by Jackie Gleason, addressing his brother-in-law-to-be, on *The Honeymooners* in 1951 (in Mingo & Javna, 1989, p. 134). Although most viewers knew that Ralph had another thing coming with Alice, his attitude was common in the ‘50s.

The post-war era of the ‘50s was the first time that television was widely seen. Men ran the industry. In fact, many were the very same men who had run radio stations and even produced movies (Brown, 1990). So, it’s no surprise there wasn’t much change in attitudes toward women (DeGooyer & Borah, 1982). Women still needed to be saved by men, who either put them down or put them up on pedestals. Seldom were they put at their side and never in front of them.

Some argue that that’s why so many women have long been drawn to television soap operas, which are a rare exception with characters who are shown in more depth, not just as passive girls who wish and whine, or action heroes who slug people and shoot guns. Over time, there's more in-depth character development than in most other forms of media and viewers become familiar with characters’ good qualities, shortcomings and quirks. The characters seem more like real people (Albada, 2000).

But even more important, according to feminist scholars Brown (1990) and Blumenthal (1997), is the fact that soap operas are a chosen form of viewing for women and that choice needs to be respected. Not to do so would be yet another way of negating the value of women's preferences. Blumenthal (1997) contends, "Soap operas are considered nonaesthetic because they offer a popular, woman-centered aesthetic, defying the dominant masculinist, elitist definitions of what 'good art' is." She says that such devaluation is sexism, "plain and simple" (p. 16). Brown (1990) states, "Part of women's strength may be in the ability and effort to try to understand how women's daily lives are constructed and how aspects of popular culture like television function in this context. The other part is obviously in the power to speak, both to each other and publicly" (p. 210).

Women's Fiction

Sometimes women are also not respected for reading women's fiction, like romance novels. Yet something in those stories speaks to them, if sales are any indication. The traditional storyline in a romance novel is for a woman to be attracted to a man but for some reason not be able to get together with him in the beginning, making it necessary for her to champion her own causes. Only then, after she's saved herself, does she get the man (Mussell, 1981; Voytilla & Cassedy, 2000). Many women apparently love that message because according to *Harper's Index* Americans buy more than 7,000 Harlequin romance novels per day and in the year 2000 romance sales exceeded $1.37 billion. In 2001, nearly 55 percent of all mass-market paperback fiction sales were romances, and romances led all paperback and hardcover popular fiction sales at 35.8 percent, with mysteries second at 26.6 percent (Hall, 2001).

So, there may be mixed messages in other forms of media about the status of women and a woman's ability to fend for herself, but in women's fiction the message is clear. As Rhett Butler said to the diva of all romance heroines, Scarlett O'Hara, when she claimed she'd be helpless if he left her, "You helpless? Heaven help the Yankees if they capture you" (in Howard & Mitchell, p. 123). We have no doubt that heaven would indeed have to help the Yankees.

Significance of Pop Culture to This Study

There are two problems regarding pop culture and women's self-development. First is the social problem, the one that hits home for most people. Second is the research problem, the one I coped with in conducting my study.

The Social Problem

Some critics believe that, although there are some exceptions, the prevailing message to women in our culture is still not as positive as it needs to be. They believe that throughout the history of our American culture the message to females has remained too much the same (Minh-Ha, 1991; Mumford, 1995; Raymond, 1990). That message is, "No matter what you are, it isn't good enough. You should try to be something else."

That message is still obviously pervasive throughout our culture (Premo, 1995). We learn it through ads, movies, TV, magazines, and all of the pop culture delivery systems. For example, the December 2001/January 2002 issue of *More* magazine, a magazine for "smart women" (p. 8), displays a cover that says, "A Time to Renew; 50 Ways to Give Back; Karen Hughes, What She Tells the President; Beauty Makeovers; Follow That Dream; Money Advice; Sex Check; Survivor Story; Lauren Hutton Rides High" (Blyth, 2001).

In her study about the effect of magazines on college women, Turner (1997) pre-tested two groups of women to ascertain what they considered to be society's ideal body type and found no difference between the two groups. Then one group viewed women's fashion magazines while the other group looked at news magazines. After just 13 minutes, women viewing fashion magazines perceived a lower ideal weight than did women who looked at news magazines.

The primary sources of women's negative perceptions of their own bodies are mass media messages and popular beliefs. Rodin, Silberstein, and Striegel-Moore (in Wolszon, 1998) say, "…in asking why legions of women pursue thinness like a career, we must first consider current cultural norms and stereotypes" (p. 269). Turner and Hamilton (1997) cite a number of researchers and deduce, "Given the messages aimed at women through the mass media, it is not surprising that many American women desire to be thin and that women typically feel dissatisfied with their bodies. (Altabe & Thompson, 1993; Brenner & Cunningham, 1992; Davis & Cowles, 1991; Koff, Rierdan, & Stubbs, 1990; Mintz & Betz, 1986)" (p. 2). Turner and Hamilton note that in 1960 an average Playboy centerfold weighed 91 percent of the female population mean. By 1978, that average was 85 percent, and that low average has been maintained (p. 1).

Wolszon (1998) states:

> The ideal for the female body, represented by actresses, models, and Miss American contestants, represents the thinnest 5 percent of women…. The fact that 95% of women cannot measure up to this ideal…is thought to be a central reason why a majority of women surveyed report significant dissatisfaction with their current body size and shape—a dissatisfaction that has been

> empirically linked to lower self-esteem, depression, and increased risk of eating disorders. (p. 4)

A woman may not realize it, but she's trying to keep up with unrealistic cultural expectations every time she tries to look thinner by putting on a pair of control-top pantyhose and high-heeled shoes. She's reinforcing the belief that she's not good enough the way she is and needs to try to be something else. That something else is what pop culture messages have told her to be.

Midlife women certainly aren't immune to those messages. They're older and wiser, but still humans immersed in our culture, after all. Apter (1995) found that letting go of images of what it means to be female that were formed in adolescence was the greatest challenge to midlife women. And body image is just the most obvious consequence of the influence of pop culture. Pop culture plays a role in the formation of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about many aspects of identity, and ultimately in self-development. But the effect of that role depends on the woman and how she interprets pop culture's messages. Does she pull on those agonizing control-top pantyhose with full knowledge of what she's doing, having made a clear decision to do it for reasons that benefit her or is she yanking them on without knowing why, being uncomfortable all day long and remaining oblivious to the reality that she has other options? Fiske (1998) puts it this way: "Popular culture is made by people at the interface between the products of the culture industries and everyday life—it stems from within…not from above" (p. 367). If women can become aware of and consider the fact that advertisers have a vested interest in making them feel insecure, they might look at advertising more objectively and respond to it more realistically.

The Research Problem

It's no surprise that there is no research that intersects pop culture, self-development, and midlife women. Minimalized by some scholars as leisure and entertainment (Warren, 1994), popular culture, and especially that of women, has not been taken seriously while researchers turned their attention to other matters, like theme parks, which were a popular subject of study in the 1990s (Giroux, 1999). The result is a paucity of information about this topic.

Warren (1994) says:

> Though popular culture has not been a foreign concept to cultural geographers, ironically we have neither the empirical nor the theoretical tools to study it adequately….That cultural geographers for so long have neglected the rich possibilities of popular culture is not surprising; they are merely echoing sentiments widespread throughout the social sciences. The most sustained commentary on the everyday has resolutely dismissed it as dangerously mindless 'mass culture.' Taking popular culture seriously is a novel idea. (p. 174-175)

Of those scholars who do consider pop culture, some believe it can be a corrosive, negative force, as discussed. But others believe that when combined with knowledge, when women are aware of concepts like those outlined here in order to know what they're dealing with, pop culture can be a positive force. By providing a multitude of examples and options, pop culture can foster creativity (Bacon-Smith, 1992), coping ability (Apfelbaum, 2000; Scodari, 1987), empowerment (Cortes, 1991), and camaraderie and community building (Jenkins, 1991). For example, creativity can be

encouraged from watching all of the creative ads on television. When people read self-help books, they might learn to cope with difficult situations, which empowers them. And, camaraderie and community building develop, for instance, when people enjoy the same television show and discuss it. Fandom, a term that has become popularized by Internet Websites with chat rooms for shows like *Star Trek* and *Xena*, has become a source of community to which many people are doggedly devoted (Fandata, 2000-2001).

Brown (1990) believes that we add to the necessary body of knowledge by creating "genres of discourse within which women can speak with full knowledge of and sympathy with the politically and socially subordinated position of women and yet seek to understand how women …can and do use what is available to them" (p. 210). Knowledge is the key.

Giroux and R. I. Simon (1989) address the lack of knowledge about pop culture when they note that educational theory and practice has ignored the fact that children learn through pop culture. R. K. Simon (1999) recognized the same shortcoming for higher education. The absence of information about popular culture and learning for midlife women illustrates that the same is true for them.

Yet, even though solid information is hard to come by in this case, a theoretical framework is needed in order to situate this study within cultural studies. Therefore, Warren's (1994) theory seems to be an appropriate foundation, combining many of the concepts already discussed as being relevant to this study. Warren's approach is to look at popular culture in two related ways:

> First, it incorporates the…view of culture as a fluid entity always being created, contested and recreated. Second, it attempts to situate the dynamics of

> cultural practices within the confines – and resources – of a mass-mediated world. These two threads…can become the groundwork for studying popular culture. (p. 175)

This approach combines the fluidity and adaptability of popular culture as individuals interpret it within the reality of mass-media-influenced traditions. Add to that groundwork Giroux and R. I. Simon's (1989) and R. K. Simon's (1999) contentions that people learn from popular culture and a solid foundation is set for this study.

Midlife women learn from popular culture. Pop culture—movies, magazines, tabloids, catalogs, advertisements, radio, TV, romance novels, self-help books, music, fashion, the Internet, seminars, and so much more—is a reality that can have a positive or negative effect. It can be simultaneously enjoyable and annoying, and illuminating and confusing. Midlife women sort through the confusion and learn what they can from pop culture so they can get on with living.

In sum, this pop culture section of the literature review provides definitions and models of pop culture theory, a historical perspective of North American pop culture in the 1900s, and a discussion on the significance of pop culture to this study. A variety of scholars' viewpoints are covered and, although scholars sometimes disagree on the exact nature of the influence of pop culture in our lives, most agree that pop culture does affect beliefs, behaviors, and daily practices. Pop culture, therefore, cannot help but have an impact on adult development, including the self-development of midlife women.

Self-development for Midlife Women

Midlife, the time of life between ages 40 and 60, begins with a time of transition and change for women. Their bodies, minds, relationships, work situations, and

spirituality can each and all change in ways that open up new possibilities for living life to the fullest. Some women breeze through the transition from youth into midlife, embracing new perspectives and new opportunities; some women are caught indisposed and panic over their first gray hair, but calm down and adjust over time; and, some women never accept the aging process as a natural part of life. When asked in a television interview what is good about getting older, Cher (2002), the flamboyant, fifty-something singer and actress replied, "Nothing." Other women, however, "experience midlife as a time of renewal and rebirth…one of the best times of their lives" (Marston, 2001, p. 4).

What makes the difference? Why do some women die on the vine and others bloom in midlife? Research offers no definitive answers to these questions, but does provide some interesting considerations. For example, Hancock (1989) found that women who have rewarding relationships prior to midlife are likely to be sustained by those relationships when making the transition into midlife. Bateson (1989) found that an ability to deal with change is a key skill. She says, "…fluidity and discontinuity are hallmarks of women's lives" (p. 137) and women who dealt well with that before will most likely do so in midlife. Hancock (1989) says that women who retrieve "the girl within" (title), what Marston (1991) calls the "wild girl" (p. 219), that child they once were that felt no fear and no limitations, seem to thrive in midlife. And an overriding similarity amongst women who adapt to midlife seems to be a willingness and an ability to learn, to move beyond what they know and construct new knowledge (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), knowledge that helps them build the lives they want.

These factors are substantiated in studies and, more importantly, seem to be good common sense. Yet some scholars hesitate to make assumptions about women. "Instead

of continuing their futile attempts to identify what is commonly experienced among women at midlife, researchers have begun to investigate what factors may influence the different ways women experience these transitions" (Lippert, 1997, p. 16). Lippert contends that midlife women are individuals who cannot be categorized. She quotes Gilbert as saying, "'Midlife women are myth-defying in their complexity' (Gilbert; 1993)" (p. 21).

Assumptions have been made about midlife women based on studies of a few women and on studies of men. It was thought "what was true for the gander was true for the goose" (McQuaide, 1998, p. 21). Lippert (1997) concludes, "As more women at midlife tell their stories and have them listened to and affirmed, appreciation of the complexity of women's midlife transitions will surely deepen" (p. 21).

Thus, with the understanding that women should not be confined to categories and assumptions cannot be made, a review of literature that relates to women's self-development is helpful in understanding different things that may be going on with different women. Rather than assuming that these theories apply to most women and that every aspect of a theory is applicable, relevant parts of these suppositions can be used to enlighten us about possibilities for women.

Most pertinent to the self-development of midlife women are studies on adult development and transition, and studies on how women learn in social context. Transitional changes influence a woman's development in midlife and learning is key to adapting to and benefiting from those changes. Learning takes place in social context, in the culture in which women live. Therefore, this portion of the literature review will

focus on two areas: (1) adult development and midlife transition, and (2) how women learn in social context.

Adult Development and Midlife Transition

"Most of the work in adult development has been driven by the psychological tradition and focuses on the individual's internal process of development. Out of this tradition have grown the most prevalent theories of development" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 94). In keeping with that tradition, earlier foundational theories of development "often have been conceptualized as a patterned or ordered progression tied to chronological time" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 94). Many of the early, foundational theories of adult development depict people as going through particular stages of psychological development at certain ages.

Furthermore, some researchers have "concentrated on life's transitions, such as marriage, birth of a child, or death" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 94). Bee (2000) describes transitions as "periods of disequilibrium, which we might think of as turning points in individual lives" (p. 412). Transitions are times of imbalance between the more stable stages of development and can be critical decision-making times. Some theorists consider transitions between stages to be predictable stages of development in their own right that often motivate a person to learn new ways of thinking, coping, and operating (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996).

However, there is a burgeoning concern about how social and cultural forces, like social class, race, and gender, influence adult development. Some studies have suggested that stage theories do not apply to most women and that women develop in a nonlinear rather than linear, stage-based fashion (Belenky et al., 1986/1997; Gilligan, 1993;

Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996; Helgesen, 1995; Rossiter, 1999). Still, the foundational, stage-based theories offer intriguing information in the investigation of adult development for midlife women, especially during the time of transition from early adulthood into midlife. Therefore, foundational, stage-based studies as well as other, more recent studies are reviewed.

Foundational, Stage-based Studies

Jung's research led him to contend that there are three responses to facing midlife: (1) facing the reality of aging which leads to erosion of attachment and disillusionment, (2) rebelling, which alarms others and can turn into depression, and (3) transition into accepting middle age, which allows a person to use his or her gifts (Jung, 1954; Stein, 1983). Although Jung's research was conducted on men and he assumed that his findings transferred to women when there was no evidence that these stages are an issue for women (McQuaide, 1998), his findings bring up considerations for women.

Women can certainly be disillusioned in midlife. Disillusionment can lead to depression and depression for some women during menopause is well substantiated in medical literature (Bloch, 2002; Vanturenhout & Ansseau, 1999; Watch, 2001)). Although studies indicate that most women do not experience depression during menopause (Bloch, 2002; Lippert, 1997; McQuaide, 1998), some do. According to medical research, depression can be chemically induced because of hormone imbalance during menopause (Genazzani et al., 1982; Watch, 2001)). Other research implies that depression can also be culturally manipulated by media messages that tell women that they no longer fit the norm (Bloch, 2002) and are supposed to be depressed as they age, as evidenced in television advertisements for Prozac and other mood-altering drugs

(Fracassa, 1999). So, Jung's contention that midlife transition can lead to depression is valid for some, but not most, women. And, his theory that with acceptance of middle age a person can use his or her gifts has been replicated in recent studies on women (Stewart, Ostrove, & Helson, 2001).

Another foundational study that offers a noteworthy concept for women is E. H. Erikson's notion of generativity, which Bee (2000) reports that he defined as, "'…the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation' (Erikson, 1963, p. 267)" (p. 37). Generativity is one of E. H. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development that he formulated based on studies conducted primarily on men and that were generally assumed to apply to both men and women. He later admitted that his stages, including generativity, may not be true for many women (Bee, 2000; McQuaide, 1998). Ryff and Migdal (1984), and Stewart, Ostrove, and Helson (2001) validated that women are not particularly concerned with generativity. Other studies of women and men, however, substantiated the importance of generativity, revealing that transferring knowledge and experience to younger generations becomes especially important to people during midlife (Fisher, 1991; Kotre, 1999-2000).

McAdams (1993) acknowledges that generativity, as E. H. Erikson suggested, seems to become more important to people in midlife. However, McAdams, with agreement from Edelstein (1997), contends that generativity can take a variety of forms over long periods of time, not just in midlife, as people face the reality of immortality at different times. "It is a mistake to say, as does Erik Erikson, that generativity is a discrete stage in the human life cycle…This is too neat to be true" (McAdams, 1993, p. 232). McAdams cites Lifton as identifying five ways in which adults are generative throughout

their lives: (1) biologically, by having children; (2) culturally, by contributing works of art, science, literature, etc.; (3) religiously, by believing in an afterlife; (4) naturalistically, by venerating the natural order of things; and, (5) mystically, by feeling divine bliss, usually as a result of an epiphany.

E. H. Erikson's belief that identity is formed by late adolescence or early adulthood, although reinforced in Josselson's (1987) study that found that such is true for women as well as men, is also a problem for McAdams. McAdams (1993) says, "I do not see identity formation as confined to late adolescence and young adulthood…. Once an individual realizes that he or she is responsible for defining the self, the issue of self-definition remains a preoccupation through most of the adult years" (p 95-96). Identity formation is still an issue for people in midlife.

Gould (1978) identified six stages of adult development, including midlife, and wrote of the adult life cycle as being a time of dynamic change. He found that when a person questions old assumptions, transition leads to transformation. Many of those assumptions, however, are deeply rooted in childhood illusions and "myths" (in Bee, 2000, p. 40), so giving them up is an emotional task that is most likely to ensue during midlife. Adults tend to carry with them, for example, the childlike belief that life is controllable. This type of unrealistic notion is important for women to become aware of, especially as they make the transition into midlife, a time that can bring with it factors like physiological changes that are out of their control. Gould also discusses key events, like an unwanted divorce, as forced precipitators of adult development. He says, "Certain key events…force us to see ourselves more as the creators of our lives and less as living out the lives we thought were our destiny" (in Parker, 1997, p. 64).

Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) described midlife transition as "a bridge between early adulthood and middle adulthood" (p. 191), in which three major tasks need attention: (1) a reappraisal of early adulthood, (2) testing new choices, and (3) dealing with "polarities" (p. 192) that cause deep divisions in a person's life (p. 192). In essence, one must let go of the illusions of early adulthood, acknowledging that not all dreams and aspirations will be fulfilled. "Illusions can be tremendously harmful; but they can also inspire works of great nobility and accomplishment. They play a crucial, helpful and hurtful part in the lives of most persons during early adulthood" (p. 193).

The concept of letting go of the illusion, of "the hero of the fairy tale" (p. 215), is especially pertinent to my study. McQuaide (1998) found that letting go of adolescent images of what they thought they would be like as grown women is one of the hardest things that midlife women have to do. Levinson et al. (1978) said that a person must "begin to grieve and accept the symbolic death of the youthful hero within himself…gradually discover which of the heroic qualities he can keep, which new qualities he can discover…and how he might be a hero of a different kind" (p. 215).

Levinson et al. (1978) detail a process of "individuation" that "refers to the changes in a person's relationship to himself and to the external world" (p. 195). Individuation allows a person to resolve the polarities of: (1) Young/Old [caps in original], balancing this time of life between youth and old age, facing mortality, and adjusting internal images of what it means to be young and to be old; (2) Destruction/Creation, coming to grips with the enormity of human beings' capacity to destroy and create, and trying to make meaning of that reality; (3) Masculine/ Feminine,

opening up to feelings and abilities that are labeled in our culture as being inappropriate for one's gender, and (4) Attachment/Separateness, finding a comfortable equilibrium between closeness to others and autonomy. Usually one part of each polarity has been neglected during early adulthood, causing turmoil and crisis in the midlife transition as these parts "urgently seek expression" (p. 200).

Also meaningful to my study on the role that pop culture plays in women's lives is Levinson's contention that as a person becomes more individuated, a process of "detribalization" (p. 242) occurs. The person looks less to others in his social matrix for reinforcement and recognition. "He is less dependent upon tribal rewards, more questioning of tribal values, more able to look at life from a universalistic perspective" (p. 242).

The Levinson studies were conducted on men and assumptions were made that the same issues were true for women. Therefore, some researchers set out to see if some of the Levinson findings were in fact true for women. Caffarella and Olson (1993) report a number of the resulting findings: Goodman (1980) found that women do experience life stages; however, women's concerns about marriage and childbearing during the midlife transition were understandably different from men's concerns at that stage; Kahnweiler (1980) ascertained that midlife women felt a "real time limitation as they were just getting to the point of forming a 'dream' for their lives" (p. 131); and, Murrell and Donahue (1982) and Roberts and Newton (1987) discovered that women did experience transitional periods related to age, validating Levinson's theory that they would. However, Roberts and Newton found that "women's dreams of their adult life were more

complex than most men's…their life structures seem less stable and more conflicted" (in Caffarella & Olson, 1993, p. 131).

With their earlier omission of women in mind, in the early 1980s Levinson and Levinson (Albelda & Tilly, 1997) conducted a study on women in which life transitions are categorized according to age, like in their earlier work. They found that "although each individual life is unique, everyone goes through the same basic sequence" (p. 14). "In this sequence, periods in which we build and maintain a structure alternate with transitional periods in which the structure is transformed" (p. 24). They found that the women in their study experienced sequences very similar to men's, including stages of Life Structure [caps in original], comparatively stable times of building and maintenance, in-between which are unstable times of transformative transition. For example, they report that men and women make an Age 30 Transition, which is the most difficult of all transitions, then move into the Culminating Life Structure of Early Adulthood between the ages of 33 and 40, and make the Midlife Transition between the ages of 40 and 45. The Entry Life Structure for Middle Adulthood lasts until age 50, when there is an Age 50 Transition, and Culminating Middle Adulthood lasts from 55-60. Late Adulthood begins at 60.

What is key about the Levinson's (1996) theory is that a:

> …transitional period terminates the existing life structure and creates the possibility for a new one. The primary tasks of every transitional period are to reappraise the existing structure, to explore the possibilities for changes in self and world, and to move toward commitment to the crucial choices that form the basis for a new life structure in the ensuing period. (p. 25)

During the Age 50 Transition, the Levinsons (1996) say, “Development crises are common in this period, especially for persons who have made few significant life changes, or inappropriate changes, in the previous ten to fifteen years” (p. 26). Especially relevant to my study are their findings that midlife women often questioned their marriages, many feeling their relationships with their spouses were “stagnant” (p. 173), and they questioned their careers, not having experienced “the incredible joy of having it all” (p. 370) as they had expected. Without significant change, marriages dissolved and careers shifted during the midlife transition more than in any other time of life.

Caffarella and Olson (1993) summarize their review of literature on the psychosocial development of women by positing that some key concepts of foundational studies are confirmed in cross-validation studies on women, including: (1) the idea of alternating and stable life periods, (2) the importance of having a solid sense of identity; and, (3) a need for intimacy.

However, they note that:

> What was markedly different from each of the original theories tested was the general lack of agreement as to what each life period contained, and disagreement with the notion of development being a clear linear process based on individual decision making. What surfaced as central to the developmental growth of women was the web of relationships and connectedness to others. (Caffarella & Olson, 1993, p. 135)

Even though many scholars (Bateson, 1994; Belenky et al., 1986/1997; Gilligan, 1993; Goldberger et al., 1996; Helgesen, 1995; McAdams, 1989) do not agree that specific age stages apply to most women, it’s doubtful that many would argue that there

are unsettling times of transition that can lead to transformation in a woman's life. Those times might occur at different ages for different people, especially if there is an off-time event like young widowhood or a menopausal pregnancy; but, nevertheless, transitions do occur, calling for a restructuring of a woman's life.

All of these earlier adult development theorists, Jung, E. H. Erikson, Gould, and the Levinsons, lay the groundwork for considering tasks and issues that are of concern to women making the transition into midlife today. A more in-depth examination of other, non-stage-based women's adult development theory exposes further areas of concern.

Other, Non-stage-based Studies

"If there is one quality that characterizes adults of all ages, it is variability" (Schlossberg, 1990, p. 8). Schlossberg believes that adult behavior is determined not by age, but by "transitions, life events, stresses, and pleasures" (p.9) that can happen at any time in a person's life. In this life-events approach, rather than an age or stage approach, to adult development she asks, "Is the transition a personal one at work, a personal one with neighbors, or a family conflict?" (p. 9). These types of events and "non-events" (p. 9), the absence of an expected event like having a baby or being promoted at work, are what impel people to learn and change. She reminds us that it is not the event or non-event itself that makes a difference, but a person's interpretation of it. Only the person involved can determine if there has been a transition and what impact it's had on life.

Many studies now focus on women's stories that disclose what the storytellers, rather than the researchers, define as transitions and how the storytellers describe the impact of those transitions. With the onset of these types of adult development studies by, on, and about women, more issues regarding midlife for women have been identified than

ever before. These issues, because there are a number of them, can best be analyzed singularly, looking at studies that relate to each one. After reviewing a number of major studies, I've generated a list of five issues that women report experiencing during the transition into midlife and throughout midlife: changes in body, mind, relationships, work, and spirituality. Change can be uneventful in one area of midlife for a woman and dramatic in another. It can be uneventful in all areas or dramatic in all areas. Each woman encounters midlife in her own way, as surely as each women experiences life in her own way.

Body. The most obvious change for women entering midlife is the commencement of menopause, which brings with it physiological changes that are hardly noticed by some women and extremely obvious for others. There are more studies on menopause than any other studies addressing issues for midlife women (McQuaide, 1997). Menopause is, of course, an important transition in a woman's life, bringing with it physical issues, like the potential for hot flashes, which are debilitating for 10 to 15 percent of women (Gower, 2002; Loprinzi, Barton, Rhodes, & Wahner-Roedler, 2001), and the onset of osteoporosis, which will plague 20 to 30 percent of women at some point in later life (Watch, 2002). Concerns about the physical ramifications of menopause are warranted.

Lippert (1997) noted, though, that cultural and social influences cannot be overlooked in explaining how North American women experience menopause. She says, "Japanese women reported fewer…hot flashes…than did American women, rural Mayan women tended to look forward to menopause…and Swedish women tended to gain self-esteem and a stronger sense of identity after menopause (Krieger, 1995)" (p. 17). These

findings imply that "physiological, psychological, cultural, and environmental factors all need to be considered when attempting to explain a woman's experience of menopause" (Lippert, 1997, p. 17).

One study found two factors to be important in a North American woman's ability to adjust to menopause: (1) If a woman expected menopause to be difficult, it was, and (2) If she was satisfied with her body prior to menopause, she was likely to remain so during and after menopause (Bloch, 2002). A woman's perception of her physiological changes is as important to her experience of midlife as the actual physiological changes.

Hurd's (2000) study indicates that there is a gap between what actually happens to a woman's body as she ages and what she thinks has happened, with women viewing their bodies as exhibiting more change, for example percent of weight gain, than has actually occurred. Unfortunately, such studies on body image for older women are scant. Most of the information on body image comes from studies conducted on girls and women of traditional college age. Consequently, the best we can do is guess at the possible applicability of such studies for midlife women.

