

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ira Jo Ann Thompson entitled "A Tentative Model of the Life Structures of a Selected Sample of Women Ages Forty to Fifty." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Psychology and Guidance.

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A TENTATIVE MODEL OF THE LIFE STRUCTURES OF A
SELECTED SAMPLE OF WOMEN AGES
FORTY TO FIFTY

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
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ABSTRACT

The formation of the life structures of women age 40 to 50 entering middle adulthood was examined and a conceptual model of female development during the mid-life transition, age 40 to 45 is presented. The adult male life span theory of Daniel Levinson with its pivotal concept of the evolution of the life structure and age-linked developmental periods served as the paradigm for this study.

The principal research method used was the intensive interview which combined the structure of an interview guideline with enough flexibility to allow for the individuality of subjects and the uniqueness of their story. To arrive at concepts of women's development, comparisons were drawn between the proposed female model of the mid-life transition, the male model, and the actual responses of subjects as they were transcribed and tabulated according to responses to specific questions.

The findings support Levinson's premise that the women in this study go through the same developmental periods at mid-life as do men and that his model offers a basis for the study of women. A distinct mid-life transition of three to five years at approximately age forty was discernible in the lives of women subjects. A comparison of the transition of women subjects with those of Levinson's sample

revealed a different period of onset and a lower incidence of severe crisis in the female sample. Subjects reported being age forty or fifty as better than they had been socialized to expect and spoke of entering the forties decade with a new sense of awareness of themselves as more inner-directed.

The departure of children from the home was viewed with a sense of relief by 50 percent of the sample involved. One half experienced depressive feelings associated with the "empty nest."

The majority of subjects reported the forties as the most sexually satisfying period of their life in contrast with the waning sexual powers of men and societal emphasis on youth and sex.

Subjects formed no serious visualization of self other than as married and did not seek as young adults an assessment of their abilities as did the men in Levinson's study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study will examine the formation of the life structures of women age forty to fifty entering the span of the life cycle recognized as middle adulthood. The focus of the inquiry will be on the early years of middle adulthood, ages forty to forty-five, that serve as a bridge between early adulthood and middle adulthood referred to as the mid-life transition.

The process by which adults develop over the life cycle and form stable identities and life structures is only now being studied in depth by social scientists. Roger Gould (1975) calls this an impoverished topic, and says we are light years away from the studies necessary for an understanding comparable to that of childhood and adolescence. Generally, it is assumed that developmental changes level off after adolescence and there is no complex adult development that compares to the rapid growth in body and mind of the preadult years (Clausen, 1972).

The body of knowledge on psychosocial growth during middle age is even more limited. Although it is an appropriate field of inquiry, it is practically untouched. Daniel Levinson (1978) speaks of this stage as one of the great taboo topics and says there is a pervasive dread in studying

middle age for fear of finding decline and restriction. The silence surrounding the changes in behavior over time may be due in part to the difficulty in studying aging. There is both a lack of theory and of practicable methods for gathering and analyzing data. Birren and Schaie (1977) stated that:

There is still no general theory of aging and the few that have been proposed are narrow. It is a mystery to both the biologists and psychologists.
page 5

The exploration of the male experience of adult development, such as the longitudinal studies of Daniel Levinson and associates (1978) called the Yale and Study and the forty-year Grant Study conducted at Harvard by George Vaillant (1978) far surpass any studies of the adult female life course. In fact, there are no comparable female studies. Of the two studies devoted solely to the developmental process in women, one is a descriptive study published by psychotherapist Iris Sangiuliano (1978) on the lives of twenty-four women whom she interviewed over a four-year period, and the second is a dissertation by Wendy Stewart (1977) on the formation of the life structures of women in early adulthood.

An understanding of the female experience is further hampered by the tendency in traditional psychology to generalize the findings from males to all people. Research institutions have primarily been staffed by males whose selection of subjects and of problems to be studied have

centered around the male population (Schultz, 1969). The outcome has often been an attempt to fit the female experience into a male frame-of-reference. The changing status of women and the growing recognition of their individuality and equality has revealed serious inaccuracies in past studies and points to the need for consideration of theories of growth and development that are different for men and women (Cox, 1976, p. 11).

Theoretical Perspectives

Of the theorists who have advanced the study of adult development, Carl Jung is often regarded as the father of the life cycle approach. His profound insights are revealed in his theory of individuation, the process of growth that begins around forty and extends over the last half of the life cycle. His theory is complex, especially as it relates to the assimilation of the unconscious components of the personality into the conscious. Many of his concepts, such as inborn patterns of behavior, polarities, integration of opposites, centering, growth from disequilibrium, and continued expansion of self, are basic to the paradigms of Erikson, Gould and Levinson. Jung proposes that the truths and ideals of the first half of life will not serve the second (Campbell, 1971).

Erik Erikson is the contemporary guiding force in developmental life stage psychology. He believes that

everything that grows has a ground plan and that adult development is a sequential, predictable, orderly progression that continues over the entire life cycle. In an attempt to describe the nature of the process, he formulated a model with eight major stages of development. Each stage poses a unique developmental task and confronts the individual with a crisis. It is his belief that the healthy resolution of each phase results in the learning of new behaviors and the discovery of a new strength (Erikson, 1963). In recent years, his model has received criticism for its male bias and the use of the male experience as the prototype for all human growth. His later works have shown an awareness of this deficiency and in "Womanhood and the Inner Space" he proposes a separate theory for the development of the female identity (Erikson, 1968). His thesis reveals astute insights into the secondary status accorded women and the problems associated with female identity formation. However, his basic concepts of womanhood remain Freudian. He identifies woman in her relation to man, rather than as a person separate unto herself.

I think that much of a young woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought. (Erikson, 1968, p. 283)

A psychological approach to the understanding of adult female development that does not rely upon a male frame-of-reference or attempt to identify women as adjuncts to men

would promote the development of a model that strives to hypothesize the true nature of femaleness. A possible difference between the male models mentioned and a new approach would be the accumulation of psychological research on female behavior for the purpose of establishing female behavioral norms. Such norms would provide a structure for comparing females with females. An outcome expected to occur would be the description and understanding of female behavior as it compares with female norms rather than as it is similar to or deviates from a male prototype.

Roger Gould (1972), while treating patients at UCLA's psychiatric outpatient clinic, developed studies of patterns of adult female and male development. He was one of the first to associate discernible life stages with chronological ages. In his Phases of Life paradigm, he noted a chronological change at ages thirty-seven through forty-three and forty-three through fifty in the manner in which the individual "senses the world" or responds to the eight major components of life (i.e., job, family, parents, self, religion, community, politics, and leisure). He found that the age-linked changes varied no more than two to three years on either side of the average age even though they were influenced by the unique biosocial condition of each individual. Gould conceptualized adult growth and change as the act of transformation—a continuous reformulation of one's

self-definition with the ideal of reaching our highest level of functioning. He believes this is accomplished by disputing, at every phase of life, a major false assumption and protective device learned in childhood (childhood consciousness), and replacing it with adult truths referred to as adult consciousness. His concept of challenging false assumptions is comparable to the idea of developmental tasks to be resolved at each life phase. "The periodic shedding of false assumptions mark our gradual shift from childhood consciousness into adult consciousness over the range of decades" (Gould, 1979, p. 39).