In her study of college women, Wolszon (1998) asks, "Why do women act as if they believe that the shape of their lives depends on the shape of their bodies?" (p. 6). The answer is they act that way because that's what they believe, based on what they have learned from our culture. "Anxiety about body weight and shape, and related attempts to diet, start at an early age for females, and frequently take a serious toll on girls' and women's mental and physical well-being" (p. 1). Wolszon found that pervasive body image discontent is associated with "psychological risks such as low self-esteem and depression" (p. 2).

What similarities might there be between the younger women in these studies and midlife women? Bergquist, Greenberg, and Klaum (1993) found in their study that midlife women, like younger women, were "either obsessively concerned with health, exercise, and diet or 'defiantly' resistant to these concerns" (p. 41). They found that more women than men were concerned about diet and weight, and some women considered their overweight bodies to be their greatest failure in life. Marston (2001) believes that rejection of one's own aging body is a type of self-hatred that is constructed out of fear. She quotes Judith Viorst as saying, "For if youth is linked to beauty, and beauty is linked to a woman's sexual attractiveness, and her sexual attractiveness is important to her winning and holding a man, then age's assaults on beauty can catapult her into a terror of abandonment" (p. 36). There are a multitude of ramifications that result from the way a woman perceives her body.

Body image can hinder or help a midlife woman's adult development. A woman who sees herself as a failure because she doesn't measure up to the media's ideal female form is going to have a harder time accepting midlife. Conversely, a woman who defines the ideal body for herself and doesn't worry about external messages is going to be more open to all of the changes, physical and otherwise, that will ensue in her middle years. Apter (1995) says that in midlife a woman can unveil "an interest in her body as something that is her own, whose meaning she constructs" (p. 63).

Mind. Along with constructing meaning, women in transition benefit from an ability to construct new knowledge, thinking critically, and learning. Bergquist et al. (1993) found that many midlifers, especially women, wish they had acquired more education. A renewed interest in reading is common and travel is seen as a learning

opportunity. It's a common belief that one's ability to learn, to experience continuous cognitive development, begins to diminish around age forty. Contrarily, Schaie (2000) discovered that although there are changes in mental ability associated with aging, they don't occur until about age sixty and the greatest changes occur for abilities that are least practiced. He also found that IQ is maintained until at least age sixty. Likewise, Craik and Jennings (in Bee, 2000) found that although long-term memory does diminish with age, rather than completely losing the ability to retrieve information, retrieval just becomes slower. Short-term memory is sustained for most common daily tasks, like recalling a seven-digit phone number. Hillman (1997) believes that as a person ages she collects so much information that her brain starts tossing out the useless stuff, like cleaning out a file. For example, forgetting an unpleasant niece's name isn't an accident; the subconscious brain tossed that file because it didn't want it anymore. So, there might not be as much relationship between cognitive development and aging as between cognitive development and other factors, like brain capacity and preferences.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) note that developmental gradients in cognition may be related more to social context than to age, thereby being more closely related to the environment in which one lives and to the people with which one associates than with age. In this way, cognitive development is related to pop culture. "Social, cultural, economic, and political forces help shape both how we think and what kind of knowledge we value" (p. 167).

Dialectical thinking, an ability to see the big picture and accept different viewpoints, is important to adult cognitive development. "Dialectical thinking, as represented by the work of Riegel (1973), Kramer (1983, 1989), and Kegan (1994),

allows for the acceptance of alternative truths or ways of thinking about the many contradictions and paradoxes that we face in everyday life" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 167). Midlife transition presents women with many contradictions and paradoxes. Considering new truths and options, and making sense of it all, are some of the mind's tasks during midlife.

Bergquist et al. (1993) write, "As learners, men and women in their fifties tend to be experience-rich and theory-poor. They want to make sense of, and find meaning in, their diverse life experiences, rather than simply be exposed to more experiences" (p. 52). Meaning-making is a common theme in studies on midlife. Mackeracher (1996) says, "Humans are 'meaning making' organisms. Perry (1970) states that what an organism does is organize and what a human organism organizes is meaning. The most fundamental thing we do with our life experiences is to organize them by making sense of them and giving them meaning (Kegan, 1982)" (p. 4).

The acquisition of wisdom facilitates meaning-making. "Wisdom is often seen as the pinnacle or hallmark of adult thinking. It is something we all speak about and sometimes yearn for as we face the many challenges of adult life" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 161). Maciel (1992) defines wisdom as "expert knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life" (p. 1). Wisdom, according to Ardelt (2000), increases with age.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) cite different researchers who connect wisdom to different aspects of learning. "Sternberg (1986B, pp. 177-178) sought to discover people's conceptions or implicit theories of wisdom by exploring 'the nature and the interrelationships of intelligence, wisdom and creativity'" (p. 163). Steinberg found that

wise people were perceived as having many of the same traits as intelligent people, and more.

Steinberg (1986b) says:

> But the wise person has a certain sagacity that is not necessarily found in the intelligent person…. The wise individual is especially well able to make clear, sensible, and fair judgments and is perceived to profit from the experiences of others and…learn from others' mistakes, as well as from his or her own (p. 186). (in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 163.)

J. M. Erikson (in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) connects wisdom to humor and says, "'When we can see ourselves as funny, it eases this daily living in such close proximity with ourselves' (p. 182)" (p. 164). The wisdom to incorporate humor into life stands a person in good stead over the years. Merriam and Caffarella conclude that, "Wisdom is grounded in life's rich experiences and therefore is developed through the process of aging…. Moreover, wisdom seems to consist of the ability…to make sound judgments related to our daily existence, whatever our circumstances" (p. 165).

This review of dialectical thinking, wisdom, humor, and other factors of cognitive development reveals that women can construct new knowledge and learn as they make the transition into midlife. The aging process has not diminished their mental abilities enough to prohibit them from using their minds to see alternative truths, construct new knowledge, and create new opportunities for living. By accepting aging as not only a natural but a rich part of life and by being realistic about the social context, like pop culture, that surrounds them, they can make meaning of midlife and ultimately of life itself.

Relationships. "Most people, when asked to describe their life histories, divide them into chapters…. Marriage, divorce, and childbearing become chapter headings in women's lives because of the way they produce—or demand—an entire restructuring of life around commitments to others" (Bateson, 1989, p. 75). Changing relationships are another aspect of midlife transition to which women attend. Traditional models have assumed that autonomy indicates a highly developed sense of self for adults (Bee, 2000). Yet for many women relationships are more important than independence and autonomy. Gilligan (1993) maintains that although the truth of separation is recognized in most developmental texts, the reality of continuing connection is lost. Recent models assert that interdependence, the continuing connection of relationships, indicates a highly developed sense of self for many, perhaps even most, women (Caffarella & Olson, 1993).

Many researchers have found that relationships are key to a woman's self-development (Baruch & Brooks-Gunn, 1984; Merriam & Clark, 1991; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1991). McQuaide (1998) found that involvement with others, especially women friends, equated to feelings of happiness in midlife. Some studies indicate that it's a variety of meaningful relationships that make a difference in a woman's development (Bee, 2000; Bergquist et al., 1993; Lippert, 1997; McQuaide, 1998).

It's easy to make the assumption that a woman's relationships with her children are important during this time of transition. By midlife, children are grown or at least aren't babies. (Of course, there are exceptions.) Midlife is the time of the postparental period, more commonly known as the empty nest, when children are usually moving away from home. But Lippert (1997) reports that contrary to the expected "grief, depression, anxiety, worry, freedom, relief, and guilt" (p. 17), each woman reacts in

accordance with her previous adaptation to the role of mother. Lippert says, "The postparental period does not seem to be universally problematic, but instead may act as a 'trigger event' for some women by unveiling other issues, such as unresolved losses or poor coping skills (Black & Hill, 1984)" (p. 18).

Hayes (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) uses an example of motherhood to remind us that some women have experiences similar to our patriarchal society's expectations when they enjoy motherhood while some women have experiences different from the "romanticized myths about motherhood" (p. 41) and find the role unfulfilling. The empty nest is a haven to the latter.

Women who can't love at all, however, never truly grow up, according to hooks (2002). She states that, although our society's patriarchal thinking has made men emotionally withholding and thereby difficult to love, there is still a place in women's lives for the love of men. In fact, midlife women have an advantage in that they have usually learned that, contrary to societal messages, a woman does not have to be good to be loved and a woman begins the process of love by loving herself. Once a woman cultivates respect and care for herself, hooks says, she can love her partner, her past, her career, and even her parents.

A goal of self-development for women is a delicate balance between self-care and care of others (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Bakan (1966) and hooks (2002) call it communion, and McAdams (1993) defines communion as "the overlapping strivings for love, intimacy, interdependence, acceptance, and interpersonal experiences suffused with the emotion of joy" (p. 71). McAdams distinguishes between love and intimacy, though both are facets of communion. Love is more complicated because there are so many

kinds of love, including erotic love, friendship love, and love of humanity. On the other hand, "To be intimate is to share one's inner self with another. Through sharing, people come to know each other better, and to care for each other" (p. 289). Intimacy can be a component of and can improve love, but love, especially erotic love and love of humanity, doesn't always involve intimacy. In one study, McAdams found that there is a strong link between intimacy motivation at about age thirty and overall psychosocial adjustment seventeen years later in midlife. In another study he found that women who scored high in intimacy motivation were happy with their life roles compared to women low in intimacy motivation. He says, "Many theories of personality and psychotherapy suggest that the capacity for intimacy is a hallmark of adjustment and maturity in life" (p. 289).

Work. Considering that the workplace is where many women spend the majority of their waking hours, a woman's job cannot help but play a role in her adult development. Studies have shown that work satisfaction correlates with general well-being (Merriam & Clark, 1991). In midlife, work satisfaction tends to shift from being proud of how others perceive one's work to being more concerned with the meaning of that work to oneself (Bergquist et al., 1993). For those who have the option of engaging in meaningful work, that work can contribute to their adult development by providing income, personal satisfaction, social relationships, and generativity (Mor-Barak, 1995). But, for those who have limited options, real or perceived, work might not contribute to a sense of self. In fact, the longer a person holds an unsatisfying job, the more likely it will lead to "stagnation" and "refusal to grow" for middle-aged people (Bergquist et al., 1993, p. 7).

Contributing to work dissatisfaction for many midlife women is the reality that, even though they've worked hard for many years, job parity is nowhere in sight. There are societal barriers, like sexism, ageism, and cronyism in our patriarchal system that prohibit women from achieving professional goals (Cunningham, 1996). Mix ageism with the wage gap and there's even more disparity for midlife women. "In 1998, women on average earned 76 cents for every dollar a man earned. But women by age 55 earned just 69 cents" (Glasheen & Crowley, 1999, p. 4). Women are not expected to achieve pay parity until 2050 (Glasheen & Crowley, 1999, p. 8), too late for women who are in midlife at the beginning of the century. Women who are qualified still find it difficult to penetrate that glaring glass ceiling, which former Labor Secretary Herman referred to as the "cement ceiling" for women of color (Glasheen & Crowley, 1999, p. 3). Women can become disillusioned, angry, and deflated by such inequities. Lippert (1997) concludes, "Biological, social and psychological factors all affect the quality of the experience a woman has in a particular role" (p. 18). Thus, a woman's exposure or lack of exposure to unequal treatment can contribute to dissatisfaction or satisfaction with her role as a career woman.

Adding to a potentially bleak impact of work on adult development is a study that found that the more television a person watches the more likely she will be dissatisfied with her standard of living, feeling that she doesn't have an exciting enough job and doesn't make enough money to live the lifestyle she deserves (Sirgy et al., 1998). So, the more able a woman is to partake of work that is important and meaningful to her, and the less she watches TV, the more likely she'll be satisfied with her work and the more likely that satisfaction will contribute to her self-development throughout midlife and beyond.

One great aspect of midlife is that it is a time of reflection and reinvention, a time when a woman who is not fulfilled in her work is more likely to be motivated to seek another, more satisfying career (Bergquist et al., 1993).

Spirituality. "Spirituality is not the same as religion;" Tisdell (2000b) reminds us. "Religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one's personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose" (p.309).

Tisdell (2000b) continues:

> Spirituality is an elusive term and an elusive concept, but perhaps this is so because it is all encompassing and cannot be torn from other aspects of one's life, including one's cultural experience, one's further development, or one's social change work in the world. For many it is a term that connotes wholeness and what gives meaning and coherence to life. (p. 335)

The quest for wholeness, meaning, and coherence is common amongst women, according to some studies. In their study of women and religion, McDonald and Farran (1996) describe "the emergence of a new women's spirituality movement that is making itself felt around the world…." (p. 46). They and others (Donaldson, 1996; Keshgegian & Baer, 2000; Lauver, 2000; Lesher, 2000; Powers, 1995; Slee, 2001; Spellmeyer, 1999; Tisdell, 2000b; Williamson, 1993) are finding that the male-as-God image simply does not resonate for many women today. McDonald and Farran (1996) report that "although women's church attendance has more than halved over the past four decades—with only 25 percent now reporting regular attendance at services—60 percent still expressed spiritual needs" (p.50).

Slee (2001) reports, "…women's spirituality is essentially relational in character, rooted in a strong sense of connection to others…. This is in contrast to the classic pattern of male development as enshrined in the major psychological accounts…which describe a process of individuation…." (p. 2). Tisdell (2000b) points out that some scholars consider discussion of spirituality to be irrational and unworthy of scholarly study. However, Tisdell found that the women in her study were very rational in examining their values in order to consider new types of spiritual practice. McDonald and Farran (1996) quote San Francisco psychoanalyst Jean Shinoda Bolen as calling this the "third wave" (p. 49) of the women's movement. The first wave dealt with political and economic unfairness, and the second with relationship inequity. Bolen (in McDonald & Farran, 1996) says, "Now, we're defining who we are and what matters to us" (p. 49).

What matters to many women, according to Tisdell (2000b), are three main themes related to spirituality: "further development of self-awareness, a sense of interconnectedness, and a relationship to a higher power" (p. 32). In developing self-awareness, women are, Tisdell contends, "…moving beyond the religious tradition of their childhood…and reframing the life-enhancing elements…while developing a more meaningful adult spirituality" (p. 38). The interconnectedness component of spirituality for women concerns connecting with oneself and others as well as a "spiritual connection to ancestors" (Tisdell, 2000b, p. 40). Daily meditation or prayer to align with that spiritual connection becomes important to many women. "I do pray to a goddess-like presence," author Swan (in McDonald & Farran, 1996) says. "But I don't know whether she's a metaphor for my inner self or whether there's some spiritual force beyond the individual person" (p. 46). The higher power aspect of spirituality has turned away from

the image of a male to a more inclusive vision of "God the All-Holy, Maker and Mother" (McDonald & Farran, 1996, p. 48). Many have turned to the image of Goddess.

According to Donaldson's (1996) research, the new Goddess image that women seek entails five interrelated characteristics. The first characteristic is that the Goddess "is being reborn" (p. 202). Donaldson says, "Like all births, it is part glory, part fear, and part mystery" (p. 202). The second characteristic is that the Goddess is cyclic. "As constant in change as the rotating of seasons, the phases of the moon, the growth from infancy to maturation…." (p. 203). The third characteristic is a connection to nature; the fourth is that she is "spiritual, but not religious" (p. 203); and, the fifth characteristic is that the Goddess "is shared, a collective regeneration of personal power" (p. 203). Donaldson adds, "She is woman power" (p. 203).

Likewise, Tisdell (2000b) reports that the women in her study connected to the theme of power by disclosing that spirituality is "a way of life that requires attention to the inner world through centering and meditation, but it also requires action in the world" (p.327). Spiritual growth encouraged the women "to take new action in their personal lives…" and "facilitated the development of…their authentic identity" (p. 324).

Clearly, a reframing of spiritual beliefs serves as a component of self-development for many women in midlife. H. L. Cohen (2001), Marston (2001), and Tisdell (2000b) all noted that this is a quality unique to midlife women.

H. L. Cohen says:

> As a result of the spiritual transformation process, women's relationship with the Divine deepens, which is expressed internally and externally by transformation in their spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices. Also, their

> relationship with the larger culture is altered, as are the beliefs they hold about themselves as women in midlife. (p. 211)

Marston (2001) found that the midlife women she interviewed, regardless of religion, had changed their daily practices as they aged, and "…have one thing in common: Their spirituality is no longer something they devote themselves to only on Sunday….It now encompasses their lives, moment by moment, day by day" (p. 211). Tisdell (2000b) related that her subjects were midlife women in their 40s and 50s, which "may suggest that the development of their spirituality…is somewhat age related" (p. 332).

Furthermore, Donaldson (1996) notes that development of new spirituality is facilitated by our culture's mass media, which allows for new images to "reduce cross-cultural boundaries; thus, non-Western women's spiritual traditions may be more easily accessed" (p. 204). Those traditions are becoming more evident in Western society, Donaldson believes, especially with the growth of Goddess, nature, and meditation-centered spiritual practices. One of Tisdell's (2000b) participants noted, "Culture is a way to express spirituality…." (p. 328). Tisdell also reports that Fowler suggests that image and symbols manifested through music and stories can facilitate spiritual education (p. 354).

But not all studies have found that spiritual growth is paramount to women in midlife. When McQuaide (1998) conducted her study on 103 midlife women, one of her premises was that spirituality would contribute to women's feelings of happiness in midlife. She expected that in their interviews women would reveal that believing in a higher power helped sustain them through midlife transition. She was shocked to

discover that, for her group, spirituality had no bearing whatsoever. Instead, her participants disclosed that an annual income of $30,000 or more, good women friends, future goals, high self-esteem, and positive midlife role models were most important to their happiness.

Disparate study results such as McQuaide's remind us that midlife women are disparate. Spirituality is so intensely personal that each woman develops it in her own unique way.

Adapting to Change

Changes in some, if not all, of these aspects of a woman's life—body, mind, relationships, work, and spirituality—are likely to occur during the transition into and throughout midlife. Bee (2000) lists a number of factors that affect the resolution of the disequilibrium experienced during transition, including intellectual ability, good coping skills, outcome of previous disequilibrium periods, faith, availability of intimate confidants, and temperament. If a woman does not have at least some of these factors in her life, she will be more likely than others to experience maladaptive changes like illness, self-destructive behavior, psychological regression, and substance abuse during her transition into midlife. If a woman does have these factors in her life, she will more likely experience adaptive changes like maturation, improved mental health, and improved physical health (Bee, 2000).

Also helpful in adapting to transitions is a woman's understanding of her own adult development. One concept that consistently appears when reviewing literature on adult development and transition for midlife women is that women's development takes a nonlinear course and does not adhere to predictable stages (Belenky et al., 1986/1997;

Gilligan, 1993; Goldberger et al., 1996; Keshet, 1997; Lippert, 1997; McQuaide, 1998; Miller, 1976; Rossiter, 1999; Surrey, 1991; Tisdell, 2000a). If a woman believes that she is supposed to fit prescribed stages and she doesn't, she can believe there's something wrong with her (Kubler-Ross, 1997; Lippert, 1997). Or, if she experiences a transition at a different time than others, if she's "off time" (Bee, 2000, p. 13), she can believe that there's something wrong with her. On the other hand, if she appreciates her own unique transitions and phases in life, she will be more likely to adapt to change (Gilligan, 1993).

Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), who adhere to a life-events rather than a stage-based approach to adult development, say that adult readiness for change depends on four factors: (1) situation, (2) support, (3) self, and (4) strategies. Situation connotes determining and appraising the event or non-event, the trigger that instigated a call for change. Support means being open to help from other people and resources. Self refers to the individual's capacity for handling change and taking control of the situation. And, strategies signify an ability to either change the situation or change one's appraisal of the situation. All of these abilities, according to Sargent and Schlossberg, can be learned.

McAdams (1993) looks at adapting to change from another perspective. He believes that people create their own personal myths and that telling those mythical stories, which is what psychotherapy and autobiographies are all about, divulges insights into a number of facets of a person's life, including "key events" (p. 258) that had such a strong impact they determined the course of the person's life. In research interviews, he asks participants to describe a "…Turning point: an episode wherein you underwent a significant change in your understanding of yourself" (p. 258). Turning points can lead to

compelling life changes and understanding how she handled turning points in the past can help a woman learn, McAdams believes, how to handle future events in a positive way.

But, perceiving events in a positive light is a difficult task, according to Seligman (2002), because psychology in our culture has an "obsession with pathology" (p. 14) and teaches us to concentrate on our weaknesses rather than our strengths. Going beyond the concept pathology and learning about her unique "signature strengths" (p. 14) helps a woman become her authentic self who can handle changes and transitions in her own best way. Gilligan (2002) believes, however, that women in this culture have a hard time planning for and accepting positive outcomes because they have been taught that they are not deserving of pleasure. Learning how to become her strongest, most authentic self helps a woman make productive transitions that can result in the happiness to which she has a right.

How a woman handles transitions and whether the results of her life changes are adaptive or maladaptive depends to a great degree on her desire and ability to learn. If she is open to new ideas and new ways of looking at life, if she can add to her existing knowledge by creating new knowledge, and if she's willing to step outside of the constricting boundaries of our culture's expectations of women, midlife can be, as Marston (2000) found, one of the best times of life.

How Women Learn in Social Context

Bateson (1989) describes a woman's life as being like a quilt, with a variety of patchwork pieces that can't be appreciated until viewed as a whole. If a single piece, a single aspect or stage of life is analyzed, as is common in research, "The pattern and loving labor in the patchwork is lost" (p. 10). So, how can all of these pieces of women's

lives that I've just reviewed, the foundational pieces of pop culture and self-development, and the more intricate pieces within self-development that include body, mind, relationships, work, and spirituality, best be appreciated as whole life quilts? Piecing it all together leads back to my earlier premise that learning is essential for women as they navigate their way into new life territory and, furthermore, pop culture plays a key role in that learning (Giroux & Simon, 1989; Simon, 1999). In making the transition into midlife, women benefit from learning and constructing new knowledge, but it's not possible for them to do so in a vacuum. They are surrounded by the social context of their culture (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), particularly their day-to-day pop culture. Context is paramount to the process of self-development (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

In transformative learning theory Mezirow (1996) addresses the issue of context when he defines adult learning as making meaning of one's experiences. In transformative learning "we learn to negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over ourselves as socially responsible, clear thinking decision makers" (p. 8). Mezirow outlines three conditions for transformative learning: critical reflection about assumptions, rational discourse to examine beliefs, and action. These conditions can clearly be instrumental in self-development for women in the midst of our culture's assumptions and beliefs about women.

Hayes and Flannery (2000) help us understand how women learn in social context in their book, *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning.* They observe that "Women's learning, and our search to begin to understand it, are like kaleidoscopes: an endless variety of patterns" (p. 1). They point out that a review of the

literature exposes gaps in the understanding of women's learning, because studies have focused on the learning of girls in elementary and secondary schools, and on that of young women in higher education. That is an interesting echo of what I found in literature on pop culture and women, where adult women are notably absent.

Women learn in ways that are not always viewed as viable learning experiences in formal education. Adult women do learn through formal education, of course, but studies reveal that informal and incidental learning are much more often employed by women, taking place wherever there is need, motivation, and opportunity (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Homeless women, for example, have been found to take advantage of informal and incidental learning opportunities for acquisition of survival skills (Pearce, 2001). Informal learning, learning opportunities that might be planned but are not formal and incidental learning, learning opportunities that emerge unexpectedly, (Livingstone, 2001), are easily accessible modes of learning for women. What is learned can facilitate or debilitate self-development. For example, mass media provides both informal and incidental learning opportunities that provide images of women in all types of roles, but often traditionally gendered roles. When women watch movies and see fewer women than men in lead roles on the screen, 14 percent compared to 86 percent (Gledhill & Williams, 2000), the subliminal message is that women are of less value than men. That message is detrimental to healthy self-development for women.

According to Hayes (Hayes & Flannery, 2000), "A particularly powerful way that gendered roles and identities can be learned in the home is through the media. Women's magazines, TV shows, newspapers, and most recently, the Internet can communicate biased and stereotypical messages about women's needs and abilities" (p. 41-42). For

example, she notes that self-help books tend to characterize women as being at fault if they don't fit into preconceived societal roles, like motherhood. The literature tends to make women feel like they need to be fixed rather than acknowledging the inappropriateness of preconceived roles. Hayes and Smith (1994) contend that popular images "show women as deficient, marginalized, or simply invisible" (in Hayes and Flannery, 2000, p. 7).

"I am a woman of a certain age, becoming invisible. I walk the street unseen," said Laberge (1991, p. 443). Bergquist et al. (1993) wrote a chapter on "The Invisible Decade" (p. 1), about how people in their fifties often report feeling invisible in our culture because advertisements, television, movies, and books, etc., don't realistically reflect their positive views of midlife. "Their sense of 'personhood' was stronger than ever, yet society and the media were fading them into an invisibility that does not sit well with the baby boomer generation" (McQuaide, 1998, p. 30). Amongst the women in my seminars, the "invisible" theme is a common concern. Hayes and Flannery (2000) notice that women are, if not entirely invisible, portrayed in limited ways in adult education literature. They speak of the "often limiting images from dominant adult education literature, such as the images of so-called reentry women – 'reentering' from where? from someplace beyond the known world?" (p. 7).

Limited portrayals of women, especially midlife women, in the media and in educational literature can have a compounded effect on women's development. McQuaide (1998) notes, "The invisibility of women in midlife in the research literature leaves a woman at the mercy of cultural stereotypes and media portrayals, or lack of portrayals" (p. 22), which can diminish a woman's sense of worth. Flannery (Hayes &

Flannery, 2000) says, "Much of women's learning has to do with women's identity and self-esteem" (p. 54). She defines *identity* as "who women are and how they identify themselves," and *self-esteem* as "the positive or negative evaluations that women give to their identities" (p. 54). Change in identity and self-esteem is especially possible, she believes, through learning. After reviewing the literature on three approaches to identity formation for women, including autonomy, relationship, and social construction, Flannery observes that contexts for learning self-esteem and identity formation include formal settings, like public education, and informal settings, like the home. She concludes, "…women's identity and self-esteem are intertwined with learning, unlearning, and relearning who we are and how to value ourselves" (p. 78).

Gender affects learning and self-development, and women's learning is so often analyzed in relationship to men's learning that the value of women's learning in its own right is often lost in the comparison, according to Hayes and Flannery (2000). They put gender at the center of their analysis, "choosing to understand women's learning within a broader social context" (p. 9). In understanding women's learning in a broader social context, Hayes and Flannery review three types of feminist theory: psychological, structural, and poststructural.

Psychological feminist theories tend to compare men and women, using gender-role socialization. A primary example of research along these lines is reported in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1986/1997).

Hayes and Flannery (2000) say:

> Belenky {et. al.} [*sic*] might also have explained women's orientation toward what they call "connected learning" in terms of women's subordinate position

> in society, which requires them to be dependent on meeting the needs of others, rather than explaining it as a reflection of women's "natural" preferences. Further…theory informed by this framework seeks to change women's status in society, but it does not question the nature of the social order. (p. 11-12)

Structural feminist theories emphasize the social structures that support the oppression (for example, gender, racial, and class-based oppression) of women and focus on the reproduction of power relationships in those social structures. Although they find value in the analysis of power relationships, Hayes and Flannery (2000) find these theories limiting because they do not explain "how multiple oppressions intersect" or that "there is a danger…of viewing women as passive victims of oppressive social forces" (p. 13).

Poststructural feminist theories espouse the fluidity and changing nature of how women respond to their unique experiences of oppression. For example, Hayes and Flannery (2000) report that Goldberger et al. say that women have different experiences of self "that are not fixed and that do not develop along a predictable continuum" (p. 14). Hayes and Flannery find that although poststructural feminist theories give attention to individual differences and help "us see the possibility of resistance and change" (p. 14), the attention to diversity and individuality can "leave women with no apparent basis for either common knowledge about their experience or unified action" (p. 15).

Although acknowledging the limitations of each type of feminist theory, the authors (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) find that each framework offers helpful information in "attempts to make the social forces that influence women's lives more visible" (p. 15).

Those social forces are part of the social context within which women learn. Being aware of such forces makes more visible the impact of cultural beliefs and behaviors, especially those of pop culture, on the learning and subsequent self-development of midlife women.

To summarize this section of the chapter, a review of the literature on adult development and midlife transition, as well as the literature on how women learn in social context, reveals that a woman's body, mind, relationships, work, and spirituality can each and all be affected by the transition into and development throughout midlife. A woman's willingness to learn and construct new knowledge is a key factor in her adjustment during midlife transition. However, learning is affected by gender and power issues. Understanding the dynamics of these cultural forces assists in understanding adult development for midlife women.

Chapter Summary

The first section of this literature review is about pop culture, defined by Storey (1998) as being "a particular way of life, whether of a people, period or group" (p. 2) that can be divided into two general categories: (1) intellectual and artistic activity, and (2) popular daily practices like fashion, food preferences, music, literacy, and sports. The first category is known as high culture and the second as low culture. This is a study of low culture, better known as popular or pop culture. Our lives are so immersed in pop culture, we usually aren't aware of it. If women aren't aware of how they are being influenced by pop culture, they can't make choices about allowing that influence to affect or not affect their lives (Kilbourne, 1999).

Mass media is a primary resource of pop culture, and some scholars believe that mass media is produced by and for the people while others believe it's produced in order

to subjugate the people (Payne, 1997). Gramsci (in Fiske, 1998), in his hegemony theory, argues that people in power negotiate and struggle to win the consent of subordinates. It benefits people to be aware of the need to negotiate for personal and social power in order to meet their needs.

A historical perspective of North American mass media, including film, magazines, radio, television, and romance novels, illustrates that cultural standards have long been ingrained into our society, especially standards about women. Those standards, for example expectations about appearance, are so narrow and confining that they restrict women's self-development (Gledhill, 1987; Sinclair, 1988).

The second section of this review analyzes the literature on self-development for midlife women. Foundational theories on adult development and midlife transition, including those of Jung, E. H. Erikson, and the Levinsons, are covered. More recent theories are given more consideration because with the onset of adult development studies by, on, and about women, more issues regarding midlife for women have been identified than ever before.

Five areas of self-development are identified: (1) Body: Because of menopause and the potential for new physical issues, the body's physiological changes are most apparent to women in midlife. But more important is a woman's perception of her body's changes; (2) Mind: Dialectical thinking, meaning-making, creativity, wisdom, and humor help women construct new knowledge about midlife; (3) Relationships: Relationships of all kinds are important to women and women tend to be more concerned with connectedness than with autonomy; (4) Work: Careers can be a paradox for midlife women. Some find that meaningful work sustains them through midlife changes, while

others find that their work offers no meaning and is yet another burden; (5) Spirituality: Some women experience new levels of spirituality during midlife and some do not. Such discrepancies remind us that each woman is unique and assumptions cannot be made about what will or will not have an impact during the transition into midlife. Transitions are times of disequilibrium that can lead to an adjusted or maladjusted new life structure.

Also discussed is how women learn in social context. Pop culture is the social context within which women develop a sense self and they develop that sense of self in large part through what they learn from pop culture. Because we live in a gendered culture, learning is gendered for women, with identity developing because of or in spite of portrayals of women in the media.

The culmination of this chapter is to understand that pop culture and self-development work in concert in a woman's life. But orchestration is difficult because, although there is some research literature about midlife women, omissions are obvious. One such gap is an investigation of the role that pop culture plays in the self-development of midlife women. This study helps fill that gap.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

I was raised by and have raised people who regard telling one story when two would do as a sign someone is not really trying.
Linda Ellerbee (1986)

Pop culture influences the beliefs and behaviors of human beings. The nature of this influence has been researched in younger generations, resulting in evidence that pop culture plays a role in the development of self-esteem and identity. But little work has been done to ascertain this relationship for older generations, including midlife women. The purpose of this study was to understand the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. This chapter is a description of how I conducted this study. Included are sections on: design of the study, narrative analysis, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher subjectivity.

Design of the Study

A qualitative research design was used in this study. The goal of this type of research is to understand how people interact with the world they live in and how they make meaning of those interactions. In other words, this type of research helps us understand how people make meaning of their lives. This is an inductive process whereby variables are not manipulated and no outcomes are predicted, as opposed to a deductive process in which existing hypothesis and theory are tested to see if they are valid. In qualitative research, “The phenomenon is observed, and an explanatory framework or

theory is allowed to emerge from the data themselves" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 27).

There are a number of characteristics of qualitative research: (1) It is process rather than results driven (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998); (2) It entails rich, thick description (Merriam, 1998); (3) The researcher is the primary source of data collection (Merriam, 1999); (4) It is inductive (Merriam, 1999); (5) Fieldwork is involved (Merriam & Simpson, 2000); and (6) It is flexible (Wolcott, 1999).

The first characteristic of qualitative research is the assumption that understanding a process is more relevant than trying to predict an outcome (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). For example, understanding how women integrate pop cultural messages into the development of their identities is more important to qualitative researchers than to what degree they do so.

The second characteristic is the collection of rich, thick descriptive material from interviews, fieldnotes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and artifacts (Hill, 1993). Wolcott (1999) contends that the richness of the information lies in the differences. He cites G. Bateson as reminding us that maps connote differences in terrain, and the "mapping" of cultural territory needs to do the same (p. 133).

Third is the researcher being the primary source of data collection, which allows for the researcher's response to the context in which the data is gathered (Merriam, 1998). Researcher observations and intuitive impressions are part of this process, providing an opportunity for clarifying participant responses.

Fourth is the characteristic of using an inductive strategy (Merriam, 1998). No pre-hypothesis guided this study; no predetermined results were expected. This openness allowed for an exploration of the data that led to new discoveries.

The fifth characteristic of qualitative research is that fieldwork is involved, meaning that the researcher goes out and digs up information (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Often, as in the case with my study, this is done through interviews. But, fieldwork can also include participant observation, for example, watching a participant at work, and the collection of artifacts like pictures, diaries, and other documents.

Finally, qualitative research is flexible (Wolcott, 1999). For example, when participants suggested that I view a particular movie or read a certain novel, I did so. There were no limits on my ability as the researcher to inform the study.

In sum, qualitative research was best suited to my study on the role of pop culture in the lives of midlife women because, as Merriam and Simpson (2000) note, "The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based, is the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds" (p. 97). They state that the purposes of this type of research are to understand how people make sense out of their lives and thereby make meaning of their lives. Midlife women interact with their social worlds through pop culture, and understanding how they make sense and meaning out of that interaction served the purpose of this study.

Narrative Analysis

When told that her realistic stories of women's lives could drive a woman insane, author Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892) rebutted that the "only story that could truly drive a woman insane was her own autobiography, written in the passive voice" (in

Stephens, 1992, p. 157). The purpose of narrative analysis is to hear stories in active, present-time voices and to determine what meaning those stories have in the tellers' lives. This form of qualitative study, narrative analysis, is the investigation of storytelling, of first-person accounts (Riessman, 1993). How a woman tells a story, what she chooses to include and omit, and the context in which she tells the story "…all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1). The fashioning of identities, the development of self, was key to this study.

Therefore, narrative analysis was selected for this study for three reasons: (1) Midlife women's experiences with pop culture have not been studied and this gap calls for the most inclusive data collection method possible; (2) Stories generally reveal a sequence of events in a person's life; therefore, narrative is best suited for studies of change, transition, or any developmental process (Bruner, 1986); and (3) As a writer, my personal preference was to analyze storytelling. By listening to women's stories and hearing about the process of adult development as they make the transition from youth to midlife, I was better be able to understand the role of pop culture in that developmental process.

Hayes and Flannery (2000) discuss the complexity of hearing a woman's story in her own voice, a complexity that allows us to discover "layers and facets of meaning" (p. 80). They distinguish amongst three meanings of voice: (1) actual speech, (2) expression of identity, and (3) consciousness of power relationships. Each of these meanings

contributes to a study of narrative analysis by allowing the researcher to unfold the multiple layers of meaning.

Firstly, actual speech—the choice of words, speech patterns, and speaking style, in other words, *talk*—reflect a woman's communication and learning preferences. Awareness of those preferences for a woman can add to an understanding of her unique developmental processes (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Secondly, Hayes and Flannery (2000) say that women's stories "…are pervaded by issues related to changes in and development of identity" (p. 91). Women often describe this development in terms of discovering that they have a "voice" (p. 91) and have something of value to say, which reflects the valuing of oneself.

Thirdly is the issue of voice as power. Voice, the telling of one's stories, can be used in two ways in regards to power, to conform to society's power structure or to subvert that power structure, which in our society is inequitable due to its patriarchal underpinnings (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Because issues of power and hegemony apply to pop culture studies, voice as power was an especially important concept to this particular study, although it is relevant to any narrative analysis. Discovering whether or not participants experience and/or realize the power of pop culture in their lives, as well as the collective power of pop culture, revealed yet another layer of meaning in this study.

Narrative analysis fit this study well. Women actively shared stories of complex, layered lives of continuous self-development impacted by pop culture.

Narratives and Learning

We learn from stories, from hearing the voices that tell the stories. Belenky et al. (1986/1997) outline seven ways in which women learn: silence, voices of others, inner voice, quest for self, voice of reason, separate and connected knowing, and integrating the voices. Integrating the voices involves taking bits and pieces of knowledge from each of the other ways of learning, bits that have been acquired from a multitude of sources over long periods of time, and combining them with personal intuition in order to construct new knowledge. Although many people receive the same bits of information, from mass media advertising for example, each individual sorts and combines that information in her own way, constructing her own new knowledge.

Narratives, life stories, reveal the unique intricacies of a person's constructed knowledge. Bringing those intricacies to light can reveal how and what women learn from pop culture as well as how what they learn contributes to their self-development.

Sample Selection

Twelve women, ages 44-58, were selected from work and personal acquaintances, women's professional groups, classes, and other sources. One important qualifier was that each woman define herself as being in midlife. I also selected women who represented a variety of work roles, including working in the home; a diversity of family situations, including married and single, with children and without; variance in incomes, from wealthy to destitute; diverse cultural backgrounds, including African-, Anglo-, and Latina-American; a wide range of educational attainments, from high school dropouts to a doctorate degree; and, geographic dispersion in regards to where participants were raised, although all live in the Atlanta area now. Because I have access to hundreds of

women in my seminars and conducted informal pop culture surveys with those groups, many women volunteered to participate in this study. Two women who had done the surveys but whom I did not know personally were selected to participate. The others came through a wide array of contacts, including two work acquaintances, two friends, one former neighbor, one who works at my health club, one who inquired about my work via the Internet, one who was referred by an acquaintance, and one who I met in a park. And I am a regular client of the professional practice of one of the participants.

Even though every effort was made to select a varied sample, these women were chosen from people who touch my life and therefore my subjectivity could not help but influence my choices. For example, even though two did not finish high school and have GEDs, it turned out that most of the women in this study, including those two, are readers. I was not aware of the preference for reading prior to the interviews, but may have inadvertently selected women who have some of the same preferences that I have.

Data Collection

Data collection is the gathering of information during the process of conducting research (Kvale, 1996). There are a number of procedures and techniques that can be used, and which ones the researcher chooses depend on which will best elicit answers to the research questions. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state, "Techniques and procedures for conducting research are to the researcher as the chisel and hammer are to the stone sculptor…." (p. 143).

Forms of Data Collection

Kvale (1996) cites four techniques and procedures for collecting data: (1) participant observation, (2) interviews, (3) artifacts, and (4) audio-visual materials.

Participant observation allows the researcher to "…study people's behavior and their interaction with their environment…" (p. 104) by observing participants in their daily lives, for example, at work or performing certain tasks. Kvale (1996) contends that this provides "more valid knowledge" (p. 104) than merely having them answer questions.

An interview in qualitative research is the "…construction site for knowledge. An interview is literally an inter view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996, p. 14). Because interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study, they are discussed in greater detail later in this section of this chapter.

Artifacts are objects, like photographs, and documents, like diaries, that contribute information to the study. Audiovisual materials include audiotape and videotape recordings of interviews and any other technology that might provide information. In this case, that included audiotapes of the interviews, movies on videotape and at the theater, music on CD, a radio talk show, television shows, and Internet sites.

Interviews

Interviews were my primary source of data. I conducted individual interviews using a semi-structured format that entailed a "sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). This method allowed for changing the questions and the sequence when it seemed prudent to do so. Because interviews are "…a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue" (Kvale, 1996, p. 125) I learned things along the way that caused me to restructure my themes and questions.

Conducting the interviews involves steps that must be followed in order to meet academic requirements as well as steps that serve as a common courtesy to participants. First, prior to the interview, participants were apprised of the purpose of the study, and that they could expect that it would be taped and how long it would take (Kvale, 1996, p. 127). The interviews for this study were between fifty minutes and two hours long. There were many follow-up emails and phone conversations.

At the time of the interviews, which I conducted in person, the participants read and signed the required consent form before the interview proceeded. (See Appendix B for the Consent Form.) The tape recording equipment was then displayed and explained. Each participant was asked if she had any questions before I began asking questions. I used a semi-structured interview guide with questions that had been extrapolated from my research questions. (See Appendix A for the Interview Guide.) There were five interview questions. The interview questions were designed to be as open as possible, with as little talking from me as necessary in order to elicit information from the participant's point of view (Kvale, 1996). Sometimes participants revealed answers to questions without the questions having to be asked. I also took a few notes. At the end of each interview, the participant was again asked if she had any questions, was reminded of the purpose of the study, and was thanked for her contribution.

After the interview, follow-up included phone calls and emails for clarifying some points, and a card of appreciation mailed to each participant. I also added to my fieldnotes, capturing my thoughts and feelings about the interview.

Artifacts, Documents, and Media Materials

Artifacts, documents, and media materials served as secondary sources of data. I anticipated that artifacts might include things such as fan tee shirts, action figures, pez dispensers, figurines, dolls, and movie posters. Documents might be diaries, favorite books, lists of favorite books, magazines, records of movie attendance, music audiotapes and CDs, and videotaped and DVD movies. As it turned out, I observed a number of artifacts and documents in participants' homes and offices during the interviews, as well being given some, like paperback books, a collection of personally written poetry, and a music CD, to take with me. Other artifacts that I observed included a number of favorite books, newspapers, magazines, handmade interior decorating accessories, a movie on videotape, a magic wand, a crystal, incense, metaphysical posters, and a statue.

In concluding data collection, all sources of data were reviewed to ascertain if there were any omissions and if more data was needed. Additional data collection included the questions on the phone and emails when the need for more data became apparent during the next phase of the study, data analysis.

Data Analysis

"If research is carefully planned and conducted, an analysis of data will produce descriptions and inferences about the phenomenon being studied" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 11). In planning, the researcher must determine which methods of analysis to employ. There are a number of approaches to narrative data analysis, including biological, linguistic, and psychological approaches. The approach that the researcher chooses can be determined by the nature of the study, the participants, and the researcher's preference. Denzin (1999), for example, offers a biological approach that

includes using family history, gender identity, and issues of class structure. Gee's (1999) version of a linguistic approach involves coding transcripts for a detailed analysis of words, tone, and pauses in the storytelling. Alexander's (1988) psychological approach identifies areas of "salience" (p. 265), which point out topics that are important to the participant, and McAdams's (1989; 1993) psychological approach is a life story model of identity that involves an analysis of the influence of internal and external factors on identity development.

Wolcott (1999) suggests that if a researcher does not find an approach that specifically fits her study, she will benefit from selecting features from different approaches and combining them to meet her needs. Although he cautions that one must "…be sensitive to what others have to offer by way of suggestions, and to be especially attentive to what others can impose by reason of their authority" (p. 111), the responsibility stills lies with the researcher to design her own best approach. To that end, I did not use biological or linguistic approaches, but concentrated my efforts on the two psychological approaches mentioned above. Alexander's (1988) areas of salience were used in a cursory way, to ascertain if any of his factors emerged from the interviews or interview transcripts. McAdams's (1989, 1993) life story model of identity was used as my primary approach, in order to help determine the nature of the identity development of the women being studied.

But before analyzing anything, the researcher must transcribe the text of the interviews in what Riessman (1993) calls "crunching text" (p. 56). Each interview was transcribed, typed out, word for word, with silences and pauses noted. A number of copies of transcripts were needed, each for marking up in different ways to denote

different analytical methods. Although some researchers might believe that transcribing offers new insights into the material, I acquire more information by listening to tapes and hearing the person's voice. Therefore, a professional transcriptionist was hired to type out the interviews and I reviewed the taped material. Then, I studied the typed transcripts.

In listening to the tapes and reviewing the transcripts, Alexander's (1988) "identifiers of salience" (p. 265) were my first consideration, although in a cursory manner because this was not my primary method of analysis. Alexander does, though, offer a dozen helpful indicators that identify points that are important to the participant. The twelve indicators are: (1) primacy, the first response to a question; (2) frequency, the repetition of words or phrases; (3) uniqueness, unusual revelations; (4) negation, negative qualifiers; (5) emphasis, key phrases; (6) overemphasis, unnatural emphasis on a point; (7) underemphasis, unnatural exclusion of a point; (8) misplaced emphasis, inappropriate emphasis; (9) omission, absence of an obviously important point; (10) error, memory alteration; (11) isolation, a remark out of context; and (12) incompletion, an abandoned thought.

The first indicator, primacy, was easiest to ascertain and sometimes caused me to ask a follow-up question regarding a word or phrase that had been used. The second indicator, frequency, proved to be telling in one instance when a participant mentioned repeatedly, even when we had moved on to other topics, that she was having a difficult time adjusting to aging. Another used the phrase "soul searching" many times, indicating that she is deeply involved in that process. Uniqueness, the third indicator, applied to a participant who told of her beliefs in extraterrestrials. The fourth and fifth indicators, negation and emphasis, were not apparent. But the sixth indicator, overemphasis, was

obvious when a participant spoke so glowingly of her life that I was immediately aware that it was important to her to project an image of happiness, which made me suspicious about the true nature of her happiness. Indicators seven through eleven, underemphasis, misplaced emphasis, omission, error, and isolation, were not obvious. However, the twelfth and final indicator, incompletion, seemed to be occurring for a participant who began a story about her marital problems, then stopped and claimed, "But everything's okay now!" When asked if it really was okay now, no more information was forthcoming.

As well as looking for and documenting Alexander's indicators, I employed my primary method of analysis, McAdams's (1989; 1993) life story model of identity. This model embodies the concept of a personal myth, and nothing seemed more appropriate for a study of pop culture and self-development. He (1993) defines a personal myth as "an act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (p. 12). McAdams believes that personal mythmaking begins in adolescence, is refined with main characters in early adulthood, and coalesced in midlife when we "bring opposing parts of our story together into a vitalizing and harmonious whole" (p. 14). It is that bringing together in midlife of disparate parts of a woman's life story that I searched for in my interviews. One striking example was a participant whose adult development has been delayed due to an unhealthy relationship with her mother. In her quest to "become my own person," the participant has come to think of her life as a book. She writes her life story in her head and adds or deletes sections as she chooses, deciding as she goes the order of the chapters. In this way, she integrates the disparate parts of her life, writing her own life story of development.

McAdams (1993) looks for six factors in a participant's interview story: (1) narrative tone, (2) mythic form, (3) imagoes, (4) agentic power, (5) communal sharing, and (6) inner motivation. Narrative tone ranges from "hopeless pessimism to boundless optimism" (p. 35) and is set early in life for most people. It can be changed, but usually only with considerable time and effort, for example, in psychotherapy. Mythic form connotes the format of a person's life story: Is it a story of despair, hope, irony, or humor? The mythic form combines narrative tone and imagoes. Imagoes are the main characters that we internalize for ourselves, which might be prototypical archetypes like warriors, sages, lovers, healers, survivors, and humanitarians. The next two factors, agentic power and communal sharing, are described by McAdams as being a "duality in human existence" (p. 71). Agency is the striving to separate oneself from others and is apparent in a person's need for power and achievement. Communion is the desire to participate "…in something that is larger than the self" (p. 71) and is revealed in desires for intimacy and love. It's the balance between these two opposing needs that forecasts identity development. Inner motivation can allude to any combination of these other factors.

McAdams's notion of narrative tone was one of the first things I listened and looked for while interviewing and analyzing the data. By immediately being aware of tone of voice, demeanor, and choice of words I ascertained that, at the time of the interviews, there was no irremediable pessimism amongst these participants. But, there was some boundless optimism. Most were somewhere in-between.

Looking for mythic form took more intense analysis, as it was not always apparent at first hearing or first glance. During the interviews I jotted down notes about

the tenor of the life stories, and then later checked those impressions by listening to the tapes and reviewing the transcripts. I found that the participants ran the gamut from seeing the format of their life stories as being somewhat despairing in two cases to quite hopeful in most cases.

The concept of imagoes, the main characters we internalize, proved to be especially appropriate for this study. For example, the mythic forms and imagoes that someone sustains can be derivations of popular cultural myths and archetypes. Indeed, the images of "kick-ass women," as one participant called them, in fiction were very important to many of the participants in this study and they seemed to gain their own strength from them. They adored the strong female characters in their most beloved books and movies, like *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood.* They could recite their favorite lines and were prepared to use that type of dialog in order to be more assertive in their own lives. In fact, some seemed to revel at the possibility.

Agentic power and communal sharing also became apparent in the data. Participants talked about television programs and movies that glorify the acquisition of power, examples of agentic power in the media, and self-help books that foster contribution to a greater good than oneself, examples of communal sharing. This data revealed that most participants were aware of the need for agentic power, at least in order to hold down jobs, but at this point in their lives they are far more concerned with communal sharing.

As McAdams suggested, a woman's inner motivation, a critical facet of self-development, can be influenced by all of these factors. Thus, the inner motivations of the women in this study were well defined by McAdams' life story model of identity.

As well as employing Alexander's and McAdams' psychological approaches to analysis, I took heed of a few words of caution from Gluck (1977). She reminds researchers that when working with women it's possible that a participant will take on a "grandmother role" (p. 222), trying to caretake and please the interviewee. Some participants are uncomfortable with silence and may talk just to fill the space, and that information may not be of much value. And some participants just aren't comfortable with reflection and their data will reveal their discomfort more than it will divulge useful insights. Her caution about caretaking applied to two of my participants and discomfort with reflection was apparent in two other interviews, which did not, as Gluck foretold, divulge many useful insights.

In order to make sense of all of the data that was being analyzed, I used a constant comparative analysis method, starting by establishing categories of information through the comparison of individual incidents from different interviews. After the first five interviews, that analysis allowed me to set-up categories and to fit information from the remaining interviews into those categories, as well as keep an open mind for possible new categories. For example, variations of the broad categories of personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth as the primary effects of pop culture on self-development were apparent early on. Moving from refining the categories to defining properties of the categories came next in the constant comparative analysis process. This was a daunting task, as some properties seemed to crossover from category to category. I found that I eventually had to pick a home for each one and not let myself experience remorse that I had not found a better home. Consumer advocacy, for instance, seemed like a combination of acquiring personal power and developing new thinking skills

(cognitive development). Ultimately, it landed under a section of personal power. The next step was "delimitation of the theory" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 116), whereby similar concepts are grouped together to limit the number of categories. Finally, I wrote an outline with all of the main categories and subcategories, after many attempts to do so and many outlines that were filed in the trash. From that detailed outline, I was able to make sense of the data and form "a systematic substantive theory, that [was] a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 116).

My final task was to not over-analyze. Wolcott (1990) suggests "organizing, conceptualizing, outlining, mulling, and 'cranking up,' as Peter Woods (1985, pp. 92-97) describes it" (p. 13-14). Finally, Wolcott (1990) advises, "A writing tip borrowed from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: When you come to the end, stop" (p. 13).

Validity and Reliability

Although verifying validity and reliability is important in any good research study, it can be hard to accomplish in traditional ways with narrative analysis because the story, whether based in what others perceive as reality or not, is the core of the research information. Memory forms for different people in different ways with a careful selection and retention of those pieces of information that are relevant to an individual. Other pieces of information, although they may be real, are dismissed by the memory as irrelevant and therefore seem as if they never existed. As a result, each person has her own memory of an event, formed in a particular way for particular reasons (McAdams, 1993). Everyone has a right to their own memories, which may not match the memories of others (Oates, 2001; Stille, 2001).

But validity and reliability can be attained, even in narrative analysis, by following specific strategies. Merriam and Simpson (2000) delineate between two types of validity, internal and external. The concern of the researcher is to follow strategies that ensure internal validity, then reliability, and then external validity.

Merriam and Simpson (2000) say, "Internal validity asks the question…Are we observing or measuring what we think we are observing and measuring?" (p. 101). Ensuring internal validity offers credibility to findings. The first strategy I used to ensure internal validity was triangulation in the form of interviews, artifacts, and documents. The second strategy was informal member checks, with emails or phone calls to participants to check on data that I wasn't sure about. I would say something like, "I'm not sure what you meant by this… Can you explain it to me?" In about a dozen such checks, misunderstood words or scenarios were clarified and more details were given. The third strategy was peer examination, with my major professor and dissertation committee providing their views on the plausibility of my findings.

Reliability, according to Merriam and Simpson (2000), asks if the "results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 102). Ensuring reliability offers consistency and dependability to a study. I used four strategies for reliability: triangulation; peer examination; audit trail, wherein I carefully described in my writing how I arrived at the findings; and, use of the investigator's position, meaning that I informed readers about my subjectivity issues, my assumptions and biases, regarding the research.

External validity is the applicability of the information for the consumer of the research. It allows the reader to ask, "Does this information apply to me?" The qualitative researcher doesn't speculate about how the findings apply to others; others decide for

themselves. The strategy I employed to ensure external validity was to provide in my writing as much rich, thick description as possible in order for readers to have a clear understanding of how I arrived at the findings so that they can ascertain for themselves if this information is relevant in their lives.

Researcher Subjectivity

Subjectivity can be viewed from two perspectives, according to Kvale (1996). Biased subjectivity simply refers to sloppy and unreliable work, which I made every effort to avoid. Perspectival subjectivity, on the other hand, "appears when researchers who adopt different perspectives and pose different questions to the same text come up with different interpretations of the meaning" (p. 212). It behooves a researcher to understand her or his subjectivity prior to beginning research, to understand that subjectivity can become further complicated during an interview because the researcher might genuinely like or dislike the participant (Wolcott, 1999), and to understand that her subjectivity may lead to different conclusions than others would arrive at with the same information.

My most obvious subjectivity is the fact that I am a midlife woman. I wasn't paying attention, so I didn't realize that the transition into midlife had happened until it was almost over. Consequently, I didn't experience the traumatic effect that some women report during the loss of youth and transition into midlife, and tend to expect other women to "get over it" and get on with their lives.

There is no question that as a female in this culture I have been influenced in the same ways as other women by our patriarchal society. Even though I always thought myself to be an astute individual, rebelling against many a box I felt that I was expected

to fit into, including high school, marriage, and having children, the mere act of rebellion, reacting to others' interpretations of what they thought my needs should be rather than meeting my own needs whether they matched someone else's interpretations or not, is evidence of the influence of our culture on my life. As I interviewed women, I couldn't help but be acutely aware that as we discussed our belief in midlife independence from the influence of advertising and other media messages, we all wore relatively fashionable clothes, many including myself had dyed hair, and some not including myself had nice manicures. For the most part, we adhere to cultural norms and media images of women. Thus, there is no way that I can be completely objective, no matter how hard I might try.

Another thing that skewed my view during this study was that I'm a pop culture fan. For instance, I'm an avid moviegoer. Even if I don't like a movie, I like thinking about how I would rewrite and recast to make it better, and I have friends who do the same. The camaraderie we have built over telling and retelling movie stories is foundational to our relationships. I'm also an armchair film studies scholar, having conducted my own analysis of the impact on women of movies throughout the history of the industry. I'm an ardent reader, too, who enjoys many types of classical and popular fiction and nonfiction books. And, I have my favorite television shows that I attempt never to miss. Another expression of pop culture is music, which I enjoy, and the list goes on and on. My stance as a pop culture fan makes it difficult for me to understand others who are not as excited about these modes of expression as I am.