The formulation and application of theories that encompass changes throughout the life span has been a formidable task. Most research of a developmental nature has been limited to the study of small segments of the life span—infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age, or to larger segments that focus on one psychological process, such as learning, memory, or intelligence (Baltes, Reese & Nesselrode, 1977). It is unusual for one researcher to study the entire life span. Some approaches use models that have already been developed for distinct periods of the life span and examine whether they will work for other periods; for example, Piaget's cognitive growth model has been extended to cover the entire life span (Baltes, Reese & Nesselrode, 1977). Piaget describes childhood cognitive

development as proceeding through hierarchial stages in which there is a corresponding chronological age for each developmental stage (Schell, Hall, 1979).

Levinson's Psychosocial Theory of Adult
Development: The Evolution of the
Individual Life Structure

Recently, the longitudinal research of Daniel Levinson and associates (1978) has added significantly to the understanding of adulthood and to an expansion of life cycle theory. Using a sample of forty men between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five from four occupational categories, he identified a sequence of periods from the end of adolescence to the middle forties through which all of his subjects passed. From this pattern he proposed a theory of the adult life course, and created a pivotal concept for the study of the character of a person's life and its evolution, called the individual life structure. By life structure he means the underlying pattern or design of a person's life at a given time (Levinson, 1978, p. 41). He conceives of adult development as synonymous with the evolution of the individual life structure, and uses the terms interchangeably. Life structures are built, modified, and rebuilt during each developmental period of the life course. The primary components of the life structures are identified by Levinson as: (1) the society in which the individual lives, (2) the

self, (3) the interplay of self and society and (4) the choices in life a person makes.

1. Life takes place in a social context including time in history, environment, class, religion, ethnicity, family, political system and occupational structure, with each affecting the life of the individual as it relates to his/her work, family and community life.

2. The self is both conscious and unconscious. It is a complex patterning of genetic and learned behaviors including anxieties, fantasies, moral values, ideals, talents, character traits, memories and modes of feeling. It incorporates, simultaneously, characteristics of change and permanence (i.e., Jane Doe changes while still remaining Jane Doe), and implies potential—the child is "mother of the woman." Individuals draw upon the self, or ignore it, in their everyday lives.

3. The interplay of self and society is the participation of the individual in the world and is reflected in the roles played such as citizen, worker, lover, friend, boss, parent, etc. Self and world are not separate entities but an interpenetration of the two. "The fish is in the water and the water is in the fish" (Levinson, 1978, page 47. Individuals use and are used by their world.

4. Levinson (1978) noted, as did Gould (1972) that the interplay between self and world is most often expressed

in the choices and decisions the individual makes. The important choices have to do with job, self, family, parents, religion, community, politics, and leisure. Of these major elements, only one or two will occupy a central place in the life structures at a time. As life structures change, an element may shift from center to periphery or vice versa.

The concept of the individual life structure provides a technique for examining life in its entirety. The researcher begins with a given "whole" similar to that in field theory, and arrives at the parts by analysis. It is less precise than the experimental tradition of studying isolated behaviors or single variables but has the advantage of focusing on individual behavior in the context of its natural environment. Levinson believes that some form of biographical method is essential during the initial stage of research on the evolution of the individual life structures (Levinson, 1978, page 16).

Developmental Periods and Chronological Ages

The evolution of the life structures are characterized by periods of stability and transition that follow a sequence and give underlying order to the life cycle. When Levinson and his associates examined the biographies of the men in their study, they found adult development to be a continuing need of the psychosocial self to grow. A specific pattern

of evolvment was discernible consisting of a series of alternating stable (structure building) periods and transitional (structure changing) periods. During the stable periods, major decisions were made which affected the goals and values of life, and it became the task of that period to build a life structure adequate for carrying out the decisions. A stable period would last ordinarily six to eight years before life's goals were again brought into question and the reappraisal and unrest of a transitional period evolved. The primary task of the four to five year transitional period was to question the existing structure and explore the possibilities for change.

The specific developmental periods and their typical ages are pictured in Figure 1 on the following page (Levinson, 1978, page 57).

Formation of the Dream

Another powerful factor discovered by Levinson in the lives of the majority of the men in his study was the formation and living out of a Dream. The Dream is of significance because it adds a sense of purpose and vitality to those who experience it and is closely tied to identity formation. In its earliest forms the Dream is a vision of the possibilities of the self in the world. It lends encouragement to efforts to explore the world and make a place for one's self there. Later, with hard work and the

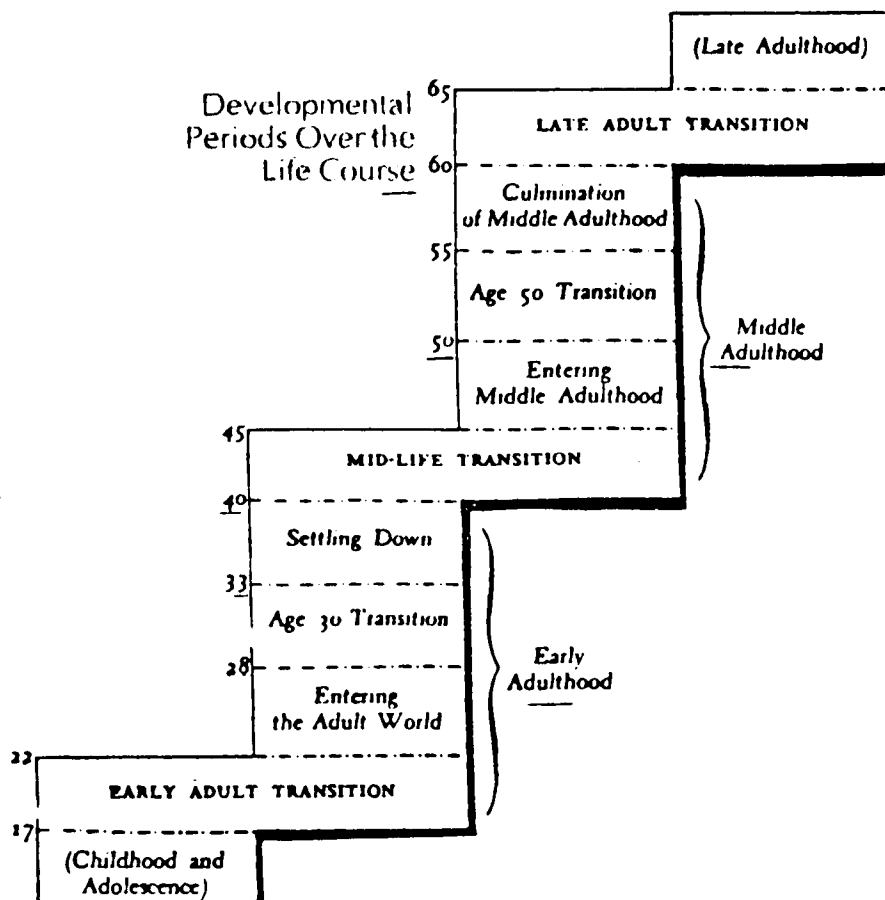


Figure 1. Seasons of a Man's Life
(Levinson, 1978, page 57)