Also difficult for me in preparing for this study was the prejudice I hold against male-dominated linear theories of adult development. Having learned those theories for my Master's degree in the 1970s, a male-dominated program within which I did not

flourish, and having then discovered that linear theories of development simply do not resonate for me, I've found it arduous to even consider points of merit in some of these studies.

My training and experience as a counselor made it necessary for me to exercise caution when interviewing, as research interviewing is different from counseling interviewing. The purpose of a counseling session is to help a client see things differently while the purpose of a research interview is to record the way that a participant sees things now, with no attempt to change her view (Kvale, 1996).

Having led women's seminars for twenty years has conditioned me to expect certain responses from most women. But just because I often experience the same responses didn't mean that those responses applied to all of the participants in my study.

As a writer of popular nonfiction and fiction rather than scholarly works, my mind tends to wander to "what book I can write next to be a bestseller." Focusing on the literature review for this study was difficult because it didn't directly apply to a book that I would write. Conversely, when interviewing I had to check myself from thinking, "Wow! What she said would be great in my next book…."

Another subjectivity consideration relates to focusing on the topic at hand, as this research has already brought to my attention many other topics that are extremely interesting but do not contiguously inform my study. For example, when conducting my pilot interview, the participant informed me that she's psychic. Although she gave me a wealth of information that did apply to my topic, we also spent a lot of time talking about psychic ability. Later, I spent hours perusing the psychic Internet sites she suggested

rather than writing up the results of our interview. I had to be very, very careful not to let that happen in the "real" study.

The final subjectivity issue was that I did indeed find that I simply liked some subjects more than others. I had to strive to keep an open a mind and monitor my subjectivities as much as possible.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented this study's design, sample selection, data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, concerns about validity and reliability, and researcher subjectivity. The methodology used in this study gave voice to women who were experiencing the process of midlife adult development within the influences our popular culture. These voices have not been heard and their messages not only inform theoretical literature, but provide insights for practitioners as well.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Most new discoveries are suddenly-seen things that were always there.
Susanne K. Langer (1942)

This chapter presents the findings of the investigation into the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. Twelve women were interviewed and the resulting data was analyzed using McAdam's life story model of identity. Alexander's identifiers of salience were taken into consideration and some of St. Pierre's notions of transgressive data were also appropriate for analyzing this data.

This chapter is divided into two parts: Part 1 presents profiles of the participants and Part 2 reviews the findings. There is also a summary of the chapter.

Part 1: Participant Profiles

This section presents the stories of the twelve women who were interviewed. Each profile begins with the date and setting of the interview, and the relationship between the interviewee and the researcher. Then basic demographic information is covered including age, ethnicity, education, profession, relationship status, and number of children (if any).

The twelve participants were interviewed between June 20 and September 28, 2002. The shortest interview was fifty minutes long while the lengthiest took two hours. All interviews were conducted in person, six in their homes, three in restaurants, two in their offices, and one in a park. There were a number of follow-up phone calls and emails.

The women range in ages from forty-four to fifty-eight. Eight are Anglo, two African American, one Anglo/Native American, and one Latina. All live in the Atlanta, Georgia, area but only four have lived in the metropolitan area for most of their lives. One was raised and educated in rural Georgia, four in other Southeastern states, two in the Midwest, and one in Brazil.

In regards to education, two did not graduate from high school but later acquired GEDs. A high school diploma was the highest level of education attained by two other women. One has an associate's degree; four have bachelor's degrees; two hold master's degrees and one of those women is working on a doctorate; another has two master's degrees and a doctorate.

A wide variety of professions are represented including part-time teacher, psychic, mortgage broker, writer, student/part-time business trainer, yoga instructor, life coach, business consultant, real estate agent, homemaker, hair salon owner, and medical lab technician. Eight have had other careers during their adult years.

As for relationship status, nine of the women are married, three of whom are married to their first and only husbands, and six of whom have been previously married, divorced, and are remarried. Two of the women are divorced and have not remarried. One has never married. Six have grown children who no longer live at home. One has four grown children no longer at home and two at home. One has a grown child no longer at home as well as two children at home. One has one child at home. Three have no children.

Table 1 on the following page summarizes the participants' demographic information. Each written profile reveals more in-depth information.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS

	Name	Age	Education	Relationship Status	Children	Ethnicity	Profession
1	Fiona	55	M.A.	M	3 (grown)	Anglo	Part-time Teacher
2	Rose	52	G.E.D.	M	1 (grown)	Anglo	Psychic
3	Oceanne	54	Assoc.'s Degree	D	2 (grown)	African-American	Mortgage Broker
4	Susan	53	H.S.	D	1 (grown)	Anglo	Writer
5	Lily	49	M.A.	M	2 (grown)	Anglo	Student, Trainer
6	Sweetness	45	B.A.	M	0	Anglo	Yoga Instructor
7	Jacqueline	46	2 M.A.s, D.Div.	M	1 (at home)	Anglo	Life Coach
8	Walker	52	B.A.	M	0	Anglo	Training Consultant
9	Jonni	58	G.E.D.	M	1 (grown)	Anglo/ Native American	Real Estate Agent
10	JoAnn	45	B.A.	M	3 (1 grown, 2 at home)	Anglo	Homemaker
11	Eva	44	H.S.	S	0	Latina	Salon Owner
12	Donna	46	B.S.	M	6 (4 grown, 2 at home)	African-American	Medical Lab Tech

Fiona

On June 20, 2002, Fiona suggested that we sit on opposite ends of her cushy new couch for our interview in her exquisite new home in an upscale neighborhood outside of Atlanta. The house is gorgeous and I couldn't help expressing my awe. Fiona was pleased that she had selected all of the new furnishings herself. But even in the plush surroundings, she established an informal, friendly atmosphere by sitting cross-legged on her end of the couch. We had been neighbors prior to her move to this house and I knew her somewhat although we only rarely socialized. I always liked her warmth and intelligence.

She is a 55-year-old Anglo who holds a master's degree in education, taught elementary school for twenty years, retired, became bored, and went back to teaching part-time. She has been married for thirty-two years to a successful businessman who has provided them with lifelong financial security. They have three grown daughters who no longer live at home. One daughter is married and Fiona is a proud grandmother.

Rose

Rose and I met in her office near Atlanta on June 24, 2002, where she conducts her practice as a "psychic, clinical hynotherapist, and spiritual counselor." I am a client of hers and was aware of the need to keep within the hour that she agreed to, as her practice is very successful and she books clients nonstop throughout the day. I knew that she was giving up $85 to do this interview and felt appreciative. Her office is an eclectic blend of prints of mystical medieval women on the walls, statues of the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet and metaphysical books on the bookshelves, and angels hanging from the ceiling. A couch, used for hypnosis and past-life regressions, sits against the back wall.

She sat in her usual chair on one side of her desk and I sat in the comfortable client chair on the other side.

Rose is a 52-year-old Anglo who described herself as “pure white” and then fussed over that statement, fearing it would be misunderstood. Her point was, she said, that her “redneck family is as white as you can get,” no one to her knowledge having ever ventured into a relationship with a person of another ethnicity. Rose dropped out of high school to marry, a union that proved abusive and ended in divorce. She has married three more times, been with her present husband for eighteen years, and intends to stay with him “until one of us dies.” She has one grown son who has not lived at home for many years. As an adult Rose acquired a G.E.D. and then became a licensed real estate agent. That profession proved not to be for her, however, as the calling to use her psychic gifts “could not be ignored.” She has “attended tons of classes and seminars” that pertain to her practice, and holds a number of certifications related to her craft.

Oceanne

The house where Oceanne and I met on June 25, 2002, is a temporary residence for her. She rents a room from the owner who is in the process of selling the home. It’s in a well-kept, older neighborhood in the Atlanta area. Upon entering I found myself fascinated with the abundance of African-American art. After meeting the owner and a brief discussion about the artwork, Oceanne and I settled at the formal dining room table for our interview. We had met for the first time a week earlier at a professional women’s association meeting.

Oceanne is a 54-year-old African-American woman who described herself as “a spiritual being of the universe.” She moved to Atlanta seven years ago after living in the

Midwest for most of her life. The move was so that her former husband, who lives in Atlanta, could take a more active role with their two children, one who was still in high school and needed expensive medical care at that time. That daughter is now well and in college, and Oceanne's older son works and lives in the area. Oceanne has an Associate's degree. She's worked temporary jobs since her divorce ten years ago, to "pay the bills," but considers her "true talent to be that of a poetess." She recently took a position as a mortgage broker, isn't making any money yet, and confessed to being in dire financial straits.

Susan

Susan lives in a small, pleasant home near a lake outside of Atlanta where we met on July 1, 2002, and sat at the kitchen counter for our interview. We had met half a dozen times at meetings of a professional writing organization to which we both belong, but had never socialized. Her energetic manner, quick wit, and success as an author had caught my interest since we'd first met.

She is a 53-year-old Anglo woman, divorced, with one grown son who is married. Born and raised in the heart of Atlanta, she has no education beyond high school and yet has become an award-winning, best-selling author of historical romance novels and women's fiction. She loves Southern stories and characters, and said that coming up with ideas is easy because "all I have to do is look around me. I can't make up these characters as good as God does." Suffering from osteoarthritis, Susan refuses to express self-pity. She said, "Christopher Reeves would kill to trade places with me."

Sweetness

Sweetness and I met for our interview on July 6, 2002, in her office at a health club in a suburban area of Atlanta. She is a club manager and yoga instructor. I had been in her yoga class for a couple of months and found her to be the best yoga instructor I'd ever encountered, which means I could actually do some of what she taught. Apart from that, I knew nothing about her except that she is midlife and Anglo.

I learned that she is 49 years old, has been married for eight years to her third husband, has no children, and describes herself as "German-Polish." She selected the name Sweetness because that was a childhood nickname that evoked fond memories. She was raised in the Midwest but has lived in the South for most of her adult life. Sweetness holds a B.A. degree in German and music. She worked for many years in sales and has been in the fitness business for the past ten years. The move to fitness was natural, she said, because she has always been a "tomboy" and "played very competitive women's and coed softball…played volleyball, intercollegiate and stuff like that…love basketball…and also enjoy watching sports."

Lily

I interviewed Lily on July 10, 2002, at a restaurant outside of Atlanta where we enjoyed a leisurely lunch while we talked. We had met a year earlier on a training job at a large corporation where we ended up working together a number of times and quickly became friends. I also took a one-day computer technology course from her. When she became a doctoral student in adult education, we had even more in common.

Lily is a 45-year-old Anglo woman who described herself as "Caucasian." Texas is where she was born and raised. She holds a master's degree in business and is now a

full-time student while working part-time as a contract trainer who provides a number of types of programs, especially in computer technology. Formerly, she worked full-time for a number of years for a state government agency. She is in her second marriage, has two grown children, and was preparing for her daughter's "wedding of the century which will leave us broke" at the time that we interviewed.

Jacqueline

For our interview, I met with Jacqueline in her home near Atlanta on July 22, 2002. It's a nice, middle class suburb and her home decor struck me as both stylish and comfortable. We first met when she found my website and called to inquire about how to get into the motivational speaking business. Subsequently, we had engaged in a couple of business-related conversations.

She is a 46-year-old Anglo woman who is married and has a 10-year-old child. Jacqueline holds two master's degrees, one in counseling and one in divinity, and a doctorate of divinity. Her present occupation is independent life coach and public speaker, which means that she provides training seminars on self-development to corporate and other groups, and follows-up with individual "life coaching." Previously, she worked for two years as a chaplain at a large metro area hospital, eleven years in the assisted living business, and a couple of years as a co-owner of an assisted living facility. She was born and raised in Florida.

Walker

I interviewed Walker on July 26, 2002, at a restaurant in the Atlanta area where we ate lunch as we talked. We had first met about six months earlier while doing training as independent contractors for a company. Although we had never socialized before, I

was part of a group from work that met at a cantina one afternoon for an impromptu bridal shower.

At age 52, Walker was about to marry for the first time. She has no children. Her Bachelor's degree is in American Studies. She describes herself as "Anglo, I guess" and was "born and raised in small-town Georgia." For a number of years she has lived in a cabin in the North Georgia Mountains and comes into Atlanta just often enough to earn money to "keep food on the table." What little contact I'd had with Walker had always been pleasant and I thought her an interesting woman, mostly because of her upbeat attitude toward her impending marriage.

Jonni

Jonni and I had lunch at an Atlanta-area restaurant for our interview on August 29, 2002. I have known her for twelve years and although we are friends, our busy schedules limit our visits, usually over lunch, to every few months. About once a year we go shopping or attend a concert together. Because we have been friends for so long, I thought I could anticipate Jonni's responses to my questions. In some cases, I was wrong.

Of Anglo and Native American heritage, she is a 58-year-old who describes herself as "white and Indian." Raised in Mississippi and Tennessee, at age thirteen she married a rock-and-roll star. She had two children during that marriage, one who died at age three. After that marriage ended in divorce when she was in her twenties, she was happy to be out of the limelight of the rock-and-roll world. She attained her G.E.D. Eventually, after a second divorce, she married for a third time and remains married to him after eighteen years. Today she enjoys her successful real estate business; tending to

her home, garden, and three dogs; cooking for her extended family; and visiting with her grown daughter when she comes from out-of-town.

JoAnn

A neighbor referred JoAnn to me after I inquired about finding a homemaker. We had never met prior to the interview on September 13, 2002, which took place in her suburban Atlanta home. I immediately liked her friendly nature. When I commented on the beautiful décor of her home, JoAnn took pride in telling me that she had done it all herself. We sat at her kitchen table while two dogs watched us through the window and where we could see her husband outside building a tree house for the kids. It struck me as a surreal ideal family, an image I struggled to shake so that I could do as objective an interview as possible.

JoAnn is Anglo, 45 years old, in her second marriage, and has one grown son in the military and six- and eight-year-olds who were in school on that day. JoAnn was born and raised in Atlanta. As an adult, she lived in the Northeast before settling back into her hometown area. She has a B.A. degree in marketing and used to work in her father's business, but has not done so for a number of years. She's considering becoming a real estate agent even though she has a busy schedule of morning runs, kids' activities, and playing in a tennis league. She admitted to working out a lot because she is "an emotional eater" and is very concerned about gaining weight. Her physique appeared to be perfect and I was struck with how youthful she looks.

Eva

Eva and I sat at her dining room table in her suburban home outside of Atlanta for our interview on September 25, 2002. Upon entering her house, I was greeted by a

handsome 9-year-old boy who introduced himself as her nephew from Brazil. After having me inspect the yard work he'd just done, he seemingly considered himself to be my new best friend and sat down at the table with me for the interview. But he politely left when his Aunt Eva suggested that he do so. Eva explained that he is here for a year to go to school. Three other Brazilian family members were also staying with Eva. Since I've known her, she has often had visiting family and friends. She used to own a house cleaning service and they cleaned my home for a number of years, so we became friends. I have long found her Latino culture to be interesting and she's invited me to events such as a dinner sponsored by the Brazilian Consulate General where I learned the salsa and danced into the wee hours of the night, and a performance of Brazilian folk dance where we ended up dancing with hundreds of people through the streets of downtown Atlanta in the middle of the night. I always have fun with Eva, even though it's clear that our concepts of bedtime differ. (She stays up way past mine.)

She is a 44-year-old Brazilian of European, African, and Native South American descent who has explained to me in the past that South Americans of African and Native heritage are considered to be minorities like they are in North America. She received her high school diploma in Brazil and moved to the U.S. when she was twenty-seven years old for work opportunities. An astute businesswoman, in the mid-1990s she recognized a need in Atlanta for a Central and South American hair salon, where Portuguese and Spanish would be spoken. She opened such a shop in the Latino community and it has been a resounding success. Eva has never married and has no children.

Donna

Donna and I first met on the day of our interview, September 28, 2002. I'd been trying to find a final participant and knew that this day would afford ample opportunity, as I'd be attending an all-day event at a park in downtown Atlanta, where lots of women would be participating. Our task was to talk about literacy to people walking through the park. Having attended this event before, I knew we wouldn't be very busy and I'd have lots of time to interview. Therefore, I took my interview gear. Volunteers, including me, were seated at tables lined up around the outdoor amphitheater and I sat there looking at about ten possible participants who appeared to fit the profile I was looking for, an African-American midlife woman. A woman seated near me was the first one whose age I asked. It turned out that she is indeed in midlife and readily agreed to an impromptu interview.

Donna is a 46-year-old African-American who is in her second marriage and has four grown children who no longer live at home, and a teenager and a three-year-old at home. She was born and raised in Atlanta. Donna holds a B.S. degree in medical technology and has worked in the laboratory at the same city hospital for twenty-five years. Her hobby is writing about her life and especially about her children. She likes to "record life events."

Part 2: Findings

This section details the findings of the investigation into the role that pop culture plays in the self-development of midlife women. Figure 1 outlines the components of the role of pop culture in that self-development. Findings relate to mass media sources that midlife women attend to, what motivates midlife women to attend to those particular

mass media sources, how they learn from those sources and, finally, what they learn and how that learning affects their self-development.

Figure 1: Components of the Role of Pop Culture in the Self-development of Midlife Women

I. Mass Media Sources Midlife Women Attend To
   A. Books
   B. Other Mass Media Sources
II. Motivators for Attending to Those Particular Sources
   A. The Nature of Mass Media
   B. Developmental Issues
III. How Midlife Women Learn from Those Sources
   A. Independently
   B. Reflectively
IV. Learning and Its Effect on Self-development
   A. Personal Power
   B. Cognitive Development
   C. Spiritual Growth

Mass Media Sources Midlife Women Attend To

By midlife, women in this culture have been inundated with pop culture information through every type of mass media imaginable. It's impossible not to be exposed to mass media messages. However, this study discovered that midlife women are selective about the mass media sources they attend to and, therefore, the mass media messages they pay attention to. They do not attend to all mass media sources they happen

to be exposed to. They carefully ascertain which of the many sources they believe will be most helpful to them and focus on the messages those sources provide.

Books

Books are the primary mass media source of pop culture that participants in this study attend to. After the first couple in interviews, when books were the primary topic of conversation by the interviewees, I made certain that books were not the first example given in the question posed to participants. In fact, the order of examples was changed each time the question was asked. For instance, "What mass media sources of pop culture do you pay attention to – magazines, television, movies, books, the Internet?" became "…movies, the Internet, television, books, magazines?" the next time it was asked. The purpose was to see if the example given first in the question received the most attention from the interviewee. This tactic made no difference whatsoever in responses. Books were still the primary source participants chose to discuss. The books are described here as the participants represented them, sometimes by title, sometimes by author, and sometimes by topic when the title or author could not be recalled.

Nonfiction. Eleven of the twelve women turn to nonfiction books for information and did so especially after experiencing a "trigger event" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 328) in midlife. Nine participants read books that are spiritual or metaphysical in nature. Jacqueline said, "I'm reading the Bible through this year." Eva said, "Bible-based material, guidelines that keep me informed of the path, that's all I really pay attention to," referring to books from her Jehovah's Witness religion. Jacqueline found *A Return to Love* by Reverend Marianne Williamson to be "transformative" and also liked Williamson's *Illuminata,* a book of prayers. Oceanne said that she reads "mainly spiritual

books." Oceanne and Susan both liked Gary Zukav's *The Seat of the Soul.* Oceanne also likes "anything" by spiritual motivational speaker Dennis Kembrow. Susan was highly influenced by *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* about teaching by example, which she says "took me somewhere I could not go otherwise." Lily read *When God Was a Woman* about ancient goddess-centered religions. Sweetness was affected by *Yoga: The Spirit and Practice of Moving into Stillness* by Erich Schiffmann, saying "I read it over and over again." Two women recently read books that combine spirituality with money. Jacqueline read *You and Money*, "all about…how when you are blocked emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, that it blocks the flow of money." And Donna most recently read a "spiritual financial book." Rose reads "mostly metaphysical" books and had just started *The Children of the Matrix* about reincarnated child geniuses who are "little masters who have chosen to come back in [to life on earth]." Jonni has read many books by and about Edgar Cayce, who wrote about reincarnation in books like *My Life as a Seer*.

Three women sought out motivational self-help books that encourage personal growth and personal power. Oceanne reads books by motivational speaker Les Brown, like *The Courage to Live Your Dreams,* saying, "He is so deep. I think I just sit there and am mesmerized by his deepness." She also liked *The Gift of Taking* by Jill Kahn about putting yourself first. Jacqueline said she liked books "in the self-help field…in the area of self-improvement, personal growth." She mentioned *Excuse Me, Your Life is Waiting*. Of *The Power of Now,* Walker said, "Today, I'm living by that book."

Two participants, Susan and Fiona, pursued self-help books that specifically tend to the emotional needs of women during transition. During the proceedings of her

divorce, Susan read *Crazy Time* and *The Ins and Outs of Rejection*, finding them both to be "very helpful." Fiona read *Necessary Losses* by Judith Viorst and said, "A wonderful and very helpful book for women, especially in different periods of their lives." She also liked *Passages* by Gail Sheehy, which deals with midlife transitions.

Two participants, Susan and Jonni, like biographies about strong people, especially strong women. Susan was currently reading *The Other Boleyn Girl,* about Anne Bolin's benevolent sister, Mary, who "wasn't pretty enough to be queen or even mistress of the King Henry VIII, so she kept her head." Susan recently read *Galileo's Daughter*, about the scientist's illegitimate daughter who was a nun and wrote hundreds of letters to her father about her cloistered life. Jonni was reading an autobiography about Barbara Bush and thinks she is "a great woman." She had just finished reading Lee Iacocca's biography and liked that, too, because of "his business sense."

Books on physical health and biology are important to three participants, Fiona, Rose, and JoAnn. Fiona reads "lots of science and medical books. I've been really interested lately in the genetic genome projects." Rose read *The Wisdom of Menopause* by Dr. Christiane Northrup and *Natural Healing*. JoAnn, a jogger, reads books on "weight loss" and "running."

Susan has a "research library, which I have accumulated either in the bargaining shelves…or I did go on a research trip to England…and Scotland…." She incorporates that historical nonfiction information into the historical fiction that she writes. Other nonfiction books mentioned were *The Healing of the Masculine Soul*, read by Susan, *River Runs Red*, about the environment and read by Fiona, and books about investing and the stock market, read by JoAnn.

Fiction. Seven participants, Susan, Fiona, JoAnn, Lily, Jacqueline, Walker, and Sweetness, read fiction with strong female protagonists. In fact, except in three cases where Susan mentioned *Shogun*, Fiona said she likes to skim Jonathan Kellerman mysteries (with male protagonists), and JoAnn stated that she likes "all kinds of fiction," all of the rest of the fiction discussed by participants centered on strong women characters. Susan stated, "I love women stories, and I love strong women characters and women who persevere." Lily said, "I like strong females." Jacqueline said that although she seldom reads fiction, when she does she likes "women with individuation." Walker likes "kick ass women." Moreover, three participants noted that their favorite books about strong women also include strong relationships amongst women. For example, Fiona likes "stories about women and the relationship of women…with themselves, among themselves. Yes!"

Since they were teens, Susan and Fiona have both been inspired by authors who write about strong women. Susan likes authors Taylor Caldwell, Mary Stewart, and Pearl S. Buck (who wrote *The Good Earth*). After her divorce, Susan reread those old favorites. She said, "*The Good Earth* offered familiar, stable ground." Fiona liked the more recent *Charm for the Easy Life* by Kay Gibbons. Susan and Fiona both like small-town, Southern-style storytelling and strong females in strong female relationships. Consequently, they both especially liked *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*.

The independent female protagonist in *The Horse Whisperer* served as a role model for Sweetness, a horse enthusiast and accomplished rider. Other independent female protagonists are represented in the murder mysteries of Faye Kellerman and Sue

Grafton, which center on female detectives. Fiona likes to follow the continuing sagas of these women, saying, "These are my friends."

Lily is drawn to novels about the spirituality of strong women. She recently reread *The Mists of Avalon* after an original reading years ago and read *The Red Tent*. Both stories address the spiritual nature of women as well as depicting strong individual women in women-centered relationships.

Romance novels used to be favorites of Sweetness and Eva, although neither woman reads them anymore. Sweetness recounted, "I use to read cruddy novels to pass the time when I would lay at the pool or go to the beach, stuff like that." Eva said, "I like it when the woman got herself into trouble, got herself out of trouble, and then could have the man. He's a kind of reward… If Prince Charming rode in to save her, I'd be upset that I just wasted my time reading that book."

Reading is vitally important to a majority of women in this study. JoAnn said, "That's how I learn" and Walker said, "I learn so much from books." Susan said, "I like to read." Oceanne stated, "My favorite thing is books." Jacqueline said, "My main interest would be books." Fiona proclaimed, "What comes to mind first is books…. I like to read almost everything. I'm a real eclectic reader…. It's like a way of life… It's almost like a drug for me – that my mind constantly has to have something going in." And Lily recalled that she used to love to read, "When I had time to read whatever I wanted, before going back to school."

Other Mass Media Sources

Because the interviewees in this study so overwhelmingly discussed books, all other forms of mass media sources that were mentioned have been grouped together here.

These sources are presented according to which were given the most discussion time and interest by the interviewees. After books, television was discussed second most often, then the Internet, movies, magazines, newspapers, music, seminars and seminar audiotapes, talk radio, a professional journal, and a 12-step program. The absence of interest in advertising is also reviewed.

Television. Three participants, Rose, Sweetness, and Jonni, admitted to watching television on a regular basis and were quick to name their favorites shows. The other nine participants claimed that they don't watch much television. However, most of them were able to recall favorite shows and four proceeded to provide examples that suggest that they do much more than cursory viewing. Fiona said about television, "It's usually just a background noise. I don't think I have a favorite show." Nonetheless, she later used phrases such as "I watch all the medical shows… I watch numerous shows… I guess the only thing that really I go for is… what I watch all the time now is…." Likewise, Oceanne said, "I don't watch television very much… I hardly ever watch it… I'm just not into TV that much…" Later she told of watching "a lot of knowledge-based…documentaries." And, she said that "it's just fascinating" to watch her favorite game shows, which she tries not to miss. Susan proclaimed that she only watches "selective television," adding, "it is amazing to me how a hundred channels I can look at and there's nothing, and I just turn it off and turn on my stereo." But then she proceeded to give a number of examples about TV shows. Jacqueline said, "I don't watch the TV…. I never turn on a TV when I get up in the morning. That's the last thing I want." Earlier, however, she had stated, "I usually watch it in the morning from seven to eight as I'm getting dressed. I watch …in the evening and then there is…." It's possible that television

is so omnipresent in their lives that they are not aware of its presence and therefore are not aware of how much they watch.

One participant genuinely seems not to watch much television and made no reference to it after answering the initial question about her viewing habits. Donna said, "No, I don't watch TV. I work, write, and have six kids, two still at home. When would I watch TV?" But most participants did indicate through their examples that they watch television, even if they initially declared that they do not watch.

Five participants, Fiona, Susan, Jacqueline, JoAnn, and Eva, watch the news on TV. Fiona said, "I watch television for the news." Jacqueline watches "CNN…*Good Morning America,* NBC…and evening news." Eva said, "The Brazilian news is on all day at the salon. It's much more broad than American news. You learn about South America and Europe. I don't pay much attention – but I'm aware of what's going on."

Three participants, Susan, Eva, and Walker, like to watch old movies on television. Susan watches "good old movies. *The Thin Man* and just old, tons and tons of just wonderful old movies." Walker stated, "I like the wonderful strong women in old movies. Like *Jane Eyre*. And, there'll never be another Scarlett [from *Gone with the Wind*]. No matter how many times it comes on TV, I can pick it up at any point, and I'll sit and watch it again."

TV dramas are appealing to three participants. Shows about the justice system attract Rose and Jonni. Rose especially likes *JAG*, about the military court system. She confessed, though, that one reason she watches is because, "That guy [the star] is sure easy to look at." She also watches *The Shield*, about "…the bad cop, but he is really a good cop, too" and *Alias*, about a young woman who is a CIA agent. Jonni watches *The*

Practice, which is about a law firm. Susan likes the dramas *West Wing*, about the workings in the office of the president of the United States, and *ER*, about a hospital emergency room. Of the former she said, "I like it a lot" and of the latter she said, "In spite of everything."

Three participants watch talk shows. Oceanne mentioned "talk shows" in general as well as watching *Oprah* when she can. Jacqueline also watches *Oprah* sometimes, if "she has somebody of interest." She added, "I like Dr. Phil a lot," of the psychologist who was Oprah's weekly guest until starting his own show. Sweetness likes *Larry King Live* on CNN.

Three participants mentioned a comedy, *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Fiona will "usually watch" it, Jacqueline watches it, and Jonni and her husband "like to watch it together." Jacqueline and her husband also like *Frasier.* She said, "Every Tuesday night we've got to be there and watch."

Two participants, Fiona and Rose, spoke of television shows that are of a paranormal nature. Fiona said, "I watch numerous shows for some unknown reason about pyramids in Egypt. I guess the only thing that really I go for is a cult thing, that I watch all the time now is I watch that *Crossing Over* show." Rose also likes "that John Edward show," *Crossing Over*, where he serves as a medium to communicate with dead relatives of audience members. Rose also watches "a new one with Ted Danson where he sees all these people that have been murdered, going around and asking him [Danson] to find retribution for them [the dead people] is really cool. And then I like all the haunted houses and castles."

Game shows are watched by two participants, Oceanne, who tries not to miss *Jeopardy* and *The Weakest Link*, and Sweetness, who watches *Wheel of Fortune* and *The Price is Right*. The latter she watches because "I know my dad is watching and it makes me feel closer to him."

Home shows are favorites for two participants, Jonni and JoAnn. Jonni likes "cooking, craft, and decorating shows." JoAnn likes "HGTV [the Home and Garden Television Channel]" and *Trading Spaces*, a home remodeling and redecorating show.

Two participants who have children at home, Jacqueline and JoAnn, watch children's shows with their kids. JoAnn said, "The TV is usually on the cartoon network."

One participant each spoke about four other types of shows. Fiona said, "I watch all the medical shows on the Learning Channel." Rose likes the real-life crime dramas "*Promising Investigations*, *Missing People,* and *American's Most Wanted*." Oceanne said, "Shows on a variety of historical topics often catch my attention." Sweetness stated, "I will watch major league baseball. I love baseball. I love football… I'm a big Bulldog fan. And I watch college hoops. Just pretty much any kind of sports." She noted that she likes women's sports on television, which have been hard to find, but it's getting better. She also commented that it's not uncommon at her house for her to be watching sports in one room while her husband is watching a movie in another room, the opposite of most couples.

The Internet. After television, the Internet was given the most discussion time and interest by interviewees. The Internet, a pop culture mass media source in its own rite, is

used to access other mass media sources like email, consumer and business information, and shopping.

Susan discussed her initial fear of the Net, saying she learned only out of necessity. “Kicking and screaming… I would ask for something and it would give me 7483 matches and I would turn it off and run screaming into a fetal position in the bed,” she noted, laughing.

Eleven participants, everyone except Donna, use the Internet for email. Susan pointed out that Kathy cartoons illustrate “how you could spend your life in the email vortex.” Fiona and Susan both like jokes that are emailed from their friends, Fiona because it “keeps me in touch” and Susan because “I needed some jokes for my book.”

Seven participants, Fiona, Rose, Oceanne, Susan, Lily, JoAnn, and Jonni, use the Internet on a regular basis for personal and professional purposes other than email. Fiona summed up the prevalent attitude about the Internet, saying, “I really use it all the time… I think I was really getting addicted to it… I never turn it off… It’s in my bedroom… It runs through the night.” Lily revealed, “I’m a computer geek. I use it for everything. The Net is second nature to me.” All seven of these women have ordered products off of the Internet at least on occasion, mostly books for personal and professional use through *amazon.com*.

Six women, Fiona, Rose, Oceanne, Lily, JoAnn, and Jonni use the Internet to look up information for personal use. For example, when some of them wanted to know about prescription drugs given to them by their doctors, they looked them up on the Net. They use it to look up other health information, as well. Fiona looks up doctors. She said, “When I go to a new doctor, I’ll type their name in to see if they published anything or to

see if they are on somebody's list for having been arrested." She also checks up on members of her community. "Every once in awhile I'll check the GBI list of child molesters who live in your zip code or sex offenders," she said. Oceanne seeks out sites that are "mainly spiritual," noting that there is a "…sight about angels that was exactly what I needed." JoAnn keeps track of her stocks and the weather on the Net. She also checks out "kids' sites" that her children might enjoy, and keeps track of her children's activities and her tennis schedule through team sites. Jonni said, "I use the Web yellow pages, dog sites, the daily headlines, and order clothes and house wares."

Six participants, Rose, Oceanne, Susan, Jacqueline, Lily, and Jonni, use the Net for professional purposes. Rose looks up historical information and paranormal sights. She says, "A lot of it's crap. A lot of it, when you start reading it, you know that somebody has been drinking or doing some really good drugs because it makes no sense. And then a lot of it is great research." Oceanne, Susan, and Lily each used the term "research" when describing their Internet use. Jacqueline will "search…and check articles…and check out the website" for companies for whom she provides training. Jonni uses "the multiple-listing service for real estate agents." Rose is putting up her own product site of lotions, health potions, oils, and crystals.

Movies. Next in terms of time and attention is the mass media source of movies. Seven participants mentioned movies, even though many of them don't go often and some had not gone in a long time. Movies today don't speak to them, with little inclusion of midlife women in lead roles. Women simply do not identify with the male-oriented, action-packed films that dominate theaters. Consequently, attending the movies at a theater seems to be as much a social activity as an exercise in selecting particular films.

Two participants regularly attend the movies, Susan and Eva, who each try to attend every weekend. Eva, who said that movies are the mass media source she most attends to, explained, "I like almost any kind of movies. But, my favorite ones are the good dramas and the comedies and adventure movies… I like to go to the movies." Susan said, "I prefer comedies. I like comedies a lot. As long as they are not Black exploitation or teen stuff." Lily sometimes attends the movies, usually going to see what her husband wants to see. Neither Fiona nor Jacqueline goes to the movies often, but when they do they want something uplifting. Fiona said, "I want something that's happy" and Jacqueline said, "I like light, upbeat movies." JoAnn stated, "The last ones I've seen are all kids' movies." Donna noted that she last went to a movie "when we were doing that dating thing," five years ago, prior to her current marriage.

Five participants mentioned movies of social consequence. Rose felt that *Monster's Ball,* about an interracial relationship, "was a good movie." Susan loved *Forrest Gump*, about the life of a mildly retarded man. Oceanne was so moved by *A Beautiful Mind*, about a paranoid-schizophrenic professor, that "two days later I was back to see it again and took two other people," even though it was only the third movie she'd been to in six years. Eva liked *I Am Sam*, about a mentally challenged father. Even though Donna hadn't been to the movies in five years, she remembered what she last saw. "*Rosewood*," she said, "about racial tensions in a small Florida town during the '20s. I thought it was a good movie even though Denzel wasn't in it."

Five participants, Rose, Susan, Lily, JoAnn, and Jacqueline, talked about war movies. *Black Hawk Down*, a fact-based film about U.S. Special Forces in Somalia in 1993, disturbed Rose, Lily, and JoAnn. JoAnn declared, "I did not like it. I could imagine

my son being in that kind of situation. It was horrible and so I can't watch those kind of movies anymore." Susan and JoAnn both saw *Saving Private Ryan*, about D-Day in World War II, which they both found to be profoundly unsettling, and JoAnn also saw *Pearl Harbor*, about the attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II. Jacqueline avoids war movies, saying, "I didn't go see *Saving Private Ryan* and I did see *Deer Hunter* years ago, and I did not rest for weeks, so I just don't go to movies like that."

Three women, Fiona, Susan, and Walker, discussed movie comedies with strong female characters and strong female relationships. Echoing her earlier statement about women in books, Fiona said that she likes movies with "stories about the relationship of women." All three of them saw and loved *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. Fiona and Susan also liked *Fried Green Tomatoes,* which Susan described as "wonderful." Fiona also mentioned *Steel Magnolias*.

A variety of other types of movies were mentioned. Susan talked about drama with "strong women characters and women who persevere." Sweetness remembered *The Horse Whisperer* as the last movie she saw on the big screen. A fan of the book, she also liked the movie. Jacqueline liked that movie, too, although admitting that part of the appeal was Robert Redford. Walker remembers *Animal House* as one of her all-time favorite movies. "Nothing redeeming. Just funny as hell." JoAnn liked the romantic comedy *Sleepless in Seattle,* as well as saying, "I do love mystery movies." Jonni prefers "time travel movies like *Peggy Sue Got Married, Back to the Future*, and *The Time Machine.* Ones that give us the ability to go revisit past times." Jacqueline said, "Of course, we go to all kids' movies now with Justin," who is her ten-year-old. She had a

hard time recalling the movie they had just seen in the theater a few days before. "What did we see…? Oh! *Crocodile Hunter!*"

Magazines. Seven participants read magazines on a regular basis and some peruse them on occasion. Jonni and JoAnn both enjoy *Southern Living*. Jonni said, "I read every word. It's my favorite." She also reads *Martha Stewart's Living*. JoAnn and Susan read *Good Housekeeping*, and JoAnn also reads *Traditional Home*, *First for Women*, *More*, and *Runner's Club*. Jacqueline has a subscription to *O*, Oprah's magazine, but said, "I'm not even reading *O* like I should." Sweetness gets *Sports Illustrated* every week and said, "It's my favorite magazine… I will sit there for hours on end and read it." Oceanne recently purchased a magazine about spas, saying, "One of these days I'm going to do this." She also said, "*Ebony* I like to look at every now and then." Eva "always" reads the Jehovah's Witness magazines *Awake* and *Watchtower,* and "skims through" *Vogue* and other fashion magazines at her salon, "just to keep up with trends. But apart from that I'd never go out of my way to look at them." Others mentioned casual glances at magazines, mostly while at the hair salon. Jonni declared, "I despise tabloids. They make up stories and lie about you and don't care, as long as they sell their crap. I refuse to ever look at one as long as I live."

Newspapers. Five participants read local newspapers on a regular basis. Susan, Jacqueline, Jonni, and JoAnn try to read at least one local paper every day, and Donna reads one once a week. Newspapers mentioned were *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Gwinnett Daily Post*, and *Gainesville Times*. Only Jonni mentioned a non-local paper, *USA Today,* which she reads in addition to local papers. Susan clips the coupons.

Music. Popular music is important to six participants, Fiona, Rose, Susan, Oceanne, Jonni, and Sweetness, for personal and professional reasons, and three others mentioned music in passing but did not emphasize it. For personal listening, Fiona, Susan, and Jonni like recent versions of classical music, which Jonni called "the movie versions." Susan mentioned Dionne Warwick and Michael Bolton. Oceanne described oldies, especially by Nancy Wilson. "I love her style," she said. Jacqueline, Jonni, and JoAnn briefly referred to oldies. Rose and Sweetness both carefully select the music they use in their work. Rose uses relaxing music while doing hypnosis with her clients and Sweetness uses mellow music and environmental sounds during her yoga classes.

Seminars and seminar audiotapes. Three participants, Rose, Oceanne, and JoAnn, attend seminars and listen to seminar tapes. Rose attends regularly, saying, "I take all kinds of seminars." For instance, she recently attended a program on "DNA and healing. Oh God! That's one that I really enjoyed." Oceanne and JoAnn attend seminars on occasion. Oceanne was deeply moved by the seminars presented by Dennis Kimbrel at her church. She said that his work is based on that of Napoleon Hill who authored the long-time bestseller *Think and Grow Rich*, as well as "talking about the African-American male as it related to those who had disrespect for the African-American female." Like Oceanne, JoAnn also listens to tapes based on the work of Napoleon Hill, saying, "Napoleon Hill is my idol." She especially liked the tape program *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* by another man but based on Hill's work, "about what rich people teach their children that poor people don't." JoAnn recently attended a seminar "on hypnosis to lose weight." She bought those tapes as well as some for stress and sleep.

Talk radio, a professional journal, and a 12-step program. One participant, Sweetness, likes talk radio, especially Neal Boortz, an outspoken conservative, and Clark Howard, a consumer advocate. Sweetness is also the only participant to spend time reading a professional journal, the *Yoga Journal*. "Yeah," she said, "the *Yoga Journal* comes out quarterly and it takes you about three months to read it because you read it and then you go back and you read it again and at some point it just doesn't appeal to you but then you will pick it back up and say, 'Wow, that makes a lot of sense this time.'" And, finally, one participant talked about the importance of a twelve-step-program in her life. Susan found Al Anon, a "twelve-step group for friends and families of addicts and alcoholics – it's a positive culture force."

Advertising. Noticeably absent was attending to advertising. So, when all discussion of other media sources had come to a conclusion, I asked if they paid attention to and were affected by ads. Most participants dismissed ads as ineffective. Many agreed with Sweetness, who said, "I just pay no attention to it." Rose declared, "Television commercials tell you to buy this drug and go try that one. It's all money. They don't really give a shit if you get well… All they care about is the dollar and most of the women I know in our age group, they know that. They take it with a grain of salt." Jonni said that ads are "stupid and absurd – those people must be on drugs." Susan talked about a particular ad that she finds especially insulting to women, saying, "They must not have tested that with a lot of women… It pissed me off." About ads in general, she said, "There are some things about advertising when it comes to women that I really resent. I think there is a lot of good old boy mentality out there in ads." JoAnn was a marketing

major in college, so she notices ads and "judges" them. She thinks many ads are useless, saying, "They're so vague. You wonder, what is it for?"

Some were aware of the male-dominant nature of ads, like a male voice-over for a female product. One woman especially disliked the cleaning product ad where the woman's arm turns into a man's arm, as if she could not possibly do the cleaning herself unless she's part man.

A few participants had some good things to say about ads. Susan said, "I like ads that tell me about stuff that's helpful and I evaluate them." And JoAnn finds the Longhorn Steaks "big-haired lady" to be memorable and thinks the Bud beer ads with the frogs are "funny." Jacqueline said, "I do notice the AFLAC commercial. That's cute," about the ad with the quacking duck.

But with all of that discussion about advertising and the overriding denial that it influences them, all of the participants, and myself as well, adhere to popular cultural standards in terms of appearance. We were all dressed in relatively current fashions, even though very casual in some instances, and do our hair and makeup in ways that are acceptable in today's culture. No one veered too far from the norm. We have clearly internalized that norm from mass media, including advertising.

Motivators for Attending to Those Particular Sources

There are two primary reasons that the women in this study turn to mass media sources when they are seeking information. The first is the nature of mass media. It's convenient and allows for independent study. The second is the need to find information to help understand and cope with self-development issues.

The Nature of Mass Media

One aspect of the nature of mass media became obvious early in the interviews. Comments such as, "Books have always been part of my life" and "the TV's always on in the background" were repeated by a number of participants. Most mass media sources are so readily available, easy to access, and such constant presences in the women's lives, it's natural for them to turn to those sources. It's the convenience of the source that serves as a motivator for using it.

Another aspect of the nature of mass media is that it allows for individual study. Women can seek out information and consider it privately. Reading books, using the Internet, and reading magazines are usually solitary pursuits. Even watching television and movies can be done alone. Mass media allows for private, informal learning, which appeals to these participants.

For instance, Jacqueline and JoAnn both talked about how reading the paper in the morning after the kids have left for school is their "private time." Jacqueline said, "It's my quiet, private time just for me, and it's very important to me. I hate to miss it."

Developmental Issues

The second reason for attending to mass media is more complex. Eleven of the twelve women in this study either continued their practice of seeking information from mass media sources or specifically sought out new types of information from mass media sources during times when they were forced to acknowledge and cope with self-development issues. Those issues can be categorized as relationships, aging, and spirituality, although in some cases the lines between types of issues blur. The issues were brought to light by trigger events that were at least uncomfortable and at most

devastating. Unable to deny the need for changes in their lives, the women turned to comfortable, convenient sources to try to understand and conquer these developmental concerns and crises.

Relationships. Six participants talked about developmental issues regarding relationships. In some cases, the relationships had been problematic for a long time and the incident that was "the last straw," as Fiona called it, was no surprise. In other cases, the problems arose unexpectedly and took the participants by surprise.

While Fiona and I were talking about her beautiful new home, she revealed, "I don't have any feeling of being here. Like I don't belong." She explained, "I am still so emotionally tied to my mother… I was born [when she was] fifteen… And it was only she and I. We moved so frequently, like every three months… So, we had no friends, we had no family." She added, "I don't think of myself as having a home."

Furthermore, Fiona has long suffered from severe anxiety attacks that strike unexpectedly. When seized with an attack, she says, "The walls begin to wiggle and your legs don't hold you up and you are very, very physically ill and your heart is beating out of your body and you have the same sensation as though someone had a gun to your head." An attack struck three years earlier during an argument with her mother. Although such arguments and the subsequent anxiety attacks were common, this time was more significant because she and her mother were, ironically, in the hospital visiting Fiona's daughter who had just given birth. The fight caused Fiona's mother to walk out.

Fiona said:

> When I got to be eighteen…when most people start a life of their own, emotionally, I did not do that. I did not learn to think about myself truly as

> a separate person until my mother walked out on me and my family. She was the one who sashayed out.

Her mother's departure was the trigger event that propelled Fiona into self-examination. Now she reads books, looks info up on the Net, takes antidepressant drugs, and sees a psychotherapist twice a week. "I was really focused on myself, because this past year it's been just me, me, me. What's wrong with me, me, me and how can I fix me before I run out of time here." She feels "the time element. Fifty-five is getting on up there."

Rose turned off the tape recorder before revealing the trigger event that caused her to explore self-development issues. She said, "You probably don't want this on tape – but if it has a penis, you can't trust it. That was my problem. I trusted a human being with a goddamned penis." When she was 45 years old, she had a "vision" that her husband was "screwing" one of her friends. A few minutes later she received a call from a third party, verifying her suspicion. Rose immediately decided to stay in the marriage, her fourth.

Rose explained:

> I got tired of giving up houses, moving, starting over. So, about forty-five I made up my mind I didn't really give a shit anymore. I was going to be happy and do my work and be relatively content with the life I had and I wasn't going to worry about it anymore.

The transition, however, wasn't easy. A couple of years prior to that event, Rose had started taking the antidepressant drug Prozac. "Depression is hereditary in my family. I just thought women were supposed to be miserable." Of the drugs, she said, "They were

great. I love drugs." But her husband's affair "didn't help with the depression." She is now off the drugs and "doing great." Her marital situation precipitated her venture into her career as a professional psychic. She concluded, "Now I do whatever in hell I want to do."

There were two trigger events, one building upon the other, that changed Susan's life. The first event began as a career change and then predominantly played into a drastic event regarding her marriage. When she was in her early forties she wanted to get out of working in her husband's business and try something on her own, but she didn't know what to do. A friend asked, "If you were going to die in two years, what would you do?" Susan said that, "Straight out of my subconscious came the answer, 'I'd write a book and try to get it published.'" Her friend said, "Why are you waiting for a death sentence to do what you want to do?" That motivated Susan to decide, "I need to do this thing. It's the first time I put what I wanted to do first." She began writing and was published within a few years.

Then, a few years ago, her husband of thirty-two years announced that he was leaving her because he was "engaged to a 23-year-old stripper – someone he'd completely forgotten to tell me about!" Before she could "catch my breath from that devastating revelation," she learned that they were deeply in debt due to "gifts to the bimbette." Writing could no longer supply supplementary income, it had to support her. Susan says she had to "do a lot of homework" and her writing got better as a result. Although she is still not financially solvent, she just signed a "three-book deal with a major publisher that I might actually be able to live on." Her most recent novel is a "funny, joyous tribute to one women's triumph over adversity after her husband

announces that he's leaving her because he's engaged to a 23-year-old stripper. Any resemblance to parties living or dead is purely consequential."

Meeting her husband-to-be was a series of events that Walker says caused a significant change in her attitude, one that illustrated that she had "grown up." Having dated different men over the years, she thought she would never marry.

Walker recounted:

> When my neighbors invited me over to meet their single, fifty-something brother I took it in stride… and forgot all about the guy as soon as I was home again. A month later he called and said, "I've been thinking of you every day." I said, "Who is this?" I didn't even remember his name. But I figured it might be a good idea to pay attention to this guy who thought about me so much.

When they finally went on their first date, a "Harley Davidson weekend road trip," she knew that "this man may not be my prince, but he is my frog-prince." She said, "I'd spent a lifetime looking for a prince and now I knew that wasn't what I wanted. My frog-prince is perfect for me." They have since married and collect frog paraphernalia.

An ongoing event has signaled changes in her life to JoAnn. Her oldest son joined the military a year ago. Obviously struggling with the emotional conflict that this tale of his independence evoked, she said, "All of a sudden he was leaving me… this is my baby and he was going into something I did not know anything about… He broke my heart." When a friend pointed out that her job of raising her son was done, JoAnn said, "But I don't want my job to end." She conceded, however, "I wanted him to be strong-willed, self-confident, willing to take chances. Now he is all that and he is leaving me. I did my

job. I am so proud of him." Adding to the blatant evidence that he is no longer a child, her son brought his girlfriend during visits home.

JoAnn explained:

> I had a defining moment when he came home and he wanted his girlfriend to spend the night here…. I said girls upstairs and boys in the basement…. But the next time they came home, he would not come home. They stayed at the Holiday Inn. It broke my heart because I wanted him to stay here.

JoAnn confessed to being on the antidepressant drug Zoloft upon the request of her husband, and the recommendation of her pastor and doctor (all males). She said, "I shut down… He [pastor] said, 'There is nothing wrong with your marriage. It's just you…' I thought it was him [husband]." She said the drug controls her "mood swings."

Donna said, "Yes, I went through a midlife crisis when I was about forty. But then I realized that *he*," her former husband, "was ninety-nine percent of the crisis. So, I got rid of *him* and got rid of the crisis." She went on to explain that after her divorce, when she thought she was "finished with marriage, men, and babies," she saw an "image of a little girl and I saw myself pregnant again." It was a "prophecy from God." She remarried four years ago and three years ago had a baby girl. Donna said, "My life has gone places I never thought it would go."

Aging. Three participants described issues related to aging. A trigger event that Sweetness says "woke her up" to the fact that she was in midlife was a yoga conference. The owner of the health club where she worked had insisted that she attend a 16-day yoga training conference in California. She didn't want to go, thinking that she knew enough about yoga. But, she was forced to go.

Sweetness said:

> It was not enjoyable. There was no sugar, no coffee, no meat, no caffeine. I slept in a tent with four other girls and was thrown into that and lost my luggage the day we got there. The first night I got there I called Bob [her husband] just hysterical and said, "I don't want to do this, I want to come home."

He said, "Give it a chance," so she stayed. "I learned a tremendous amount about yoga," she admitted, "and realized that a lot about yoga is knowing what is going on inside here [pointing to her heart] and how you can control how you react out here by how you feel." That conference taught her, "You can do whatever you want to do at any age." That experience has motivated her to learn about new kinds of yoga and continuously improve her classes so that they will be "safe for everybody at every age."

Transition into midlife is "happening now," said Jacqueline. "I feel like I'm in a real crisis about that now," she added, laughing. "Because I have never been sensitive about my age and telling my age. I think that is heightened or accentuated…I got married when I was thirty…had Justin when I was thirty-six… It's maybe because of Justin and the other mothers in their mid-thirties." She told about another women who was "forty-one at the time and she said she looked down one morning at her hands and they were not her hands. They were her mother's hands attached to her body [laughter] and I have had that experience. They aren't my hands!"

Jacqueline also talked about being in menopause, saying:

> I do have mood swings. A few times I don't know if I'm falling apart or if the world is coming to an end or if there is nothing wrong… I know that it

> is strictly something chemical happening inside my body… I have always been on top of my game. There is nothing I have ever wanted that I did not get. A house, a man, a job, a dress, nothing. So for me to know for the first time, to be dealing with loss or wrinkles or again just redefining identity in completely new ways.

Consequently, she's sought out information that would help her "gain perspective on this aging thing," which she mentioned twice more during the interview.

Jonni says that two trigger events coincided to make her aware that she was growing older. The first was being thrust into menopause and being "drugged into a stupor" by her doctor. She said, "For four years I was in a coma. I had no energy. I slept a lot." Finally, after finding a new doctor who would help, she got off the drugs. "But," she said, "menopause was hard on me." Then she told of another event, saying, "This might seem like nothing to anybody else, but it was a shock to me!" She said, "It was when my daddy started to retire. All of a sudden I knew that if my daddy was old enough to retire I must be too old to be daddy's little girl. I must be a grown-up." Her daddy, as it turns out, quickly became bored with retirement and went back to work. "So," Jonni laughs, "I don't have to be totally grown up yet."

Spirituality. Two participants talked about spiritual issues that motivated them to learn. The trigger event in Oceanne's life that caused her to become aware of these issues and to seek out pop culture sources of information occurred in 1993, after her divorce, and was "a fight with God."

Oceanne said:

> I had just really had it, single parenting, the challenges that come with that… I was giving to others and all of a sudden one day it was "when do I get a turn, when do I get a turn?" I've seen other people growing and flourishing and I just feel like I'm in quicksand…I'm being left out.

She said, "I did a lot of things that they told me in the Baptist church I shouldn't do to God. You don't question God." But she "just went ballistic… I had never been that kind of person before" and "wouldn't you know I was going through the change at the same time." She did question God. "These things I had held in for so long and I just let it out," she said. That is when she began reading a lot of spiritual material, attending seminars, and listening to tapes. And, that is when her first poem came to her, entitled "I Am God." She later changed it to "I Am Goddess." The fight with God was the precursor to a lot of "real soul searching" that "kind of pushed me into the lovemaking with God."

Lily's issue was also related to her spirituality. When asked if there was a trigger event that had motivated her to seek out new information, she said, "I was in church, the church my husband and I had belonged to for years, and I sat there listening to our same old chauvinistic preacher giving his same old chauvinistic sermon and I just couldn't listen to one more word. I up and quit the church"

Lily's transition, like that of Fiona, Rose, JoAnn, and Jonni, included drugs. She had to get off the drugs, she said, in order to learn to deal with the changes in her life.

Lily stated:

> It [breaking away from her church] was such a dramatic change. Everything seemed to be too much… I was on Prozac for three years. But

> the problem with drugs is they don't take care of your problems; they just make you not care about your problems. You either have to stay on them forever so you won't ever care or you have to get off of them so you can learn to deal with your life.

How Midlife Women Learn From Those Sources

At first it was difficult to ascertain precisely how midlife women learn from the mass media sources discussed, but after repetitive, close examination of their transcripts two closely related trends surfaced. Firstly, women want to learn independently, through self-study. The preponderance of books being selected and read without collaboration or supervision is evidence of the preference for independent learning. Secondly, they want to reflect on what they have read and observed, once again preferring to do so in solitary situations. Only a couple of references were made to learning in groups, such as seminars or the 12-step group. Most talked at length about reading books, watching television, or using the Internet, situations that allow them to learn and reflect on their own.