encouragement of a mentor and/or special woman (usually wife or mother), the Dream can be transformed from visions of what might be to what is. Levinson (1978) noted the function of the mentor and special woman as that of sustaining the man's Dream.

CHAPTER II

EXPLANATION OF LEVINSON'S MODEL OF THE MID-LIFE TRANSITION

Mid-life Transition

The mid-life transition is a span of time (developmental period) between age forty and forty-five that serves as a bridge between early adulthood and middle adulthood. Levinson (1978, page 192) found the typical age of onset to be forty or forty-one and the average age of termination forty-five. It is an unsettled time of doubting, searching, and reviewing one's life. During this period 80 percent of the subjects in Levinson's study encountered tumultuous struggles with self and world.

The specific character of the mid-life transition or any other developmental period is derived from the nature of the tasks to be performed during that period. There is a strong parallel between Levinson's description of developmental tasks, Erikson's eight ages of ego development and the challenging of false assumptions associated with the sequential life stages identified by Gould. Developmental work on an issue is never achieved once and for all and success at one stage does not guarantee success in the next (Erikson, 1978). Also, the failure to achieve mastery at

one level may create developmental problems in the ensuing stages (Bischof, 1975, page 30). In the mid-life transition the predominant developmental tasks identified by Levinson are: (1) to reappraise the past (reappraisal is a part of the process of breaking out of or terminating the past and initiating the future; (2) to assume a senior role (from about age forty to forty-five, individuals begin to take their place in the "dominant" generation—the generation between their own parents and their children); (3) to reintegrate polarities (reintegration is the uniting within one's self of the opposing forces of young/old, masculine/feminine, destruction/creation, and attachment/separateness).

Levinson's model of the mid-life transition and evolution of the life structures with its sequence of eras, periods, developmental tasks and transitions suggests a basic source of order in the life cycle which is normal or natural for all adults. He assumes the model or basic order of development is the same for both genders and is universal across cultures. I agree that the underlying eras, periods and development tasks are similar. However, I propose that the specific life structures to be worked upon, the major life components which move from periphery to center of interest, and the issues that arise to be reintegrated in the four polarities will vary with the sexes.

Reintegration of Polarities

The perception of all elements in our environment as polarities is a primary orientation as old as the I Ching (3000 to 1200 B.C.). The Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism stress the relational character of all things. Whatever is singled out exists only in relation to its own opposite (i.e., pleasure is defined by pain, light by dark, active by passive, etc.) (Watts, 1957, pages 13, 63). The concept of the union of opposites or the integration of polarities as the ideal for which the individual strives is also a doctrine of the I Ching as well as of many western psychotherapies, and is represented by Yang and Yin the symbol of wholeness, harmony, and complementary opposites (Jung, 1964, page 357). A somewhat modernized adaptation underlies Gestalt Therapy, "whatever is, will differentiate into opposites and if you stay in the nothing of the zero center, you are balanced and in perspective" (Perls, 1969, page 76). Albert Ellis (1974) seized upon the idea of contradictory realities when he founded Rational Emotive Therapy—the idea of challenging the unrealistic with the realistic. It is believed that increased energy and renewal spring from the equilibration of opposites.

A polarity, as defined by Levinson, is a crucial problem or issue of the self in relation to the external world, and is stated as a contradiction between opposites. The

developmental task is to arrive at a favorable balance or centering (1978, page 323). The term reintegration is used since the polarities are never completely resolved and arise for reworking in each developmental period. Levinson's unique contribution has been the identification of the four major polarities he considered to be a part of the human social condition and as such fundamental to all adult development. The polarities are: (1) Young/Old, (2) Masculine/Feminine, (3) Creation/Destruction and (4) Attachment/Separateness.

1. Young/Old. This polarity does not refer to chronological age but is an archetypal symbol representing birth, growth, possibility, energy, initiation, and the vision of things to come versus termination, fruition, maturity, stability, and death.

2. Destruction/Creation. The evolution of the earth is a process of destruction and creation. This polarity represents the egotistic, powerseeking, warring human forces versus the life affirming, productive, loving, forgiving forces.

3. Masculine/Feminine. These terms refer to the meanings attached to gender. They go beyond the biological to include the sociological and psychological differences between the two. A traditional cultural theme in the masculine pattern is doing, making, having; that of the feminine is nurturance, creativity, and intuition.

4. Attachment/Separateness. Individuals are attached when they are trying to master the external world. A person experiences separateness when he/she is primarily involved in the world of inner self. Separateness is needed for personal growth and acceptance of mortality.

Diagram of the Male and Female Model of the
Mid-life Transition

Figure 2 is a diagram of the male model of the mid-life transition. I have condensed the model from the full written description set forth by Levinson in his book Seasons of a Man's Life. Following the male model is a diagram (Figure 3) of a tentative female model of the mid-life transition which I have conceptualized from the paradigm of the male life structures. The proposed female model explores the suitability of applying a model of adult male development to the life course of a selected sample of women who were predominantly white, middle class and married. The female model also explores the possibility of providing a contextual framework or skeleton for integrating into a coherent whole much of the existing literature and expanding research on isolated female behaviors.