Independently

Most participants, when selecting their sources of information, chose those that they could access while alone. Books, for example, allow them to read what and when they please. No one, like an instructor in a class, suggests what to think of the material. If readers disagree with the material, they can dismiss it without discussion or argument. As Lily said, "That book was so stupid I didn't even put it in the charity box - I tossed it right into the trash." They don't have to defend their points of view or listen to someone else try to persuade them of another point of view. Jacqueline and JoAnn, for example, each read the newspaper during "private time," alone and in relaxed settings. Jonni reads

books on reincarnation by Edgar Cayce and finds them to be so intensely "personal" that she doesn't usually discuss them with anyone. Lily reads about women-centered religions and usually doesn't even try to share those concepts. She said, "I rarely talk about religious matters that aren't truly traditional even with other women." Solitary learning appeals to these participants.

Reflectively

Reflecting on the information that has been accessed through media sources is also a part of how women learn from those sources. Taking time to think about the information and to "mull it over," as Walker said, allows women to analyze whether or not they want to internalize or act upon the information. For example, in the case of drugs that were recommended to them by doctors and advertisers, some participants initially took the drugs but then spent time deliberating about whether or not to stay on the drugs. They did not take at face value the information they had been given, preferring to consider it, research it further, and then make a decision as to the information's value. Of the five participants who had been told to take drugs, three are now off of drugs of their own volition.

Fiona and Susan reflected on what they'd read and learned before deciding how to handle their problematic relationships. Fiona's decision not to contact her mother was made after long, hard deliberation. Susan's ability to see her ex-husband from a new perspective occurred after a lot of thinking about what she'd read in a variety of books on relationships and what she'd heard in the 12-step program regarding addicts. She spent a year deciding whether or not to get a divorce, and eventually did. Oceanne's reflection took place after she'd attended religious-based seminars, read books, and listened to

audiotapes that introduced her to beliefs about God that were new to her. Her new insights "built-up over months" and led to her "fight with God." Lily said that she keeps a "journal and that acts as my sounding board… I usually have given something considerable thought before I discuss it." For these participants, taking time to reflect was vital to their learning processes.

Even with fictional sources, like novels, some participants spoke of savoring the experience through reflection. For example, Walker said, "I like nothing better than a nice day when I can curl up in my cabin and read a good book, take a walk in the woods, and then read some more. I feel like I take those people [the characters in the book] with me [on the walk]."

Learning and Its Effect on Self-development

Three categories arose regarding what women learn from mass media sources and how that learning affects them. They experience increased: 1) personal power, 2) cognitive development, and 3) spiritual growth. Each of these categories influences the others, so the process is a self-regenerating cycle. Even though religious, metaphysical, and spiritual types of information were most sought by women, with nine women selecting books of that nature, two watching paranormal TV shows, two looking up spiritual information on the Internet, one reading religious magazines, and one attending religious seminars, only two participants said that quandaries about religion were the trigger event that caused them to seek out new information. Relationship problems were cited most often, with six participants stating that was their trigger event. The fact that relationship problems led to the eventual exploration of spirituality implies that while learning to be more personally powerful in order to sustain better relationships, and while

developing new cognitive skills for that and other reasons, women also ventured into their spirituality. These three concepts, personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth, therefore, appear to be intertwined for these women, woven together to form one strong thread in their lives. Division of thought amongst these factors was usually not apparent in participants' conversations. They spoke of them as one.

Personal Power

The common theme of strong female characters and strong female relationships in the mass media sources chosen by participants was obvious. They like to read about and observe powerful women. These sources have a positive perspective in common, serving up the promise of becoming not only a more powerful individual, but of using that power for the benefit of one's family, friends, community, and society.

For example, Susan said:

> I love *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* immensely. It was cheaper than therapy. I forgave my mother. Really. It was such an amazing book. It showed the power that women have. We are culturally conditioned to tear each other down professionally and personally. If women would support each other no matter what, rather than pick each other to pieces and try to save each other and change each other, then there is an amazing power there.

Three ways in which the women in this study experienced increased personal power were through: (1) developing what Jacqueline called "authenticity," feelings of being more one's real self, (2) acquiring assertiveness skills, and (3) becoming socially conscious. Themes of developing oneself in order to be as genuine as possible, standing

up for oneself and others, and making useful contributions to society were important to many of the participants.

Authenticity. In the mass media sources they attended to, the women in this study extrapolated three methods for becoming more authentic, for living in ways that Oceanne described as "closer to my soul:" (1) validation of an existing sense of self, (2) relinquishment of adolescent ideals, and (3) recovery of the "calling" they felt as children.

Firstly, women in this study learned to be more authentic by using media sources to validate an existing sense of self. For instance, Sweetness, being a "tomboy," finds solace in sports magazines and sports on TV, saying, "They tell me more about what I love. Ask me anything about sports and I'll tell you. Just don't ask me anything about decorating. I can't do it." Oceanne said that the movie *A Beautiful Mind* taught her that "everyone is schizophrenic somehow or another…we allow ourselves to get over involved in some issues… And I kind of related the parallels that way in terms of looking at my life." Furthermore, the book *The Gift of Taking* helped Oceanne accept that it is okay for a woman to put herself first, a totally new concept to her way of thinking. Fiona said of the book *Charm for the Easy Life,* "She wrote about my life. I could have written that book. It was good to know I'm not the only one [with problems]." Susan stated, "It [the book *The Ins and Outs of Rejection*] showed me what had been going wrong all along…so I didn't feel quite as personally rejected. I knew I was okay." In this variety of ways, media sources validated the participants' sense of themselves, shortcomings and all, as being okay.

There was one exception to the use of media to validate a sense of self. JoAnn used media to try to fit cultural ideals. She reads running, weight loss, decorating, parenting, and marriage books and magazines. Others read similar things but JoAnn's intensity when discussing the importance of being a particular shape, having a beautiful home, and being a perfect mother and an obedient wife set her conversation apart from the others. She is having difficulty letting go of her adolescent ideals of what it means to be a woman, using sources to reinforce old concepts rather than create new ones.

Secondly, looking more closely at how pop culture's mass media sources help midlife women feel more authentic, it became evident that some of the sources encouraged the women to relinquish adolescent ideals, to let go of former notions of what it means to be a woman and what a happy life looks like. For some letting go has been relatively easy and for others it has been difficult.

Walker contended, "It's been a long time since I've thought I should be doing the typical marriage and kids thing." Donna said, "I've learned to resist the turmoil of life today… That's not the same [kind of thinking] as when I was a teenager." Rose spoke of learning to let go of her attempt to be "normal" and "fit in." She talked about "being able to look at it without feeling like it's betraying some sort of indoctrination… in that tight society of, this is the way it is." She added, laughing, that she's learned to "stop worrying about the petty shit…like husbands, children, grandchildren, any of the husbands."

Rose, Jacqueline, and Jonni talked about letting go of immature ideals about appearance that they learned through the media when they were young. Jonni said, "I used to go to the hairdresser when I was in my teens and say, 'Do my hair like Priscilla's [Presley].' I was fascinated that she could get hers so high! Now I know, of course, that

how you look doesn't matter so much." Yet she candidly added, "But I still refuse to let myself get fat. I know that's vain, but I refuse to let myself do it." Rose stated, "I think older women now don't really care what they look like. Most women are just happy the way they are. Well, okay, fine. You know, being beautiful back when I was young… [Laughter.] I was skinny… worked out…great body. It did not do me a damn bit of good!"

Some participants were forced into relinquishing adolescent ideals about their parents and used media sources to help them deal with that. Fiona noted that the book *Necessary Losses* discussed "all the losses what we go through. Normal and abnormal." That helped her accept the "loss of my mother." She explained that she had to "realize that my mother is narcissus [sic] or a borderline personality." Fiona is learning how to give up "unhealthy ways of thinking, just the ways I always thought," regarding her relationship with her mother. She said, "It's been really hard to be fifty-five and be a whole person all by myself." JoAnn is struggling with letting go of adolescent ideals and relayed a story about her dad having recently said no for the first time in her life to her request to borrow money. She said that her parents "protected me and they kept me sheltered and so I never got to learn by my mistakes. And now I'm okay. If I make a mess, I just take it up and go on about my business." Although that statement was adamant, the entire conversation revealed that she is grappling with letting go of childish notions about being taken care of and is just beginning to learn to "take care of myself," which precipitated her interest in reading about investing.

Susan and Jacqueline dismiss old ideals by turning their backs on convention. Susan said, "I was raised reading the Bible… still read the Bible… and now I'm a goody-

two-shoes fundamentalist Christian who writes dirty books." Her "dirty" books include semi-graphic descriptions of sexual intercourse, and words like "shit" and "fuck," a huge leap over the barrier of a background that prohibited such language. Susan explained that she struggled to even be able to put the words on paper, but when she did it felt like she'd been released from some kind of internal prison and proclaimed her independence. Books like *Seat of the Soul* helped her let go of stereotypes of how she thought she was supposed to live. In Jacqueline's case, "I was always such a career person… Doing what I thought I was supposed to do… The business experience and finding that empty reawakened a need on a much deeper level." That reawakening led to her intensified exploration of self-help books like *Excuse Me, Your Life is Waiting* and *A Return to Love*.

Thirdly, along with validating an existing sense of self and relinquishing adolescent ideals in order to become more authentic, some of the women used media sources to recover a part of the children they once were who had clear visions about what they perceived and wanted to do. They returned to their "calling," as two participants labeled it. Jacqueline said of her entrepreneurial business venture, "That experience really led me away from what was really important to me… [it] was not where my heart was." She went on to explain that by reading she was getting back to "a sense of calling." Oceanne recounted, "I really did use to write a whole lot…and that was kind of a memory that I had become so involved in responsibility that writing was only once in a great while…his [a childhood friend] coming back into my life reminding me of who I was… of my call…" That reminder has led to the perusal of books and seminars. Lily said, "When I was a kid I used to imagine working with women, helping women. Here I am, finally starting to do it." Reading about women-centered religions in books like

When God was a Woman and *The Mysts of Avalon* has been a motivator for Lily to work with women. Sweetness recalled, "I was such a sports fanatic – I always wanted to be an athlete when I grew up. I spent all those years in sales, and finally got to what I had always wanted to do." Her sports sources, like *Sports Illustrated* magazine, reinforce what she does. Rose told of getting back to an earlier self, saying that she was born with psychic abilities, but her family kept her from using them. She said, "I birthed into that family and I looked at Gram and I said, 'Where am I and why did I come here? 'Cause these people are going to kill me!'" So she denied the abilities and only came to acceptance of them in midlife. She said that after "studying it" for so long through books, seminars, the Internet, and personal contacts, she believes that many other women feel the same way.

Rose explained:

> All the things that they [women] innately knew in their hearts, they now realize that they were right. Now, if someone says, "There's a ghost in my house," they go, "Well, damn! Who is it?" instead of, "You are so full of it."

Through media sources, women learn to trust their inner knowledge and value what they have always known. They recover aspects of the children they once were who felt no fear and no limitations to their beliefs.

Using media sources to establish authenticity by validating a sense of self, relinquishing adolescent ideals, and reclaiming their child's "calling" contributes to increased personal power. All twelve participants expressed a boost in personal power in midlife. Rose's declaration, "Now I do whatever in hell I want" and Susan's statement,

"I've learned I can make it on my own," are two simple yet meaningful indicators of increased personal power. Other indicators are: Fiona's willingness "to be fifty-five and be a whole person all by myself," Sweetness sticking out yoga training and pushing her mental as well as physical limits, Lily breaking away from her church, Jacqueline deciding that money isn't everything and changing careers, Walker marrying her "frog prince," Jonni rejecting her physician and finding a new one, JoAnn learning "that you can't live to please your parents," Eva thriving in a foreign culture, and Donna's decision to "get rid of *him*" and divorce the father of her first five children.

Oceanne poignantly expresses her newfound power in her poem, *Awaken in Me*:

Awaken in me the giant
That I may live naturally
Unimpeded by illusions
That encumber me
Awaken in me the giant
That I may practice wise
Knowing the power within me
As the creator of my life

Assertiveness. Along with authenticity, learning to be assertive contributes to increased personal power. Many of the participants have become more assertive in midlife. They exhibit assertiveness when they consider media information but assimilate it only if it aligns with their own wants, needs, and values. Phrases such as "I don't listen to them [media pundits]," "I've got to the point where I'm not going to put up with stuff

[advertising] that's not right," and "I don't give a rat's ass if anybody else likes it [physical appearance that doesn't fit media standards]," abounded in these conversations.

The most obvious way they exhibited assertion was by ignoring advertising. They take scant heed of ads, feeling little or no draw to do what marketers tell them to do. They had a hard time even recalling ads, let alone conjuring up those that had affected them.

Furthermore, some participants used media sources, especially nonfiction books about relationships and fiction with strong female characters, to learn to be more assertive when dealing with men. For example, they said, "I just went in there and told him what I wanted," "I don't ever do what a doctor tells me to do anymore unless I research it first," and "My husband tells me how to drive and I just go 'okay' and smile…I'm going to drive the way I want to drive." Their comments were reminiscent of dialog from the novels and movies they had mentioned, like *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood, Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *Steel Magnolias*. Rose noted, "We are brought up to think we've got to have a damned man, which is a joke…." However, she added, "I don't think that you have to be forceful. I think women can have everything they want and still be feminine…and still be equal without showing our ass. It's just all a matter of knowing, it's called grace."

Becoming socially conscious. Putting into practice what has been learned about being more authentic and more assertive results in a rise in social consciousness, an awareness of one's contribution to society and the potential for contributing in a more powerful way. There were four ways that participants in this study expressed increased social consciousness: (1) by talking about their distrust of patriarchy, (2) by discussing their sense of civic responsibility, (3) through consumer advocacy, and (4) by wanting to

contribute to the greater good of their communities, their country, and the world. Media sources helped them become more aware of inequities in all of these areas and fostered a desire to do something about them.

Firstly, building upon their newfound assertiveness, some participants were very vocal in describing their distrust of our culture's patriarchal system. Lily was the only one to use the term patriarchy, saying, "We live in such a patriarchal society." Others, however, also expressed distrust of males in positions of authority. While talking about television news, Rose said of politicians, "Those crooked bastards! There is not one person up there [Washington, D.C.] that you can trust." Jacqueline echoed that sentiment with, "You can't trust them. They need some work in ethics." Jonni talked about how her male doctor "didn't give a damn as long as I paid my bill." And Lily had her mental run-in with her "chauvinistic preacher."

Three participants expressed opinions about patriarchy when they talked about war movies. Their sentiments were expressed by Lily, who said of the movie *Black Hawk Down*, "It was so realistic. It shows how our government really does not care about our kids that they send over there."

Secondly, increased social consciousness was illustrated through a heightened sense of civic awareness and responsibility. Participants were concerned about right overcoming wrong, justice prevailing over injustice, and good conquering evil. Although phrases like "right and wrong" were not always used, that is essentially what these conversations were about.

For example, three participants talked about movies that depicted inequities in our culture. Susan, referring to the movie *Forrest Gump*, about a mildly mentally retarded

man, talked about becoming aware of "how we equate intelligence with humanity in this country and that's so wrong, and we are working toward genetically purging ourselves of these people who are so amazing." Eva was impressed with the movie *I Am Sam*, also about a man with mild mental retardation, because it showed "the prejudice against people like that." Rose liked it that *Monster's Ball* "did show the stupidity and bigotry" regarding interracial relationships.

Jonni and Rose discussed TV shows that depict how the U.S. system of justice works, JoAnn spoke of how crimes are solved in murder mystery movies, and Susan related a story in a book about justice. Jonni watches *The Practice* because she likes "to try to follow the lawyer's method of conclusion. Sometimes these people are guilty and they get off. It's realistic." Rose said that *JAG* appeals to her because it shows, "Justice. Divine justice. How, no matter what, you always do, ultimately have to pay in some way for your choices. Everybody does. And it is always nice to see that it is reflected on TV because usually it is not." JoAnn explained, "My dream is to be an attorney. I love to go to movies and try to figure out who did it and why." Susan's conversation about justice revolved around the book, *The Other Boleyn Girl.* She said that Anne Boleyn was not nice to her sister Mary, so Susan can't wait "for Anne to get hers" [to be beheaded].

Two participants, Sweetness and Susan, described the damage they think the Internet can do. Susan said, "My husband got started with Internet porn." Sweetness stated, "I absolutely despise the Internet because of all the people you hear about, the people that molest children… That is all wrong, just nasty stuff that is available because of the Internet… There is just so much evil out there."

Thirdly, many of the these participants use mass media sources for the acquisition of consumer information, informing their own and others' purchasing and product use decisions. They become consumer advocates, no longer buying willy-nilly, as they might have when they were younger, but being more critical in making their purchasing choices. Sweetness said, "Mainly I listen to Clark Howard as far as mortgages, credit cards, what to watch out for in the consumer world and stuff like that." JoAnn reads books and peruses sites about the stock market to help her decide how to invest her money. Jonni uses the Internet to look up clothes in online catalogs before going to the store to buy them. Fiona, Rose, Oceanne, Lily, and Jonni also look up drugs and medicines on the Net. Some participants use magazines to give them decorating and cooking ideas, which can influence their buying decisions. Susan likes "ads that tell me about stuff that's helpful." Moreover, they are quick to share this information for the benefit of others. To that end, four participants offered consumer advice on a variety of products.

Fourthly, although this study revealed a strengthening of the individual, the ultimate outcome is a strengthening of devotion to contribution to community, to giving to others. These women may have begun their development processes by wanting to contribute to their own well-being, but the end result was a desire to become their best so that they would have their best to give back to the world. There is an intense awareness of being part of a greater whole. Fiona said, "I want to learn to be a giver." Susan wants to write fiction for midlife women, "Because nobody's doing that and those women deserve good books, too." Jacqueline and Walker want to help others, especially women, with their spiritual growth by offering seminars. Lily wants to teach midlife women about

making good decisions. Sweetness is dedicated to offering yoga for people of all ages. Jonni spoke about knowing that she is "in this life to help people" and believes that her trials as a young bride serve as an example to others to overcome adversity. In midlife, she wrote a book and had a movie produced about her life story. Although she prefers not to be in the limelight, when asked to do a media interview, she does in the hope that someone out there will be strengthened by her ability to survive, learning that they, too, can surpass the mistakes of their youth.

Cognitive Development

Participants exhibited increased cognitive development, a change in thinking patterns over time, which was facilitated by what they learned from media sources. Although there are many factors that contribute to cognitive development, in this study there was one primary contributor, the construction of knowledge.

Construction of knowledge. The participants used media sources to learn to construct three types of knowledge: (1) technical skills, (2) critical thinking, and (3) subjective knowing. At the same time that they become more analytical and logical, for example learning about computer technology, they consider new points of view and come to trust their own perceptions as they never have before. Those new points of view are offered in the sources they attend to, whether fiction or non-fiction. Seeing how other people do or might do something, turning it over in their minds before trying it out themselves, and knowing they can go back and find other options if one doesn't work are how women learn from pop culture sources.

Technical knowledge was the most obvious type of knowledge acquired by participants. Computers are a prominent product of our pop culture, and three participants

talked dramatically about learning to use computers and four others mentioned learning to use computers or computer software programs. Most of them learned by reading manuals, practicing trial-and-error, and calling technical support representatives on the phone. Susan discussed using a computer program to learn to touch type, which she refused to learn in high school lest somebody ever try to make her be a secretary.

Susan said:

> This old dog just starts pulling teeth cause every time I finish a lesson, and the last two have taken me a hundred times…my internal me goes, "No, no, no, we are not ready to move on." [Laughter] I'm my own worst enemy about it which I have to just make myself do it and eventually after about 150 or 200 tries my mind will go, "Oh, alright."

Lily, a computer whiz, contends, "Once women get past the barrier of thinking they can't do technology, they discover they can do anything they want on a computer.

Fiona stated:

> From a person who could not even open the box to get one out to put one up…now I have learned how to put a computer together. I've learned how to fix my friends' computers and how to reinstall their software and how to fix software problems. It's been fun. I learned all that from…the tech boys at Mindspring…I was surprised to find out that I was so handy at it and that I could remember things when they had no meaning several years ago.

The second type of new knowledge that facilitated the cognitive development of some of these participants stems from learning to think more critically, to consider

alternate points of view that might have seemed out of the realm of reason before. Some participants talked about "thoughts that I've never had before," as Walker put it, explaining the book *The Power of Now.*

Rose described new critical thinking ability when talking about the two new fields she learned about for work. She excitedly noted that metaphysical books have taught her "…how to deal with our new generations…. Not so much control them, but keep them from controlling us. You kind of tweak them in the right direction. They are coming in [to life on earth] to do some really advanced work." And, seminars have provided information on the new DNA healing work she performs by circling her hands above a person's body and calling on divine intervention. She's "very careful to read the manual" and do the DNA work properly because, "I hate to screw up somebody's mind." She laughed, adding, "Ruin their life."

Sometimes critical thinking is encouraged by something as simple as watching TV shows. Oceanne said she watches game shows, "…to see the reality of all the things I don't know…I learn so much." Sweetness said of *Larry King*, "Always you get different sides…I try to figure it out…I just kind of absorb the information."

The third type of knowledge construction that adds to cognitive development is subjective knowing, learning to trust one's own feelings, insights, and intuition. Lily's new knowledge, encouraged by what she read in books and on the Internet, is both critical and subjective. She said that she revels in learning about women-centered religions that she "never knew existed before. It's opened up a whole new world." She has learned to "trust my feelings about what religion's all about."

Susan expressed a dynamic change in her thinking that was subjective and critical. She said of her perception of her ex-husband, "I was able to detach from that and love him and see that he was a very isolated and lonely and frightened person in there." She explained that the 12-step program, which she attended after learning that her ex-husband is a sex addict, was "a double blessing, because the program helped me learn to respond in a healthy, non-enabling way."

Fiona's knowledge construction is also both subjective and critical. She questioned her emotional development with her psychiatrist: "My first question for him was, 'Can you create a new personality? Can you make a new one all your own?' That's really what I have been trying to do for the past year." She uses an interesting technique for constructing a new sense of self.

Fiona said:

> I do that in my head. I keep a book. I say, "I'm going to put that in my book. Let me think if I have a whole chapter on that…." Really, that's the only way I can conceive of myself. I become the character of my book…. I have to have some way to create myself, so I do it in my own book. Because reading is all I ever had.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth is the third facet of self-development, along with personal power and cognitive development, which was unearthed in this study. Two aspects of spiritual growth emerged from the data: (1) spiritual growth helped women to make meaning of their lives and of life in general, and (2) some expressed unequivocal hope and happiness.

Meaning-making. Making meaning of life occurred in two ways, through the development of new religious beliefs and by exploring beliefs about death. Rose, Oceanne, Susan, Lily, Jacqueline, Walker, and Jonni have all acquired new beliefs about religion as they have grown older. In some cases, there were revelatory circumstances; in others, the development of new beliefs occurred over time.

Jonni developed new religious beliefs as she matured and began reading books about spiritual beliefs that were dramatically different than those she was raised with. She was raised a Baptist, but with her parents "not an outrageous value was put on church attendance." However, Jonni was "forced to join the Church of God" during her first marriage, of which she says, "Those are good but sad people in my opinion, it was all fear of Hell and you couldn't do anything that wasn't a sin… They weren't in touch with reality." By reading Edgar Cayce's books about reincarnation, which she said are reinforced by time-travel movies like *Back to the Future* and *The Time Machine*, and through spontaneous insights and past-life regressions with a hypnotherapist, Jonni has come to believe in reincarnation.

Jonni explained:

> I believe that everything we do here on earth influences what we'll need to do in our next lives. When I started to explore my past lives, they just seemed to fit so much better than that church stuff… I know I was a priestess of some sort in an ancient community. I know I wore a long, white robe and I was there to help people. And I'm here to help people now.

Jacqueline spoke at length about when she was in her twenties and went to seminary. “It really was a transcendent experience where I was truly living in flow.” She continued, “So I learned what a lot of these books [self-help books] talk about…when living what you feel is your call…things literally do cleave to you and from you in ways that you really can’t talk about.” But she got away from her “flow” and found “the emptiness of that lifestyle,” which has motivated her to read and explore in order to rediscover her original calling, redesigning it to fit her life today. Even though she holds a doctorate of divinity degree, she said, “I still have no interest at all in just working with a church or religious group.” She says she has “a much more ecumenical approach.” She’s concluded that, “The workplace, maybe the corporate world, may be exactly what I need. Because if anybody needs the message today [laughter] it’s the Worldcoms to Enrons.” Her new career as a “life coach” in corporate settings fits her new approach to religion. By using current resources, like popular books on business and spirituality, she is able to teach life skills including “work in ethics, kind of sliding in the spiritual side.”

Oceanne has made drastic changes in her religious beliefs. She said that during her midlife changes “my spirit wanted to go higher” and she did a lot of “soul searching.” That was easy to do in Atlanta, she said, because “this place is so spiritual.” She turned her back on her Baptist upbringing and attended a Unity church with “a female that was a minister.” Oceanne declared, “I was a different person.” She added, “The minister…this was father’s day, she went into this meditation of prayer…around being a father-mother God… she was just taking me on a journey about God and who God was and was a more expanded expression of God.” Later, Oceanne attended the Dennis Kimbrel seminars at that church and bought the seminar tapes that she would play over-and-over. That’s when

she had her "fight with God." The result was "I have a much bigger God today than I did at that point…." Her change in beliefs "drew lots of spirituality, lots of people." She's now a member of a women's spiritual group that meets to discuss the spiritual books they have read and other issues; and, she attends a "Buddhist community center." Oceanne confided, "You are going to say, 'Take those women away.' But I'm fascinated by what I feel… I feel trees… I go outside and stand in the back and I'm like one of the trees…and I think, 'That tree has everything inside of it to do what it needs to do. I have everything inside of me for me to do what it is that I need to do.'" The beginning of her poem *I Am Goddess* sums up Oceanne's beliefs: "I am Goddess, a big statement some might say, for me to be Goddess, is to be a creator of peace in the world, every moment of every day…."

Rose studies religions by reading books, visiting Internet sites, and attending seminars. Her grandfather was "a Quaker Preacher…and my grandmother was a healer, a witch." The grandfather was on the paternal side of her family and the grandmother on the maternal side. Rose said, "It was a strange group…I got to watch grandma in the middle of the night. She's the only witch I ever saw that would have a cauldron and a shotgun at the same time." But that grandmother would "go to the Baptist church. I could not figure out why in the hell she drove me there. And she'd go, 'We have to fit in.' I said, 'I don't.'" And she hasn't. A practicing witch herself, Rose said, "Every religion. I love them all. I think they are all just different belief systems that God has put here on Earth so that men, man can understand who he is… And so I like the Druids, I like the Catholics." She continues, "The Baptists, I like them, but…they are like a mule with blinders that's really pissed off… I like all of them, so I use all."

Rose explained, however, that she doesn't need to attend any type of group service. "I got my own circle in the backyard… I light my candles. I open up the energy. I call in my guardians and have them put in a boundary of protection and I do my work there." She noted, "I don't need to speak to any other person to get my request done. I do a lot of work on different dimensions." Wondering what would become of these disclosures, she said, "I may not be good for this paper [dissertation]… They [dissertation committee] are going to look at that and they are going to go, 'You've got one real wacko.'" But, Rose continued to explain, "Around thirty-five [years old], something activates and it's like somebody reaches in and flips the switch and says, 'Okay, now you've played around way too long… We are going to start showing you glimpses… [of] a multi-dimensional world." She stated that our "inner knowledge" becomes activated as we age, and that we become more aware of our other lifetimes. She knows she was in Egypt and liked the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet, whom she believes to have been an extraterrestrial. "And I also knew that I was an old woman in the Druids that never married, that did nothing but sit in a cave around a coven and do spell work for people. I am sure I had a good time doing it." She concludes, "Most of our young adult lifetime, I think, the women in our age, we spend just trying to survive… We have some gifts that we don't even use until we are able."

Lily mentioned the "ancient woman-centered religions" that she's been reading about and said they "open a whole new world." Walker spoke of "the goddess I've become so close to [through reading and meditation], who brings me so much peace." Susan's religious beliefs, which she has explored by reading, have expanded to include a bit of humor. She said that God supported her work as a writer some years ago when she

tried working as a real estate agent. Smiling, she explained, "God did not want me to be a real estate agent so He gave me psychotic sellers and buyers. They were wonderful material for a book."

The second aspect of meaning-making was exploring beliefs about death. Fiona, Rose, and Jonni have used books, the Internet, seminars, and television to develop new concepts of death as they have aged. Fiona is "fascinated, for some reason, with TV shows about the pyramids," and with "medical shows about disease." She admits to being drawn to sources with "themes of death." Rose has read books and attended seminars that explain what happens after death. And, Jonni loves her books about reincarnation, like Edgar Cayce's *Story of Karma*.

Fiona said:

> But the aging thing and the thing about dying and facing eternity - yes, that has become a predominate thought that I never would have had twenty years ago. Maybe not even ten years ago. But…I'm restructuring my own thoughts about myself and… I begin to think about things like that. What's going to happen? What is death? Is there something after? Is there spiritual? I find myself to be a more, not a spiritual person because I felt I always was in some respect. Not in a traditional sense. But if spiritual can mean more forgiving, kinder, trying to be more thoughtful of others, less interested in myself, then I think I do become that as I get older it seems more important to me to do that. To be a giver.

Rose explained that when you die, if you haven't led a good life, you can become "a fragmented soul" and "attach to another person." That's why some people are

"bipolar, multiple personality, crazy." She said, "Say you are a drunk or a murderer…and you have been taught all your life if you do these things you are going to hell…You don't want to go…You stay trapped here…attached to someone."

Jonni talked about wanting to get this life right so that when she dies her next life will be "enriched" by this one. "That's a lot better," she said, "then having to learn everything all over again because I didn't pay attention this time. I'm very aware that I only have so much time left to get it right."

Hope and happiness. Along with meaning-making, the second aspect of spiritual growth is hope and happiness. A number of participants expressed hope for the future and declared their happiness in the present. Oceanne said, "I have so many gifts and so many talents now I know that I am truly loved." She learned to appreciate her gifts and feel loved by attending seminars and listening to tapes. However, her interpretation of that material has led her to "reach for the stars," which could be an unrealistic aspiration at this point in her life. She needs to find solid ground first. For example, she recently took a commission-based job that may not be the best choice considering that she is in financial crisis.

Fiona professed her happiness, saying, "I have this most wonderful life. A wonderful life. I have people who love me and people I love. …" Sweetness said, "I am very lucky and I'm very blessed in my life. I have like the perfect life. I have no worries whatsoever. I have a lovely extended family and friends and my husband is the absolute most wonderful person in the world… I am doing exactly what I want to do." Sweetness was so insistent about her happiness that it made me wonder if she is happy or just trying to convince herself that she is happy. In either case, she values happiness. Susan said, "I

thank God for everything that I have and… I ask Him to give me opportunities to share His love and I thank Him."

Furthermore, Susan stated:

> I just think that we are blessed in this country to have the capacity, the opportunity and the capacity to have seasons in our lives as women where we may be performing one function at one phase in our lives and then we will go into something totally different and what a blessing it is to have the choice to do that.

Eva and Jacqueline expressed hope for the future. Eva's Jehovah's Witness materials help sustain her positive attitude. She explained that those beliefs support her as she considers changes in her life. She said, "At about [age] fifty-five, I know I'm going to change my life. I don't know what I am going to do yet… But it's going to be good." Jacqueline talked about "redefining her identity" by reading and reflecting. She said, "I feel very hopeful about it. I am working so hard and I'm willing to go into it. I'm real hopeful that I'm going to come out much deeper and richer on the other side of it. But I'm not there yet."

Jacqueline concluded our interview by saying:

> I love my work, I love my husband and I love my child, I love my home, I love everything about my life. I am very much in process. I have miles and miles to go. I'm dealing with issues that I have never dealt with before. But, I really do know, I have a peace inside and I really do know I'm on track and moving in the right direction.

Some of the participants talked about seeking themes of hope and happiness in the media. They like optimistic endings and were distressed over movies, like *The Joy Luck Club* and *Saving Private Ryan* that left them without a promise of well-being. Susan said, "*The Joy Luck Club*… I kept waiting for them [characters in the movie] to communicate with each other and they never did. It was painful to watch… So much could have been avoided and it wasn't… There was no closure. I like them to leave me with some sense of hope." JoAnn said of *Saving Private Ryan*, "It was horrible. All of them dying like that. I'll never go to a movie like that again." Fiona and Jacqueline like "resolution." Lily simply said, "I look for happy endings."

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the investigation into the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. Part 1 presented the profiles of the twelve women who were interviewed. Part 2 reviewed the findings.

The participants ranged in age from forty-four to fifty-eight and had a variety of ethnic, economic, professional, educational, and religious backgrounds. Some were married, some divorced and remarried, some divorced and not remarried, and one never married. Most had children and some had grandchildren.

Several components of the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women were revealed in the findings of the study. The first component was the mass media sources that midlife women attend to. Books of all types surfaced as the primary source, with spiritual/metaphysical books being the most popular type of book read amongst this group of participants. Other media sources played a secondary role in self-development. Those other sources were television, the Internet, movies, magazines,

newspapers, music, seminars and seminar audiotapes, talk radio, a professional journal, and a 12-step program.

The second component of the role of pop culture consisted of motivators for attending to those particular sources. It was found that the nature of mass media, its convenience and allowance for independent study, was one motivator. The other motivator was the advent of developmental issues, trigger events, which caused all of the women in this study to seek out new information in order to deal with those issues. Developmental issues consisted of relationship, aging, and spiritual concerns.

The third component of the role of pop culture in self-development was how midlife women learn from those sources. It was discovered that they learn in an independent and reflective manner. They prefer to learn and consider what they have learned on their own.

The fourth component divulged what they learn and how that learning affects self-development. Three facets of that component emerged: (1) increased personal power, (2) cognitive development, and (3) spiritual growth. Personal power increased through authenticity, assertiveness, and social consciousness. Authenticity, a woman's feeling that she is living her life in ways that align with her genuine self, included validating a sense of self, relinquishing adolescent ideals, and reclaiming the child's "calling." Assertiveness skills improved, especially in the areas of ignoring advertising and dealing with men. Social consciousness included distrust of patriarchy, civic responsibility, consumer advocacy, and contribution to community. The second facet of this component, cognitive development, was revealed through the construction of knowledge, including technical skills, critical thinking, and subjective knowing. The third facet of this

component, spiritual growth, was illustrated through meaning making, and hope and happiness. Meaning-making occurred by learning about new religions and exploring beliefs about death. Many of the participants expressed happiness in the present and feelings of hope for the future.

This study found that pop culture does play a role in the self-development of midlife women. The primary way that pop culture plays that role is through the mass media sources women select to attend to and the effect those sources' messages eventually wield in the women's lives.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

You'd have done fine at track meets.
Especially if they'd had an event called Jumping to Conclusions.
Kristin Hunter (1966)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. No research was found on this topic for women in this age group, although studies have been conducted on the influence of pop culture on teens and young women (Kilbourne, 1999; Kilbourne & Pipher, 2000; Pipher, 1995). Those studies have shown that mass media images affect the self-development of younger females in detrimental ways, fostering negative self-concepts. Questions guiding this study regarded whether or not pop culture, through mass media sources, is attended to by midlife women and, if so, how the messages in those sources might affect them.

A qualitative research design was employed because by being more concerned with process than outcome it reflects how individuals construct life meanings while interacting with their "social worlds" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 97). This type of design proved most appropriate for understanding how women in midlife make meaning of the events that triggered their self-development and of sources of pop culture that influence that self-development.

Furthermore, narrative analysis, a particular type of qualitative research that investigates first-person accounts (Riessman, 1993), was used so that women's own

stories would be heard. How the women told the stories, what they included and left out, and the contexts in which they recounted their stories were often as revealing as the stories themselves. A couple of psychological approaches to narrative analysis were used, including Alexander's (1988) areas of salience and McAdams' (1989; 1993) life story model of identity. Hayes and Flannery (2000) remind us that women's stories are full of issues regarding "development of identity" (p. 91).

For this study, twelve women between the ages of 44 and 58 were interviewed. The interviews, which lasted from fifty minutes to two hours, were conducted using four open-ended questions.

The analysis of the data revealed three components of the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women: they experience increased personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth. The interplay of those components leads to the conclusions and discussion that follow.

Conclusions and Discussion

This chapter presents two conclusions based on the findings identified in Chapter Four, which are summarized above, and then relates these conclusions to the literature. The two conclusions are:

1. Pop culture facilitates midlife development for women.
2. Personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth intertwine to form a single developmental spiral.

Most of the women in this study were in the process of self-development, striving to garner control of their minds, bodies, and spirituality. Most had not completed the process, but are determined to do so. Those who are close to feeling that they have

control and those who have acquired control serve as examples to others that it is possible for a woman, in a culture rife with prohibitive influences, to be her own person.

Conclusion One: Pop Culture Facilitates Midlife Development for Women

Hayes (Hayes & Flannery, 2000) stated that women of all ages learn about gendered roles and identities through the media. She noted, "Women's magazines, TV shows, newspapers, and most recently, the Internet can communicate biased and stereotypical messages" (p. 41-42). It would seem that such slanted messages would negatively influence the self-development of women, which is why some scholars believe that women should not rely on mass media for learning (Douglas, 1995; Fracassa, 1999; Lemish, 2000; McCracken, 1993; Pipher, 1995; Raymond, 1990; Rogers, 1999).

But other scholars believe that, with knowledge, women can be selective about the mass media sources they attend to and can strive to choose the measure of influence they allow those sources to wield in their lives (Apfelbaum, 2000; Beauvoir, 1949; Jenkins, 1991; Minh-Ha, 1999; Modleski, 1982; Ogden, 2001). Such was the case with the women in this study. A discussion of the sources they selected, how they used those sources, and the effect of those sources' messages on their self-development leads to the conclusion that pop culture does influence the self-development of midlife women, but primarily in ways that are acknowledged and to which the women assent.

What Pop Culture Sources Midlife Women Attend To

Books were overwhelmingly selected by women in this study when they wanted to learn about something new, whether of an impersonal or a personal nature. Kelly (1996) reports that women in this culture have long turned to books when seeking personal transformation. It's a natural selection process, with books being the primary

source of information women and men grew up with in school. Moreover, a study sponsored by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE, 1996) found that baby boomers read more of all types of sources including books, newspapers, and magazines, and use the Internet more than younger generations. They also watch less television and attend fewer movies, presumably because of a preference for reading.

Bateson (1989) noted that when asked about their life histories, most women divide them into chapters like in a book. One of the participants in this study thinks of her life in precisely that way. The familiarity of books and their ability, when well-written, to transport readers to new realms of learning and thinking, makes them popular with women who are facing the need to redesign their lives as they make the transition into midlife.

This study revealed that midlife women like nonfiction and fiction as long as it tells a good story so that they can identify with the messages and/or characters. McAdams (1989; 1993) contends that people create their own personal myths throughout their lives and want to bring together opposing aspects of their stories so that they can experience harmony. Women read in order to learn how others bring harmony and happiness into their lives.

Even though books are a common source of information for women in this age cohort in this culture, the overwhelming preference for reading for these participants indicates a group that values learning and is at least moderately if not well educated. Although some grew up poor, no one was raised in an environment that prohibited access to public education. Even the two who did not graduate from high school displayed a respect for education by receiving their GEDs in adulthood. Midlife women who grew up

in environments that did not esteem education or who had reading disabilities might have different preferences for acquiring information.

Although books were by far the main source of information that women attended to, they also watched television and accessed the Internet, another form of reading. Some read newspapers and magazines, and attended seminars; a few went to the movies; and most listened to music at least on occasion.

How Midlife Women Use Pop Culture Sources

This study illustrated that midlife women opt to learn in solitary fashion. They want to explore new information on their own and then perhaps, if they choose, discuss it with others. The selection of books and the Internet as primary sources of information point to this preference for informal self-study.

Informal learning, that which "refers to the experiences of everyday living from which we learn something" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 21), was preferred because the women wanted to learn within the contexts of their lives. Gardner (in Ryan & Cooper, 2000) said that learning, in order to have value, must take place in context. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) stated, "Certainly informal learning contexts…are where much of adult learning takes place" (p. 396).

These participants used informal learning in a self-directed manner, systematically selecting what to attend to amongst books and the Internet. They took what was convenient in their everyday lives and organized it in a fashion that facilitated their learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) state, "Although these two terms [informal learning and self-directed learning] have not often been used interchangeably, both describe similar phenomena" (p. 32). They explain that "this form of learning occurs

most often in learners' natural settings and is initiated and carried through primarily by the learners themselves (Candy, 1991; Coombs, 1985; Merriam and Brocket, 1997; Watkins and Marsick, 1993)" (p. 32). That was the case in this study.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) cite an example of a woman discovering that she has breast cancer and therefore becoming motivated to learn everything she can about treatment so that she can talk intelligently with medical personnel and be actively involved in her own recovery. The woman's self-directed learning pursuits arise from her need to solve a problem. Likewise, the women in this study responded to their problems by taking control of their learning, carefully selecting the sources they would attend to and thoughtfully applying those lessons to their lives.

The Effect of Those Sources on Self-development

The effect of media messages on women has long been acknowledged. For instance, at the dawn of the twentieth century the ideal American woman became epitomized by the "Gibson Girl" (McPhilimy, 2002). Charles Dana Gibson's version of a dazzlingly dressed, vibrant, young American woman first appeared as an illustration in the original *Life* magazine. Gibson was shocked at the popularity of his model and stunned that women emulated the image. He didn't consider himself a woman's trendsetter, but rather a political satirist. Today it seems fitting that a popular image of an American woman was created by a satirist.

In North American culture, images of women are no more realistic today than they were one hundred years ago and the effect of those images on a woman's sense of self is still profound. Impossibly thin, obsessively sexual, and seldom bright, women are

too often portrayed in limited ways (Turner & Hamilton, 1997; Wolszon, 1998). As Wolszon (1998) reminds us, "95% of women cannot measure up to this ideal" (p. 4).

This study's participants were well aware of unrealistic media portrayals of women and of the omission of positive media representations of women in their cohort, which Hayes and Smith labeled "simply invisible" (in Hayes and Flannery, 2000, p. 7). This study shows that women understand that they were unduly influenced by those images when they were younger, just as Kilbourne and Pipher (1999; 1995) contend that girls are affected today. Furthermore, women know that even though they are much more aware of the effect of media images than they were when they were girls, they are still probably influenced in some ways.

Although some studies signify that there are midlife women who are "obsessively concerned with health, exercise, and diet" (Bergquist, Greenberg, & Klaum, 1993, p. 41) and it can be speculated that such obsessions might come from the impact of media messages, most of the women in this study have surpassed the desire to fit someone else's perception of what they ought to look or be like. Only one seemed unduly concerned about her weight, appearance, and age. She runs, diets, reads weight loss materials, and has on occasion taken diet pills and joined weight loss programs. For her, weight is a primary concern, even though her body size appeared to be within a perfectly healthy range. And when asked about aging she replied, "I try not to even think about it." She repeated that statement later in the conversation and expressed concern about how she looks to others.

But most of the women had gone through Levinson's (1978) process of "detribalization" (p. 242) wherein they look less to others for reinforcement and more to

themselves. Thus, this study affirms Lippert (1997), Marston (2001), and McQuaide's (1998) contentions that as women age they become more concerned with living up to their own physical, emotional, and spiritual ideals rather than the limited ideals of others. They might fulfill others' concepts of what it means to be a woman in this culture just enough to keep their jobs, but they do so with full awareness of their purpose. As one participant put it, "I only wear pantyhose when I absolutely have to so I won't get fired." Some researchers (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Gilligan, 1993) found that midlife women sometimes knowingly allow themselves to be dominated, for example by wearing prescribed clothes to work, because they understand they must do so in order to survive in our patriarchal society. However, they do "not align themselves with authorities" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986/1997, p. 44). They do not necessarily consider the authorities to be "right" in their demands. For example, a woman might think that being required to wear pantyhose to work is silly, especially when the male boss making the demand doesn't have to wear them. The woman considers herself to be better informed; she considers herself to be the final authority in many areas of her life.

That is not to say that the media does not influence midlife women in profound ways, because it does. Women in this culture cannot escape being affected by "the power of representation" (Nixon, 1997, p. 318) in the media. "For [film scholar] Mulvey…the pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (p. 318). Women are represented from the male point of view because males are in positions of power that dominate mass media like film, television, and advertising. Therefore, there is a "gender imbalance [that] maintains the power relations between men and women;

between the active masculine control of the look and the passive feminine object of the look" (p. 319).

In this study some of the women were fully conscious of male-dominated images of women in mass media, some were just becoming aware of that concept, and one was not aware of the power of men over her life. But those who were aware were making efforts to overcome the influence of mass media messages, stepping out of their former passive roles as objects by carefully selecting the sources they attend to and then perusing those sources with consideration. They no longer believe whatever they hear, mistrusting the patriarchal media and preferring to research information via a multitude of sources before passing judgment on it. They do not fall for hype, whether that puffery is intentional, as some cultural studies researchers insist (Giroux & Simon, 1989; Mayo, 1999), or happenstance, as others contend (Browne & Browne, 2001). The difference between the affect of pop culture on a girl or young adult woman and a midlife woman is that the elder is influenced with considerably more awareness and purpose. She attempts to control the source rather than letting the source control her.

That, as it turns out, is a fitting analogy for the rest of her life as well. Midlife women are more likely to take control of other aspects of their lives, including their health, education, relationships, careers, finances, homes, and spirituality (Lippert, 1997; McQuaide, 1998).

Today the ideal American woman, like the Gibson Girl a hundred years ago, might still be epitomized by youth and sexiness in the media, but most midlife women have broadened their perspectives to move beyond such limitations of worthiness. They know that their worth lies in their minds, hearts, and souls. They know their value, even if

our pop culture does not. McQuaide (1998) said of the midlife women in her study, "Their sense of 'personhood' was stronger than ever, yet society and the media were fading them into an invisibility that does not sit well with the baby boomer generation" (p. 30).

It is speculated that as baby boomers age, because they are such a large group, about 73 million people, society's attitude towards the elderly will change and become more accepting (Bergquist et al., 1993; Olson, 2001). But midlife women are not waiting. They are accepting themselves and moving forward with their lives.

In accepting themselves rather than adhering to pop cultural images of perpetual youth and sexuality, midlife women go through a transition of letting go of their adolescent illusions of what it means to be a woman, as McQuaide (1998) found in her study, and of embracing their awareness of their adult selves, as the Levinsons and others (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996), and McAdams (1993) contended. Levinson and McKee (1978), in their study of men, stated that one must accept the death of "the youthful hero" and discover new qualities that lead to being a "hero of a different kind" (p. 215). In the Levinson's (1996) study of women, that concept was reinforced when they said, "After 40, we may begin to develop many archetypes – potentials within the self – that remain relatively primitive until mid-life" (p. 15). They go on to say that a woman's dream of a successful life is "embedded in a corresponding cultural myth [which] portrays a hero struggling against great obstacles in quest of a noble goal. The contemporary myth…is one of the few in which the hero is a woman" (p. 369). McAdams (1993) believes that we bring heroic images, "imagoes" (p.

117), in and out of our lives as we create our life stories, and those images are quite different in midlife than they were when we were younger.

In the process of deciding who they are and want to be at this point in their lives, midlife women selectively use pop culture sources, especially books and the Internet, in order to explore possibilities. They are seeking new examples of heroic images that they might want to incorporate into their own lives.

They are eager to make sense of this new phase of life, one which, for the first time, presents the reality that their existence as they know it on earth is finite. Their lives are about half over and they will die someday. Riordan and Kahnweiler (1996) found that they feel a real time limitation, so they are not about to waste their time. Women find and use sources that are helpful to them and readily dismiss those that are not.

All but one of the women in this study recalled a trigger event that signaled transition into midlife. Although the trigger events, like relationship or aging issues, were traumatic in some cases and less so in others, knowledge or lack of knowledge about the impending trigger event did not seem to predict the type of transition the woman experienced. In other words, the most unexpected trigger events did not necessarily precipitate the most difficult transitions. For example, one woman who experienced an unexpected, nasty divorce has made a healthy, happy transition. Another woman, however, who experienced the expected separation from her grown child when he left home, has been struggling with a difficult, depression-ridden transition.

Furthermore, some of the women went through stages of transition while others did not go though distinct stages. Some went through the stages that many scholars, like Jung (1954), E. H. Erikson (1978), Gould (1978), Levinson et al. (1978), and the

Levinsons (1997), claim are to be expected at certain ages. For example, the Levinsons assert that in midlife women first examine their young adulthood, then experiment with new choices, and then deal with discrepancies in their lives. Some of these participants did that but others experienced "stages" in random order, in tandem, or not at all.

One of the life discrepancies that the women in the Levinson and Levinson (1996) study became aware of, and which some of the women in my study were also aware of, was the reality that, after years of trying, they could not have it all and would need to "find a new basis for living in middle adulthood" (p. 372).

The Levinsons explained:

> The woman began more seriously to examine the reality and the illusion in her imagery… It became evident that she was not, despite the mass media hype and her own private wish, a Superwoman who could accomplish everything… A severe developmental crisis occurred when a woman felt that much of her existing life was coming to an end, that a drastic restructuring was necessary, and that she lacked the basis for making a new start. (p. 372)

The Levinsons (1997) said of the "Age 50 Transition" (p. 26), it can be an especially difficult change for "persons who have made few significant life changes…in the previous ten to fifteen years" (p. 26). Three women in my study who had been "stagnant" (p. 173), avoiding and denying problems in their lives, had or were having difficult transitions into midlife. Suddenly, when the problems, for example relationship or health problems, could no longer be avoided, they sought information and solace in books, websites, and other sources.

Seven participants, however, did not experience trauma over the trigger events that ushered in the realization that midlife was upon them. They did, however, seek out sources of information, but more out of intense curiosity and a burning desire to grow rather than from a searing need to balance discrepancies or heal deep divisions, like the Levinsons (1997) spoke of. These women illustrate McAdams' (1993) contention that identity is not fully formed in childhood and young adulthood, as some scholars like the Levinsons proclaim, but remains an issue throughout one's entire lifetime. Because identity is constantly being reshaped, it is a natural process that does not have predictable transitional stages according to age. It is fluid and flexible. Bateson (1989) agrees, saying that an ability to be flexible and deal with change is the skill that will sustain women through all of the events in their lives. This was the case for the majority of women in this study.

This study points out that, as Schlossberg (1990) stated, "If there is one quality that characterizes adults…it's variability" (p. 8). Some women went through predictable stages of transition into midlife but most did not. A few experienced debilitating transitions but most did not. In any case, they used pop culture sources in order to learn about being in midlife.

What most of the women wanted to learn was how to transform their thinking and therefore their lives in order to move into new dimensions of living. Most did not want information that merely reinforced what they were already doing; they did not want to be told how to be better wives, how to get thinner, or how to be a more productive worker. They wanted to learn about new ways of thinking, perspectives on relationships, self-acceptance, potential careers, health, and alternative ways of viewing a higher power.

Mezirow (1996) listed three conditions for transformative learning, and some or all of those conditions were met by most of the participants in this study, although not in any particular sequence or at any particular age. Mezirow's first condition aligns with the first task set forth by Levinson et al. (1978) and the Levinsons (1996), a reexamination of one's former youthful self. For example, the women in this study reevaluated their adolescent ideals of what it means to be a woman. Secondly, as Mezirow suggested they would, the women examined their beliefs, often changing their concepts about relationships, spirituality, and other aspects of their lives. And, thirdly, they took action or were planning on taking action to change their lives. Some had been doing these things prior to entering midlife. A few were just beginning to experiment with these concepts. But those who had taken action, for example by being in a rewarding career or by leaving a destructive marriage, were savoring the benefits of their efforts.

The effect of the messages in media sources on the self-development of midlife women proved to be dramatic. Self-help books, spiritual and metaphysical books, novels about women in transition, and other sources helped with that development. They used media sources to facilitate the move into midlife, and the effect was threefold. They: (1) experienced increased personal power, (2) developed their cognitive abilities, and (3) underwent spiritual growth. These factors lead to the second conclusion in this study.

Conclusion Two: Personal Power, Cognitive Development, and Spiritual Growth Intertwine to Form a Single Developmental Spiral

The links amongst the three major findings of this study, personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth, were clear. Development in one area led to development in the others. Furthermore, it didn't matter at which juncture a woman

entered the process. She could be building her personal power in order to cope with an unhealthy relationship, constructing knowledge in order to be a better consumer, or seeking spiritual guidance in order to fill a void in her life, and that beginning led to development in the other areas as well. Although personal power was the first and most obvious characteristic of the women in general, upon further examination it is the combination of characteristics, the development in all three areas and the delicate balancing of those facets of life that is most impressive.

Personal Power

The personal power of the midlife women in this study was striking. They have survived divorce, depression, career changes, poverty, and health problems. Of the three who suffered empty nest syndrome, two had overcome it. Of the five who were put on drugs by their doctors, three got off the drugs of their own volition. Of the nine who had divorced, seven seemed content with their lives, whether they had remarried or not. Of the eleven who experienced a trigger event that forced them to cope with changes in midlife, most had made robust transitions. They face their fears, sometimes quite well and sometimes very poorly, but they face them nonetheless. In *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (Wells, 1997), the novel most-often mentioned by participants, Vivi, the eccentric protagonist, says to her daughter, "There is nothing, anywhere, to be afraid of! …*we are not afraid*!" (p. 326). That was prior to her confinement in a mental institution, but she eventually came out to face her world.

The personal power that most of the women in this study possess emanated from deep within them. Their stories revealed that their strength was evident when they were children, reinforcing Hancock's (1989) contention that in midlife women retrieve "the

girl within" (title) and Marston's (2001) finding that midlife women discover the "wild girl" (p. 219) they once were who felt no fear and no limitations. According to Kilbourne (1999) and Pipher (1995), the freedom that young girls experience is buried under culturally induced expectations before they reach their teens. Then in the "hurried lives" (Bost, 2001) of young adulthood, when most women are taking care of others and working outside the home, issues like personal power and self-concept are too often not considered. It is in midlife that women dig down and recover their personal power, bringing it out into the light so that they can examine and restructure it as needed.

Interestingly, the one participant who balked at discussing the fact that she is middle aged is the only one who does not exhibit personal power. Even though she originally identified herself as being in midlife and therefore qualified to participate in this study, she became uncomfortable with questions about aging. Dependent on drugs that men, her husband, preacher, and doctor, convinced her she needs, and busy acquiring a perfect body and being the perfect wife and mother, she is living a hurried life that does not allow for the kind of self-examination that facilitates the recovery or construction of personal power. For the others, however, the rediscovery of their power in midlife is a welcome relief. They have missed it and revel in feeling or being closer to feeling, as Jacqueline labeled it, "whole."

Cognitive Development

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) state that developmental gradients in cognition might be related more to social context than to age. It is in this way that cognitive development is related to pop culture. They said, "Social, cultural, economic, and political forces help shape both how we think and what kind of knowledge we value" (p.

167). This study revealed that midlife women are aware of external forces that have influenced their thinking and are ready to explore their own internal forces in order to become clear about what is genuinely important to them as individuals.

Dialectical thinking, the ability to consider new points of view, was paramount to self-development for the women in this study. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), "Dialectical thinking…allows for the acceptance of alternative truths or ways of thinking about the many contradictions and paradoxes that we face in everyday life" (p. 167). Midlife presents many contradictions and paradoxes for women. Making sense of it all by considering new truths and options is one of the mind's most important tasks during midlife.

The way that midlifers make sense of their lives is by finding meaning in their life experiences. According to Bergquist et al. (1993), "They [midlifers] want to make sense of, and find meaning in, their diverse life experiences, rather than simply be exposed to more experiences" (p. 52). Mackeracher (1996) states that humans are meaning making organisms, and Kegan (1982) contends that giving meaning to life experiences is the most fundamental thing human beings do. Hayes and Flannery (2000) say that women will find "layers and facets of meaning" (p. 80) within the fabric of their lives. This study confirmed all of these suppositions about meaning making.