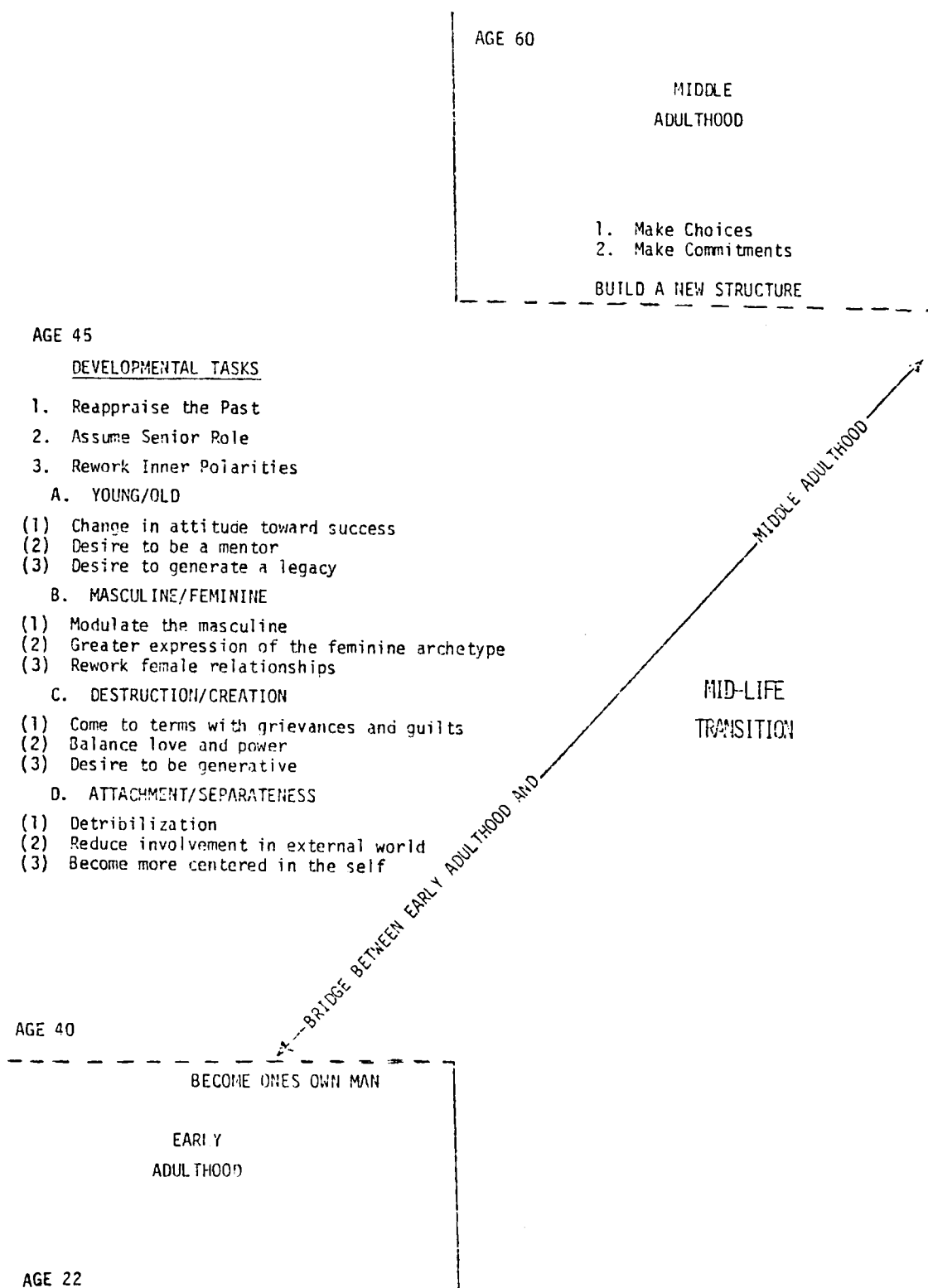


Figure 2. Male Model of the Mid-life Transition

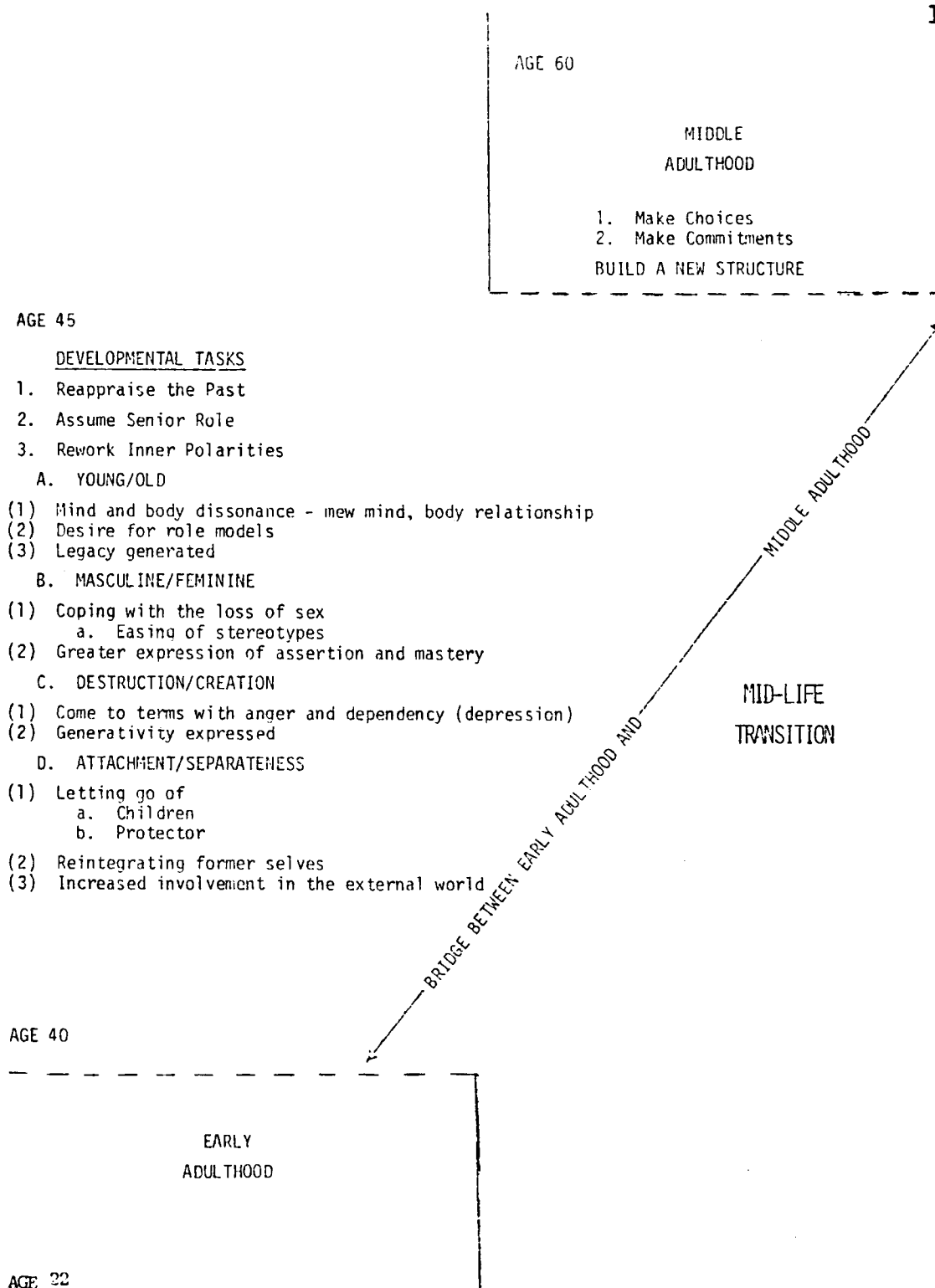


Figure 3. Tentative Female Model of the Mid-life Transition

CHAPTER III

FORMATION OF THE LIFE STRUCTURES OF WOMEN

ENTERING MIDDLE ADULTHOOD:

A PROPOSED MODEL

The theoretical constructs described in the tentative model of the female were derived from a review of the literature on adult development over the life cycle, and from personal observations and inquiry, over the years, of female clients and psychology students. It should be noted that Levinson and his associates began their research with even less structure, for he had not yet formulated his model, "The starting point for our thinking was, however, not an articulated theory but an intuitively derived, metaphorical sense of what the life cycle is about" (Levinson, 1978, page 6).

The experiences of the investigator have been stated in the first person in the following model for purposes of clarifying the source of information.

Developmental Tasks of the Mid-life Transition of Women

Reappraise the Past

At mid-life there is a heightened awareness of mortality and a restructuring of time. There is a shift of focus on

time from time-since-birth to time-left-to-live (Neugarten, 1968). The new urgency of time brings the life structure into question and mid-life women note that whatever it is they are going to do, they must do it now. Iris Sanuiuliano (1978) posits that the traditional mid-life woman is in search of a separate self, a personal identity that has been submerged and postponed by marriage and parenting. Joan Kennedy (1978) referred to it as "Some space of my own."

Assume Senior Role

Assumption of the senior role refers to the change in generational status that occurs at about age forty. The individual moves into the dominant (senior) generation as the role of their parents declines. Females in our culture do not arrive at this life stage with the economic and political power of the male. Woman's power is in her self knowledge as a "survivor." Upon the early death of my mother and father I became my own parent.

Rework Inner Polarities

Young/Old

Mind and body dissonance—new mind, body relationship.

The inner self feels ageless. I must look at my body to know I have grown older. I feel discontinuity between the ageless, expanding inner self that is moving toward completion, and

the declining, dying outer self. "The same young Jonathan Seagull was there that had always lived behind his golden eyes, but the outer form had changed" (Bach, 1970, page 37).

Desire for role models. When I reached forty-five, I began looking for role models on which to pattern my behavior. Where are the middle-aged women who are engaged in exciting, important things? With few female role models, no "old girl network," and the unlikelihood of a mentor, the middle-aged woman who moves up or out generally becomes her own trail-blazer.

Legacy generated. It is a standing joke among women that mothers can't die until their children are raised. One day in my early forties I looked at my youngest child and realized that she and the other two could make it without me. I felt a great sense of liberation. Now my children are my legacy, my magnum opus. "After having lavished its light upon the world, the sun withdraws its rays in order to illuminate itself" (Campbell, 1971, page 12).

Masculine/Feminine

Coping with the loss of sex. The double standard in aging in Western society results in a ten to fifteen year social and sexual advantage for men over women (Freeman, 1979). Ironically, I found an unexpected bonus. Freed from

the strict sexual stereotypes imposed by our culture, I am free to be a "person" in my relationships with others.

Greater expression of assertion and mastery of the environment. Bernice Neugarten (1964) found in the Kansas City study on individuals over age forty that as men age they change from active to passive mastery styles, and women change from passive to more competitive, assertive styles. As I age, I strive for autonomy and mastery as a method of preserving bargaining power and self-esteem in a society that emphasizes the worth of a woman in her value as a sex object.

Destruction/Creation

Coming to terms with anger and dependency (depression). Roger Gould (1978, page 332) posits that women in mid-life have the added load of dealing with the existential anger of having been deprived while others benefited . . . "Who's going to give me back those twenty years?"

A higher incidence of depression, two to five times the male rate, has been consistently reported for women in the mid-life (Scarf, 1979). According to Jesse Bernard (1976) depression in women is an outgrowth of helplessness when one has to depend on others to provide their basic needs. Bernard's association of the passive, dependent role and

depression is in accord with the Gestalt Therapy concept of mental health. Maturation is a continuous process of transcending environmental support and developing self-support, which means an increasing reduction of dependencies (Perls, 1951, page 1x).

Generativity expressed. As a wife and mother, the traditional woman in the mid-life decade has been in the nurturant, generative role for most of her adult life.

Attachment/Separateness

Letting go of children and protectors. The sense of mortality and letting go that surfaces in middle adulthood is a familiar theme in literature. I first experienced this awareness during the years forty-five through forty-seven in dreams that left me frightened. I experienced the panic of a soul adrift, apart from the body, alone, unable to touch, see and love. Gould (1979) speaks of this maturing as giving up the "illusions of safety." The poet Robert Lowell (1977) wrote, "My life's fever is soaking in night sweats . . . always inside me is the child who died" (page 81). The dreams ceased but the urgency of time left permeates my thinking.

Reintegrating former selves. The reflection of the forties and increased interiority (inward orientation)

described by Neugarten (1964) is an obvious happening. I experienced it as a deep need to reacquaint myself with me that was a child, adolescent and young adult. It took the turn of retracing old steps, returning to my "roots," visiting places I had once lived, reunions and reworking memories in the light of a more mature me. "I try to see the line which leads through my life into the world, and out of the world again" (Jung, 1965, page 320).

Increased involvement in the external world. More American women work outside the home than ever before. According to the 1975 Handbook on Women Workers (page 12) the labor force participation of women age forty-five to fifty-four years is higher (54.9 percent of total) than for any other female age group. Released from the responsibilities of home and children the middle-aged woman has the opportunity to formulate new goals. It should be noted, however, that the increased involvement of women after mid-life in the external world and their change from the passive to more assertive styles is in contrast to the personal need of time for contemplation and reflection discovered by Neugarten (1968) and described by Jung as an instinctive human need of time to prepare for the final developmental task, death (Jung, 1962, pages 124-125). Neither is it to say that because the labor force participation of women

age forty-five to fifty is higher they are engaged in fulfilling work or are living out a vocational dream.

Focus of the Study

There is a lack of integrated developmental theory on the adult development of women. A review of the literature reveals that psychological research on how individuals, male and female, change over time is in its infancy. There have been, in recent years, several significant developmental studies on males, but few on women and none, at this writing, focusing on the specific developmental period in women age 40 to 50. The 40 to 50 time period includes the mid-life transition, commonly referred to as the mid-life crisis, and is believed to be a significant time of change for most women.

The goal of the present study is to adapt an existing male model of research design to the life course of women entering middle adulthood with the effect of generating theory on how women in this age period change and the effect of change on their life course. The major research questions to be addressed are as follows: Do women go through an unsettled period of transition around age 40? If so, what is the nature of the transition? Does it vary from the male model in the manner described in the tentative female model of the mid-life transition? Does it appear to follow the

same age-linked pattern? Are alternating periods of transition and stability discernible in the life course of women age 40 to 50? Do women form and live out a Dream?