It was revealed that women strive to make meaning of midlife, perceiving it as a new phase of life that is somewhat mysterious to them because of the negative or mixed messages about it in the media. They reach age forty or fifty and do not feel at all over-the-hill, as the media would have them believe they are supposed to feel. Instead, they feel pretty good and want to accelerate their learning so that they can grow intellectually,

emotionally, and spiritually. However, being in midlife does provide a new facet of learning that was not available to them earlier, wisdom. Acquired over time, wisdom facilitates meaning making and adult development (Ardelt, 2000; Maciel & Others, 1992). "Wisdom is often seen as the pinnacle or hallmark of adult thinking" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 161). Sternberg (in Merriam and Caffarella, 1999) contends that being wise is more than being intelligent, saying, "The wise person has a certain sagacity that is not necessarily found in the intelligent person" (p. 163).

This study disclosed that many women do become wiser as they age. They learn from their past mistakes; they open their minds to new possibilities; and they join cognitive development with personal power and spiritual growth to make meaning of their past, present, and future lives.

Spiritual Growth

This study, like those of Cohen (2001), Marston (2001), and Tisdell (2000b), found that women experienced spiritual growth as a facet of their midlife self-development. In this study spiritual growth affected women in two ways: (1) it helped them make meaning of their lives, and (2) it provided a sounding board for expressions of hope and happiness. Tisdell (2000b) reminds us that spirituality is an elusive concept because it "cannot be torn from other aspects of one's life, including one's cultural experience…" (p. 335). However, Tisdell found that women were willing to make the effort to move away from their cultural experiences in order to capture that elusive concept of spirituality. Six of the women in this study moved away from the religious beliefs they were taught in their childhoods, for a variety of reasons, including feeling disrespected in the patriarchal systems under which those churches operate. Tisdell

(2000b) likewise found that midlife women were moving "beyond the religious tradition of their childhood…while developing a more meaningful adult spirituality" (p. 38). In this study some women purposely left and some simply wandered away when their traditional religions offered them nothing in the way of meaning and they found other concepts that were more relevant to their lives.

McDonald and Farran (1996), and others (Donaldson, 1996; Keshgegian & Baer, 2000; Lauver, 2000; Lesher, 2000; Powers, 1995; Slee, 2001; Spellmeyer, 1999; Tisdell, 2000b) found that the male God image has no significance for many women because it does not accurately represent their concept of a higher power. Donaldson's (1996) description of the new Goddess image as embodying a "collective regeneration of personal power" (p. 203) fits the women in this study. She says that the Goddess is "woman power" (p. 203). Tisdell (2000b) also noted a theme of power in her study of spirituality for women, saying that spiritual growth gives women the strength to "take new action in their personal lives" (p. 324) and assisted in the development of "their authentic self" (p. 324). Tisdell's connection of power and authenticity with spiritual growth echoes this study in which women illustrated personal power by being more authentic, as well as expressing increased spiritual growth.

Conversely, McQuaide (1998) found that spiritual growth was not relevant to the midlife women in her study, even though she originally expected to find that it was. Unlike the women in this study, her group did not experience spirituality as having sustained them during the midlife transition and did not feel that it contributed to feelings of happiness. McQuaide speculates, "My guess would be that this is because, although for a subgroup of women spirituality contributes to well-being, there is another group,

which cancels out the effects of the first group" (p. 30). By using mixed methods, including a questionnaire that contained a quantitative scale and questions of a quantitative nature, it's possible that the scale evoked the canceling effect that McQuaide mentioned and that the questions did not lend themselves to responses about spirituality. Also, her participants were all white women from the New York City area, which may have limited her findings. My group adhered to Tisdell's (2000b) contention that women use spirituality to further self-awareness, enhance a sense of interconnectedness with others, and to form a relationship with a higher power.

Interconnectedness, a bond amongst women, was important to many in this study. Even though they prefer to learn in solitary fashion and treasure their reflection time, once they have collated their thoughts, they want to share those thoughts with others. They also want to hear from others so that they can learn more about how other women perceive spirituality. Half of them expressed a desire to develop that type of group camaraderie. One participant, for instance, has just started her own such "discussion group" that meets once every three months. Another belongs to a spiritually-based book club. Yet another is planning on facilitating a women's spiritual growth seminar. This kind of spiritual interconnectedness helps women make meaning of their lives.

Another way, besides meaning making, that the women developed spirituality was by exploring their beliefs about death. Three have come to believe in reincarnation and others are toying with that notion. Donaldson (1996) found this to be common amongst the women in her study on spirituality.

Spiritual development also gave women an opportunity to openly express their happiness in the present as well as their hope for happiness in the future. Seligman (2002)

contends that long-term happiness is difficult to recognize, admit, and express in this culture because psychology has for years been drilling into us that we should concentrate on the deficits rather than pluses in our characters. He says that not only do we want positive feelings, we want acknowledgement that we are "entitled to our positive feelings" (p. 8). When we are alienated from positive emotions, he says, it "leads to emptiness, to inauthenticity, to depression, and, as we age, to the gnawing realization that we are fidgeting until we die" (p. 8). For some women, emptiness, inauthenticity, and depression were trigger events that precipitated their exploration of midlife development.

Supplementing Seligman's theory is Gilligan's (2002) belief that joy is a difficult emotion for women because, living in a patriarchal society, they have not been taught that it is their right to expect to experience pleasure, happiness, and joy. In order to do so, women must cross the "psychic terrain" (p. 47) of patriarchy, a difficult crossing. Patriarchy is an enveloping system that does not allow for escape from internalized oppression. Living within this system every day of their lives, women are not usually aware of the oppression that they have internalized and the effect it has on their daily practices. They are not aware of their deep-seated beliefs that they are not deserving of happiness. Gilligan states that women must allow history to fall away and let "life [come] into the room" (p. 53). Many of the women in this study have taken the first steps and some have taken leaps (rather joyous ones at that) in freeing themselves from the shackles of the history of patriarchal expectations. They know they cannot escape oppression completely but are doing all they can to give themselves permission, because it will not come from elsewhere, to be happy on their own terms. They use their newfound spiritual beliefs as a springboard for taking that journey.

This study found that spiritual growth becomes integral to women's lives during midlife, helping them make meaning of their complex worlds and affording them the opportunity to be happy. No longer practiced just once a week, spirituality "encompasses their lives, moment by moment, day by day" (Marston, 2001, p. 211).

The Single Developmental Spiral

The three primary aspects of self-development for women during midlife, increased personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth, joined together to form one spiral of growth. Women did not necessarily experience them independently, in any given sequence, or within any predictable timeframe. Although most of the women did encounter each of the three components of development, the connections amongst them were unique to each woman, exemplifying that women's development takes a nonlinear course (Belenky et al., 1986/1997; Gilligan, 1993; Rossiter, 1999; Tisdell, 2000a), with each individual's development forming in its own way. Time and again, participants' stories about developing in one area progressed to stories about simultaneous development in the other areas also. Personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth fed off of each other, forming a support system that exponentially strengthened and accelerated the self-development process.

That support system protects, sustains, and transports women as they make the transition into and adjust to being in midlife. It helps them handle the physiological, cognitive, relationship, professional, and spiritual changes that occur. It helps them create one cohesive, balanced life experience.

Summation of the Conclusions

The majority of women in the study were well aware of being in midlife and of the ramifications that brings in this culture. They garner their strength from many sources, especially books that teach, through fiction and nonfiction, that women can be personally powerful, learn, and grow spiritually.

For some the transition into midlife was a natural event. For others it was not so easy. For a few it is still a struggle. Yet they prevail. That ability to prevail was a welcome discovery. The willingness to do whatever it takes to live a good life, the ability to overcome personal and cultural obstacles, and the fortitude to stick it out until the desired state is achieved, illustrate a stalwart attitude. These women are absolutely unwilling to be unhappy and willing to do whatever it takes to be happy. Their sense of purpose is driven by unequivocal hope. Although that finding was a pleasant surprise, it fostered the question, "Does our culture's media instill unrealistic expectations of hope and happiness in women?" Does the proverbial "happy ending" do more harm than good?

My conclusion is that most midlife women do not harbor unrealistic expectations of hope and happiness. Only one participant in this study exhibited unrealistic aspirations, which she learned from the motivational seminars she had attended and the accompanying audiotapes she had listened to. Excited about making her life better as the messages from those sources had encouraged her to do, she had recently taken a commission-based job. That is not an appropriate income choice for someone who is in a critical financial state. But most of the others were dedicated to ambitious yet realistic goals for happiness. By this point in their lives they know the difference between

unrealistic and realistic aspirations, and know how to select media messages that help them and dismiss those that do not. The media attended to by these women, sources of their own choosing, did nothing but motivate and inform them so that they could pursue the results for which they were striving. My sense is that no source of media or other pop culture influence, or individual or group, could stop most of them. They want balanced, meaningful, happy lives. They are going to achieve those lives, come what may. That inner determination, often buried under the rubble of years of familial and cultural constraints (Kilbourne, 1999, 2002; Kilbourne & Pipher, 2000), insists on surfacing and being given its due.

These findings corroborate the supposition on page 8 of this document that in midlife women experience physiological, cognitive, relationship, professional and spiritual changes. Attending to all of those changes helps women live cohesive, balanced, happy lives.

Implications for Practice

Today more midlife women than ever before are at the forefront of media attention. With more female governors, some high-profile women in the federal cabinet and legislature, and even some midlife women being portrayed as the heroines in movies, television shows, and in books, the general population is probably more aware of this cohort than before. That doesn't mean that midlife women are in a position of respectful acceptance in this culture, it just means that acknowledgement of their existence is more prevalent than before. They might not be "invisible" as Bergquist et al. stated (1993, p. 1), but they are still not in clear focus for this society.

Many practitioners and peers are in positions to help midlife women through transitions, and by doing so they can help to promote cultural acceptance of midlife as a viable time of life. The Implications for Practice section of this chapter encourages both activities, helping and promoting. Three groups are addressed: (1) adult educators, psychotherapists, and religious leaders, (2) writers and publishers, and (3) midlife women.

Adult Educators, Psychotherapists, and Religious Leaders

College professors, seminar leaders, continuing education instructors, workshop facilitators, program planners, instructional designers, psychotherapists, counselors, social workers, religious leaders, and others involved in adult learning are in prime positions to inform and influence midlife women. This study revealed a number of factors that can help these professionals in their practices.

Midlife women do not prefer formal education systems. They would rather learn on their own, through self-study and reflection, before participating in group learning. The type of group learning they are most likely to select are seminars. Classes, degree programs, and other group activities were seldom discussed.

This study supports previous research on adult learners (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) and especially women learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). As Hayes and Flannery note, women conceptualize in their own unique ways, causing educators to "look at what we were learning upside down and sideways" (p. 21). The women in my study like fast, useful information and will become disgruntled if they believe their time is wasted. They want to see positive representations of strong midlife women, in equal measure with others, in examples, activities, and text. They love good storytelling. And, keeping in

mind that they are or are becoming more assertive and more independent thinkers than they might have been in the past, they do not want to be lectured to or told what to do. They want to interact with the information so that they can discover for themselves if and how to incorporate that information into their lives.

Because seminars are their most likely source of group learning, seminar leaders and workshop facilitators can benefit from planning highly eclectic sessions for this group. There needs to be poignant storytelling, humor, interactivity, creativity, real-life examples, and cognitive challenge. Most of all there needs to be relevancy and respect. Midlife women want to feel valued.

Although formal learning through a university was their least likely choice for group learning, this study suggests that there are options for educational institutions to address this group. None of the women in this study mentioned distance learning or had experience with it, but their desire to learn independently and their computer savvy indicates that Web-based knowledge could be a viable educational source for them. Considering that "the online distance-learning market is defined heavily by its focus on non-traditional working adult students…who are looking for consumer-friendly degree programs" (Roach, 2002, p. 22), midlife women would fit the profile of potential students.

And, considering their preference for reading, supporting materials in print that they can peruse on their own will facilitate the educational process for midlife women. Topics that they are interested in revolve around personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth. Midlife women will heed information that, as Hayes and Flannery (2000) said, offers "consciousness and enlightenment" (p. 252).

Especially pertinent for psychotherapists and others in counseling positions is the fact that Dr. Phil McGraw is a favorite with some of this study's participants, although he is the bane of existence for some psychologists (Elliott, 2002) because he has taken psychotherapy into mainstream pop culture by offering it on television. Most women don't care what academic psychologists think. *Dr Phil,* the TV show and the man, fits their criteria for learning: fast information in a witty, sometimes touching, and sometimes entertaining format. His brand of non-traditional, no-nonsense advice-giving has made his show wildly successful, breaking industry viewership records (Stanley, 2002). One of his messages that women especially like is that it is imperative for individuals to connect with their "authentic self [which] means finding your way back to the no-kidding, real you that existed before the world started crowding you out" (McGraw, 2001, p. 10). That message hits home with women who are in the midst of untangling their lives and getting back to "the girl within" (Hancock, 1989, title). They have been crowded out for too long and are ready to do whatever is necessary to break away from cultural expectations to lead the lives they want. And they don't want to waste seven years in therapy trying to figure out how to do that. As the women in this study indicated, they think they have already wasted enough time. They are ready to live.

As much as traditional psychologists might dislike it that psychotherapy has become a pop culture icon by being on television, that reality cannot be ignored. Neither can the fact that many people like it. Furthermore, it doesn't seem to bother women that there is a sense of male rescue in Doctor Phil's work. They are accustomed to male dominance and do not question it here. Psychotherapists and counselors who are

disturbed by the popularity of a dominant male spin doctor would still benefit from analyzing that phenomenon in order to add to their repertoire of professional skills.

The women in this study want information and ideas, and they want them quickly. Moreover, they like self-study and reflection, and therefore prefer that their first contact with information be private, without interaction with another person, which helps explain the popularity of *Dr. Phil* on TV and of his book, *Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out* (2001). Those preferences point to a need for practitioners to have readily-available data about their services in brochures, on the Internet, and in books.

When midlife women are in face-to-face therapy, their partiality for self-study sources, especially mass media sources, could well be kept in mind. Their favorite books, movies, and television shows, even *Dr. Phil*, could be used as reference points to open discussions. The practitioner could also suggest books, articles, Internet sites, television shows, movies, videos, and other media that would help with the therapy process. Knowing that women attend to these types of pop culture sources anyway, guidance regarding which sources upon which to focus could be helpful.

Another implication of this study for adult educators, psychotherapists, and religious leaders is one that many such practitioners will undoubtedly dislike, but this study found that if a practitioner has been seen in the public eye, such as answering questions on a television show or on the cover of a book, they will be given more consideration. Women like researching before becoming involved, so observing allows them to analyze the practitioner's style and beliefs. The public forum allows them to critique the practitioner without having to interact with him or her. Interaction might call for defending their point of view, and they are not willing to get involved in that unless

they feel quite certain it will prove productive. If they feel comfortable with and informed by that initial representation, they will be more likely to seek out that person than an unknown.

There are also some implications of special relevance for religious leaders, although this information can be helpful to adult educators and psychotherapists, too. This study revealed that spiritual growth is of paramount importance to midlife women, being one of three primary effects, along with increased personal power and cognitive development, of self-development. But this is not a traditional kind of spiritual growth; it does not include going to church on Sunday mornings and singing in the choir. This is a realization that their former religious ties were too binding and that they must create their own female-affirming situations. That is why Minister Marianne Williamson's books are favorites with some of the participants. She encourages women to create their own spiritual ties with a higher power, freeing themselves from the tethers of cultural constraints. An advocate of self-development, Williamson (1993) said of women, "We can't look to the world to restore our worth; we're here to restore our worth to the world. The world outside us can reflect our glory, but it cannot create it" (p. 10).

Tisdell (2000b) tells us that religion and spirituality are not the same thing, that religion is an organized community while spirituality is about one's own beliefs. Midlife women become more aware of their own beliefs in many aspects of their lives, including their thoughts about a higher power. Traditional religion no longer fits for them because it is simply not respectful of women, which could explain why women are leaving organized religion in droves, with women's church attendance diminishing by more than

50 percent in forty years (McDonald & Farran, 1996). Seven of the twelve participants in this study are either exploring or practicing nontraditional worship.

It might seem to religious leaders that midlife women are becoming less spiritual because they are leaving their churches. In fact, they are becoming more spiritual, more connected to their spirits within, which leads to the severing of ties with their former religious beliefs. Religious leaders, as well as other practitioners like adult educators and psychotherapists, would benefit from recognizing the deeply rich convictions of women to honor a Holy Spirit as long as they are esteemed in return.

Writers and Publishers

Implications for writers and publishers are included in this chapter because so many women in this study chose books as their first source of information. They didn't discriminate between fiction and nonfiction; they attended to both. The ramifications of addressing the needs of midlife women for writers and publishers point to a valuable contribution to society and to profit. The recent success of Dr. Christiane Northrup's book, *The Wisdom of Menopause: Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing During the Change* (2001) and Rebecca Well's novel*, Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (1997), both on the New York Times Bestseller List in 2002, and the popularity of Stephanie Marston's book, *If Not Now, When? Reclaiming Ourselves at Midlife* (2001), prove that there is an audience for books about midlife women. The vast numbers of midlife women, approximately 37 million in the United States (Census Bureau, 2001), combined with a preference for learning via reading illustrates to publishers that books addressing midlife issues can find their way into the hands of large

numbers of consumers, as long as those books are current, well-written, and relevant to the real needs of women rather than pop culture's version of those needs.

The women in this study sought out information regarding personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth. Most of them did not seek out resources about what we see most often in the media, like those addressing appearance and sex (Rotella, 2001; Tappart, 1998; Turner & Hamilton, 1997). Providing what midlife women are looking for could be a profitable venture for, as well as a valuable contribution by, writers and publishers.

Midlife Women

This study presents the finding that women use pop culture's resources, like books and Internet sites, to learn about facilitating their midlife self-development. The result of that learning is a sense of well-being. However, other pop culture resources, like particular advertisements or movies, present midlife women in a negative light. Midlife is often represented in the media as a depressing, "over-the-hill" time of life. Women who are in transition into or are in midlife can help others understand that media representations of midlife are not accurate for all women and that midlife need not be feared. With awareness, learning, and a mind and heart open to endless possibilities, midlife can be an exhilarating new phase of life (Lippert, 1997; Marston, 2001; McQuaide, 1998).

But many women in midlife are busy undoing the damage to their egos and their psyches from their adolescence and young adulthood, which is time and energy they could be expending to do great things. Some do go on to do great things, but usually only after untangling earlier cultural ties. If midlife women help each other untie the knots,

women can more quickly understand that midlife need not be the dreaded stage of life they have learned through the media to fear. It can be the most productive, rewarding, and free time of life (Bergquist et al., 1993). It can be a time to accept and take responsibility for one's body, mind, relationships, work, financial status, living space, and spirituality. It can be a time of fulfillment.

Not only can midlife women help their peers, they can help younger women as well. The preponderance of literature (Albada, 2000; Albelda & Tilly, 1997; Banta, 1987; Cutting, 1999; DeGooyer & Borah, 1982; Glasheen & Crowley, 1999; Hall, 1997; Lemish, 2000; Minh-Ha, 1991; Peters, 2000; Rogers, 1999; Sinclair, 1988) reveals that young women fight an uphill battle against pop culture messages that tell them that no matter what they are, it isn't good enough. They should try to be something else (Gledhill, 1987). Girls and women consistently receive messages through the media telling them that their bodies aren't good enough, they aren't smart enough, they need to cater to their relationships, their work opportunities are limited, they must depend on a spouse for income, their living space should achieve a high standard, and attending to their spirituality is weird and of little relevance.

No one is in a better position to provide positive messages to girls, young adult women, and other midlife women than midlife women. No one can depend on the media, the government, or our culture to start providing responsible images of women (hooks, 1997; Mayo, 1999; Riley, 1994). Nor can women depend on men, because even though they might contribute to the cause they don't have the same vested interest. Midlife women have acquired the wisdom (Ardelt, 2000; Bergquist et al., 1993; Northrup, 2001) and determination to be able to affect others. Accomplishing that type of generative task

is part of the development process for many (Bradley, 1997; Kotre, 1999-2000; Mor-Barak, 1995), as it was for some in this study. They can teach that women do not have to become mired in media messages that insist that women live up to impossible standards, trying to be all things to all people all of the time and thereby setting themselves up for failure. Women of all ages can learn to interlace personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth at any time in their lives in order to strengthen their resolve and expand their realities so that they can ascend to their best selves rather than settling for the mediocre selves the media expects of them.

Midlife women are in a unique position to help not only themselves with their own self-development, but others as well. By helping others, they contribute to our culture. If our culture is going to shift to a healthier perspective on women, midlife women are going to have to be the ones to do it.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a number of recommendations for future research based on this study. Replicating this study for other adults could determine the role of pop culture in self-development for midlife men, lesbians, gays, women from other cultures, elderly women, and elderly men. Such replication, using the same narrative analysis methods for different groups, would advance the body of knowledge regarding the connection between pop culture and self-development.

A question that automatically arises from this study is whether minority women, especially African Americans and Hispanics, experience the role of pop culture in their midlife self-development in the same ways that Anglo American women do. Information is available regarding the effect of mass media on younger women, including African

Americans, but none specifically on African American or Hispanic midlife women. This study included African, Hispanic, and Anglo American women and found no differences in relation to ethnic backgrounds. However, this study was not designed to seek that information. A narrative approach with questions generated for that purpose would inform us about cultural differences and/or similarities regarding the role of pop culture amongst minority and non-minority midlife women.

Another issue that arose in this study was that in order to develop personal power midlife women need to give up their adolescent illusions about what it means to be a woman and about what makes up a happy life. Further exploration into the culturally-influenced images of themselves that midlife women still cling to, and what effect those specific images have on their self-development would add to our knowledge about midlife women. We do not know how much they hold to old images, like believing they should be thin or should be great sex partners, or the full extent of the ramifications for doing so. Do old pictures in a woman's head of how she thinks she is supposed to be inhibit her adult development in midlife? This study suggests that they do, but more information is needed. Using narrative analysis so that women's own stories are heard, as they were in this study, would be the best way to conduct new research.

An additional subject that merits attention regards the discovery by grown women that they had positive qualities as children that were buried under culturally-induced expectations, and that those qualities can be rescued in midlife. For example, a number of women reported that when they were kids they weren't afraid of trying new things, weren't concerned about behaving "properly," hadn't been indoctrinated yet into believing they should look like Barbie, and didn't have lives that revolved around males.

In other words, they were their authentic selves. A study delving into the characteristics of that girl within, characteristics that can be retrieved in order to help women during the transition into midlife and beyond, would be fascinating. This study implied that women are aware of those characteristics but don't always know how to incorporate them back into their daily lives. Further study could help them learn how to do that. Again, for the same reasons already cited, narrative analysis would be the best approach to such a study.

Another gap in knowledge that became evident during this research is the effect that advertising has on midlife women. In this study, the women claimed they were offended by ads and therefore ignored them. But we all, myself included, sat there doing the interviews in our relatively fashionable, socially acceptable clothes. Many of us have dyed hair and some had trendy hairstyles. Most, if not all, of us wore makeup. Some had pretty manicures. The scent of perfume sometimes permeated the air. To claim that we have not been influenced by advertising is ludicrous. So, the disconnect between what women think, that they are not affected by ads, and what they do, following advertising's prescribed rituals, would be a fascinating gap to fill. Doing so would provide information about how advertising really affects the self-concepts of midlife women.

My final recommendation for further study addresses the question that arose regarding how much television women watch and its affect on their sense of self. Participants purported not to watch much TV, but proceeded to give examples that revealed extensive television viewing. A study on how much television viewing really takes place, why viewers aren't aware of their watching practices, and the affect of those practices on their self-development would add to the literature about pop culture as well as to that about adult development.

All of these recommendations would further our knowledge about midlife women, a group of neglected study subjects. Bringing them into the fold of research would not only provide data, it would help validate the worth of this cohort to our culture. The invisible could be brought into view and put into focus in the context of our society so that midlife women could operate from a position of knowledge in changing their lives and in changing their worlds.

Chapter Summary

This chapter concludes the discussion on this study about the role of pop culture in the self-development of midlife women. The section on Conclusions and Discussion offered two conclusions that were derived from the findings reported in the previous chapter: (1) Pop culture influences the self-development of midlife women and, (2) Personal power, cognitive development, and spiritual growth form a single developmental spiral.

The Implications for Practice section of this chapter offers suggestions for three groups: (1) adult educators, psychotherapists, and religious leaders, (2) writers and publishers, and (3) midlife women. Women's preference for independent, reflective learning, especially through reading, indicates that practitioners could best assist midlife women by taking their preference into consideration when addressing this group.

Recommendations for Future Research include replicating this study for other cohorts. It was also suggested that studies be conducted on women's television viewing practices.

This chapter concludes that midlife can be the most exhilarating time of life for women when they break away from the restraints of cultural expectations and become

their best authentic selves. Midlife can be a time of enormous opportunity, a time to be celebrated.

As Marston (2001) suggested:

> This is a revolutionary idea, one that goes against the dominant culture. We…no longer have to go along with the game. We're grown women. And by the sheer magnitude of our numbers, we can invent a New Middle Age. Consequently, we can redefine the rules for aging. (p. 30)

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The Role of Pop Culture in the Self-development of Midlife Women

Interview Guide: Participant_____

Date	Place	Start Time	End Time

As you know, this is a study about learning and pop culture.

1. So, to start, I'd like to hear about your favorite TV shows, movies, books, magazines, websites, music, ads, and anything else that you like to watch, read, and listen to.
2. What about {name of book, show, etc.} appeals to you?
3. What have you learned from {name of book, show, etc.}?
4. What issues are currently important to you at this stage of your life?

Thank you for your time and assistance. May I contact you if I need any more information?

Demographic questions:

Real Name:_____

Selected Name:_____

Age:_____ Marital Status_____

How would you describe your ethnicity and/or culture?_____

Event or incident that triggered midlife transition?_____

Occupation:_____

Born and raised where?_____

Comments or concerns:_____

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH STUDY INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I, _____ agree to take part in the research titled "The Role of Pop Culture in the Self-development of Midlife Women" conducted by Linda Hughes, a Doctoral student in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia. I can contact Ms. Hughes through the Department of Adult Education, UGA, 400 Rivers Crossing, Athens, GA, 30602-4811, and phone 706-542-6910. Her advisor is Dr. Sharan Merriam, Department of Adult Education, UGA, 406 Rivers Crossing, Athens, GA, 30602-4811, and phone 706-542-4018. I understand that I do not have to take part if I do not want to. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to find out what pop culture sources, if any, have influenced my adult self-development and to find out how those sources have influenced me. By participating in this study, other women can be taught about pop culture sources that can influence their lives.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Provide information, such as mementos and lists to familiarize Linda Hughes with my pop culture preferences.
2) Be interviewed one-on-one and answer questions about my involvement as a midlife woman in pop culture, and other feelings and thoughts in regards to being a midlife woman in pop culture.
3) Allow our interview session to be audio taped.
4) Be available for follow-up phone and/or e-mail conversations to clarify my information after the interview. There is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the email technology itself. Therefore, Ms. Hughes will ask if I prefer phone or e-mail contact and I will inform her of my choice.

I will not receive compensation or gifts for my participation.

No risk is expected but I may experience some emotional discomfort or stress upon discussing my career. I need not answer any question if I choose not to.

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. I will be assigned a pseudonym and this name will be used on all research data. Ms. Hughes will erase the audiotapes of the interview no later than June 2003.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. Contact Linda Hughes at 678-546-7771 or lindahughes@mindspring.com.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator / Date Signature of Participant / Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia; 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone 706-542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.