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

The principal research method used in this study for gathering data was the intensive or biographical interview. An Interview Guideline originally prepared by Levinson and adapted by Wendy Stewart (1977) for her research on the life structures of women in early adulthood, was used as an outline and stimulus to devise a Biographical Questionnaire (Appendix A) appropriate for the developmental period under investigation in the present study. The biographical interview is a structured research method that combines a clinical interview, in that specific topics are covered, with a conversation between friends in which the subject can feel free to tell her story.

As in a clinical interview, the interviewer is sensitive to the feelings expressed, and follows the threads of meaning as they lead through diverse topics . . . as in a conversation between friends, the relationship is equal and the interviewer is free to respond in terms of his/her own experience. Significant work is involved in forming, maintaining and terminating the relationship. (Levinson, 1978, page 15)

Counseling skills were necessary to the collection of appropriate data. They were specifically needed in knowing what questions to ask, when to ask them, when to encourage elaboration, when to offer emotional support, and when to move the interview forward.

The fifteen subjects selected for the study were interviewed a minimum of three hours each. Thirteen of the subjects were interviewed twice from 1-1/2 to 2 hours at each meeting and two subjects, due to unusual schedules, were interviewed at one meeting for a three-hour period. Ten of the interviews were held in the office of the researcher, three in her home, and two in the homes of the subjects. All of the interviews were tape recorded on audio cassettes and transcribed verbatim.

The Biographical Questionnaire was not used to standardize the interview for fear it would interfere with subject's spontaneity and limit responses. It was used as a guide to ascertain that all major areas of the subject's life were covered and, whenever appropriate, to present subjects with the same questions worded similarly.

Theory Construction

The research design developed by Levinson (1978) to determine adult male development served as a paradigm for construction of the female model of the mid-life transition proposed in this study. Once the interview data was collected comparisons were continuously drawn between the female model and the actual responses of the subjects. To accomplish this, the transcribed interview data was organized so that all subject responses to a specific interview question or

questions (such as responses on sexuality or religion) would appear together. Once all responses on a specific topic were grouped, both the group and the individual subject responses could be tabulated and compared with one another and with the male and female model.

A life-line was constructed on each subject to picture the structure changing periods of transition and the structure building periods of stability. It was devised by this researcher as a means to present a visual image of the developmental periods in the life course of subjects and to more accurately determine the onset and termination of the mid-life transition if it was experienced. The plotting of the life-lines was accomplished by first compiling a summary sheet from the transcribed data on each subject noting the significant events of their life as they recalled them, the age at which the event occurred, and the emotions surrounding the event. The diagramed life-lines on each subject facilitated a comparison between the age-linked phases of a man's life proposed by Levinson (1978) in Figure 1, page 11, and those of the women in this study.

Selection of Subjects

Fifteen subjects were chosen from a specified age range of 40 to 52 years of age and from a combination of familial and occupational roles heavily weighted toward the traditional

woman. The familial roles were: (1) married with children at home, (2) married with children no longer at home, (3) widowed, and (4) divorced. Typical occupational roles selected were: (1) housewife, (2) housewife plus employment outside the home in typical female career such as secretary, teacher or counselor, (3) mother plus employment outside the home in typical female career, and (4) housewife, mother and employment outside the home.

Characteristics of the Sample

Historical

Born between 1928 and 1940, subjects arrived upon the scene in the years of the Great Depression and the economic recovery of the New Deal. They were reared by parents who remained sensitive to the severe unemployment and suffering of that period. The subjects grew into early childhood and adolescence in the 1940s under the threat of Nazism and the conflict of World War II. Their lives were shaped by war news, war movies, war books and songs, rationing, a booming economy, and the call to patriotism as young men were drafted and women were drawn from the home into war work (Baxandall, Gordon & Reverby, 1976). A wave of juvenile delinquency accompanied and followed the war, but most youth were on the whole innocent (Bailey, 1975). There was very little smoking, drinking or promiscuity and no drugs (Edey,

1970). Heterosexual affairs existed but were not flaunted and other types of sexual activity were kept private (Edey, 1970).

By the 1950s and 1960s subjects reached the age of employment. As young women, they found it acceptable to work, but the expectation was that they would work for only a short while after completing their education and then would stop to marry, have children and spend the remainder of their days caring for their families and homes (Friez et al., 1978).

The growth in personal income during the 1950s and early 1960s prompted the move of cohorts along with other American families to the suburbs. The availability of easy credit made the purchase of a split-level home, a second car, a pleasure boat and a T.V. set in the family room a reality for middle class Americans (Edey, 1970). In suburbia subjects were expected to give their children the "advantages." They entered them in clubs, enrolled them in music and dance classes, watched them play in Little League, and in the process added chauffeuring and volunteerism to their wife and mother roles.

The plight of cohorts as a minority group improved in the 1960s and 1970s with the advancement in Federal Civil Rights legislation, Affirmative Action and the "woman's movement" (Bailey, 1975). The disappearance of the stigma that was once attached to working opened the door for women

to leave their kitchens and seek employment to supplement the family income or keep constructively busy after the children were reared (Bailey, 1975).

Identifying

The identifying characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Upon collection of the interview data, each subject was assigned a number and a pseudonym comprising a first name and last initial which were, from that point on, used to identify the subject in all written and verbal discussions concerning her (see columns 1 and 2). Column 3 presents the year of birth of each subject. The age of each subject at the time of the interviews is presented in column 4. Column 5 presents the total number of interview hours respectively. Additional criteria such as occupational and familial status are presented in column 6.

Limitations

The age (48) and sex (female) of the researcher was helpful in relating to the material disclosed by subjects but had the disadvantage of contributing to possible experimenter bias. To add objectivity to the analysis of data and limit the disadvantage of the researcher also being the analyzer of results, subjects' verbatim responses were included in the study to document the researcher's interpretations and conclusions.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Sample

Subject Number	Pseudonym	Year Born	Age at Interview	Number of Interviews	Total Hours Interviewed	Additional Characteristics
1	Karen C.	1940	40	2	3.5	Married, housewife, mother of four 15, 14, 13, 6, full-time student
2	Lenny S.	1940	40	2	4.2	Married, housewife, mother of four 15, 13, 11, 7, full-time nursing student
3	Sarah C.	1940	40	2	3.5	Married, housewife, mother of two 9, 7, full-time student
4	Janie B.	1939	41	2	3	Widow, mother of child 10, full-time student
5	Pat M.	1939	42	1	3	Divorced, mother of two 20, 19, employed as clerk
6	Laura K.	1937	43	1	3	Married, housewife, mother of three 17, 14, 9, student

Table 1 (Cont'd)

Subject Number	Pseudonym	Year Born	Age at Interview	Number of Interviews	Total Hours Interviewed	Additional Characteristics
7	Julia S.	1935	45	2	4	Married, housewife, mother of three 23, 19, 14 part-time student
8	Ann P.	1934	46	2	4	Married, housewife, mother of three 23, 22, 17 part-time student
9	Bobbie H.	1934	46	1	3	Married, employed (secretary), mother of two, 23, 18
10	Joan F.	1933	47	2	4	Married, housewife, mother of four 24, 23, 21 and 20; full-time student
11	Jean S.	1933	47	1	3	Divorced, employed (secretary), mother of three 26, 24, 18
12	Polly E.	1932	48	2	3	Married, employed part-time; mother of three 21, 19, 13
13	Lucy J.	1929	51	2	3	Separated, mother of five 28, 27, 26, 22, 16; part-time student

Table 1 (Cont'd)

Subject Number	Pseudonym	Year Born	Age at Interview	Number of Interviews	Total Hours Interviewed	Additional Characteristics
14	Verna R.	1928	52	2	3.5	Married, housewife, mother of three 28, 26, 15; part-time student
15	Mary A.	1928	52	1	3	Widow, mother of two foster sons 17, 19; school teacher

The sample selected was not representative, nor was it entirely composed of traditional women. Two subjects had served in the military, five held college degrees and seven were re-entry college students.

The Biographical Questionnaire did not cover all areas of the subject's life with an equal number of questions and each interview was to some degree different. To the extent that some topics received more emphasis than others, the questions asked subjects can be said to have predetermined the results.

Mid-life transitions and crises may be a feature of those socio-economic classes who can afford the luxury of reflection, doubt and the selection of alternatives.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA ON THE LIFE STRUCTURES OF WOMEN SUBJECTS ENTERING MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

Developmental Tasks of the Mid-life Transition of Women Subjects

The three major tasks of the mid-life transition are, (1) to reappraise the past, (2) to assume the senior role and to (3) rework the innerpolarities of Young/Old, Masculine/Feminine, Creation/Destruction, and Attachment/Separateness. The first two tasks are involved with terminating the past era and initiating the new era of middle adulthood. The reworking of polarities is the underlying process by which the first two tasks are accomplished. The manner in which traditional women respond to these developmental tasks is revealed in the analysis of data to follow:

Young/Old

Mind and body dissonance—new mind and body relationship. In the analysis of data, much overlapping was found among the four polarities with the Young/Old duality the major of the four. Young/Old is more than an age level or category. Young/Old is also a fundamental method in linear thinking and of defining reality. As individuals develop, there is the continual need to rebalance themselves on this continuum

and discover new ways of being Young/Old. To discover if women entering middle adulthood experience the Young/Old polarity, as predicted in the female model, twenty questions on the Biographical Questionnaire were directed specifically at the nature of the aging process. The questions yielded over two hundred responses from which patterns of behavior emerged. Patterns were distinguishable when a majority of the subjects responded similarly to an inquiry or when their responses agreed or disagreed with the proposed models.

One of the first major ideas to emerge from the data was the awareness that women subjects age forty to fifty experienced and described aging in two forms, an "inner form" that refers to the "inner self" and is clearly aligned with how one feels and an "outer self" that refers to the physical body and is what one observes or sees when she looks upon the body. It was more common for the subjects to report aging in physical, outer-self terms than in terms of inner self. This should be expected since it is easier to describe the aging one actually sees than to search for words from a language that remains inadequate for describing the inner experience.

For the majority of subjects, what they saw was not what they felt. Responses of nine of the subjects revealed the experiencing of a mind-body dichotomy perceived as a form of disharmony or contradiction between the inner and outer self. The remarks of subjects support the Tentative Female

Model that women in mid-life transition experience a form of mind and body dissonance that was not present in previous transitions. The disharmony is a contributing factor to the anxiety of the mid-life transition. The information above is best illustrated by the actual responses of subjects. Responses have been arranged in chronological order.

Question: How do you perceive yourself growing older?

Responses: I know how old I am, but I feel like a kid. (Polly F., age 48)

I don't feel old. I know I'm not a kid, but I don't feel different. I don't feel like what I thought forty would be like (Pat M., age 42)

Actually, on the inside I still feel like I am eighteen. It's just a shock when I look in the mirror. I don't feel old. I still feel young . . . mentally I still feel young on the inside. When I look in the mirror I see the grey hairs. God, you're not young anymore. (Janie B., age 41)

I feel mentally young. (Laura K., age 43)

I want to be young, but I want to be my age. (Julia S., age 45)

Jo Ann, I'm forty and I don't feel forty. Sometimes I say to myself, "I should act my age." (Sarah C., age 40)

I think my mind is much too young for my body. (Lenny S., age 40)

While the aging of the inner self was described by subjects in positive terms, the experience of aging in the outer self was registered almost exclusively in negative

symbols. Some common expressions by subjects were: "My bottom is getting bigger," "I don't like the way my face is going," "I feel less attractive," "Eat the same amount and gain more," "Needing bifocals," and "My skin is getting dry." The most notable happening, sensed by nine of the fifteen subjects, was their change in energy level. Seven subjects reported a decrease in physical stamina while two expressed an increase in energy level.

It is possible that the fear of aging, due to conditioned cultural negativism, is worse than the actual experience of aging, and that at each succeeding developmental period women will find aging better than was expected. The remarks of subjects previously mentioned such as, "I don't feel old. I don't feel like I thought forty would be like," "I'm forty and don't feel forty," "I want to be young, but I want to be my age," tend to support this idea. The fears expressed by six subjects were more associated with cultural responses to aging, such as job discrimination, the double standard in aging, the lack of honor accorded age, and the accompanying loss of personal power than with physical aging itself.

Question: What are your concerns about aging?

Responses: I'm frightened about age. I'm worried that my age will be used against me; that there won't be a place for me (expects to have her degree in engineering in one year); that I have waited too long. (Joan F., age 47)

It is scary thinking about starting a career at fifty-one. I want the people I work for to take me seriously.
(Lucy J., age 51)

One thing I can't stand is not being seen, and that is what I dread. I won't allow it! There are a number of things my mother said to me that are so blatant: "When your hair turns grey, forget it. There is nothing worse than an old woman." (Polly E., age 48)

The pressure of time as a limited commodity was voiced as a concern of seven subjects. The pressure brought home two realizations concisely expressed by subject Joan F., age forty-seven, "Whatever you're going to do, you had better get on with it," and Jean S., age forty-seven, "Whatever decisions you are going to make, you need to stick with them for a fairly long time." Three subjects mentioned age fifty as a marker time by which they expected to have particular goals accomplished. Subject Laura K., age forty-three, noted, "Fifty has a feel of no longer being young."

How subjects maintained their feelings of youthfulness or agelessness in the midst of obvious body decline and gradual loss of physical attractiveness (by society's standard) was readily available in the data. The answers were so clear and well spoken by subjects that the information is an encouraging aspect to the prospect of aging. Subjects arrived at middle adulthood with a special possession, a

specific new awareness of themselves that tended to offset the cultural fear associated with aging and to compensate for the decline of the body. The essence of this special knowledge, accumulated and earned through experience was clearly expressed by Janie B., age forty-one, "Forty is a good time. If you are ever going to know who you are, you are going to know it then." All of the subjects expressed, in various forms, this solidifying of the inner core, the special knowledge of knowing, not only who they were, but of what they were made.

Questions: In what ways are you changing? Experience yourself growing older?

Responses: I am more productive than I was in the past. I am more content with what I have. (Verna R., 52)

I have become more independent. It was a necessity. (Mary A., 52)

I am more inner directed. Now I can go ahead and be. Oh good, whee, at long last! (Polly F., age 48)

I think I find myself more self-sufficient, less inclined to say, "Oh, I can't do that." I'm understanding myself better. (Joan F., age 47)

Right now I know if I have to I can emotionally survive on my own. I don't need someone else. (Bobbie H., age 46)

I feel more contented now than I have ever felt. (Ann P., age 46)

I feel more secure about myself and what I can do. (Julia A., age 45)

I have reached the point of feeling that whatever happens I can handle it. If my husband decides that he can't live with a feminist and there is a divorce I know I can survive. (Laura K., age 43)

I think I have learned to live with myself better. I am learning to be alone. (Pat M., age 42)

I think forty is a good time. If you are ever going to know who you are, you are going to know it then. (Janie B., age 41)

I know more about what I want and I know I can go out and get it. (Sarah C., age 40)

I have more of a sense of being myself now. Part of it is that I have more of a sense of purpose. (Lenny S., age 40)

All of the subjects were engaged, at various levels, in the developmental task of finding a new way of being Young/Old or forming an internal image of themselves as older. Responses of subjects suggested the evolutionary nature of the phenomenon that proceeded by acknowledging and incorporating new information about the "outer" and "inner" self, as well as society's message, much of which is negative, into the internal image in a manner that is not diminishing to the self. The disclosures of Jean S., age 47, a particularly introspective and verbal subject, provided insight into this process. Jean is a tall, statuesque, attractive woman whose transition revealed a move from the early adulthood task of supplying others with the attractiveness they expected, to

entering middle adulthood and tiring of the packaging and asking that others care enough to accept the real Jean S.

Question: When was it you first got the feeling you were no longer a young adult?

Jean S.: Forty was the turning point for me. I could see visually the loss of attractiveness, the jowls hanging, the loose skin. I could no longer hide it with makeup. It was pretty devastating for me. All of a sudden I felt old and began to look old and I didn't know how to deal with it.

Question: Have your feelings changed?

Jean S.: Yes, especially in the last two years. In 1979, I started college as a self-development project. One of the things I wanted to do was get comfortable with the aging process. Before I kind of pushed it back.

Question: Where are you with it today?

Jean S.: Today I am comfortable with the grey hair. It is there to stay. I'm not trying to pretend I'm twenty-nine anymore. Before you could cover it up until you strip down naked.

Question: Do you still feel attractive?

Jean S.: I don't feel as attractive now as I once did. I used to feel I had to supply people with this attractiveness. People never got beneath the packaging to know the real me. Now I expect them to care enough to know. I get tired of the packaging. I want to be accepted as I am.

A desire for role models. The use of role models as a major resource in the evolution of the life structures is not

a part of Levinson's paradigm. The male model and author's female model differ in this respect. Levinson constructed a career-oriented model of adult development proposing the mentor relationship as the major process by which men internalize the admired qualities of significant figures and seem to emulate them. The concept of mentor and role model are similar but not interchangeable. A mentor is an admired individual whose personal relationship with another (excluding son or daughter) helps to foster that person's development and enhance their life goals. The function of the role model does not imply a personal relationship.

According to Levinson (1978), women engage in very few mentoring relationships. The manifestation in women of the developmental need/desire to be mentored, described in the male model, is unclear. The hypothesis in the proposed female model was that mentoring would be experienced by subjects as a deficiency in finding appropriate female role models, due to the narrowly defined sex roles of today's middle-aged women.

Eight questions from the Biographical Questionnaire were directed at determining the extent of mentoring relationships and the influence of role models in the lives of women. Subjects were asked if there was a man or woman they particularly admired. Five subjects (33-1/3 percent) named their mother as the person they admired most and would most like to be like. Five subjects responded in the same manner as

Verna R. who described as her model a composite of positive characteristics assembled from a number of people, "I can't really say I have a role model. There are lots of characteristics from lots of people I would like to put together to make one superwoman." One subject named her father as the person she regarded most highly and desired to be like, and another mentioned a male friend as the person she admired most. Three subjects said there was no one in particular they admired or wished to emulate.

To determine if subjects had experienced a mentoring relationship, they were asked if their early adult growth had been influenced by a special person, other than their parents, who took personal interest in their life or career goals. Nine subjects (60 percent) were unable to recall any such person. Four subjects said there had been no special person other than their mother. Two subjects, Sara C. and Jean S., did receive mentoring. Sarah C. described the assistance of a WAF Sergeant who served as her guide and sponsor while she was in the military, and Jean S. spoke of her relationship with a special man who provided encouragement and direction to her life.

The naming of mother as the significant figure most often modeled or internalized by subjects was also supported in the interview data gathered from the section on Family of the Biographical Questionnaire. Ten subjects (75 percent)

described their mothers as the dominant parent and seven named her as the parent to whom they felt the most close. Father was often described as the less stressful parent or the fun person who did not discipline. The brief remarks to follow reveal the impact of mother on subjects' lives.

Mother is a no nonsense person—stronger than Dad. I would like to be like her. (Sarah C., age 40)

Mother is still the strong one . . . My concept of my mother sustains me. I feel I am like her. (Lenny S., age 40)

My mother was the most dominant in the family. . . I have modeled my mother and grandmother in their importance of duty. (Karen C., age 40)

Mother is most aggressive. She still pushes. I couldn't keep up with her or meet her expectations. (Ann P., age 46)

Of the two people, mother was the stronger . . . I'm dominant like my mother, but not like her in other ways. (Bobbie H., age 46)

Mother ran things. I'm not as dominant as she. (Julia S., age 45)

I'm strong and dominant like my mother. I realize I am more like her than I admit. (Jean S., age 47)

She was very kind, giving, giving, giving. I am not that nurturing. Sometimes I feel I'm my mother, and she would have done the same thing, whether it is a facial movement or a reaching or something or other; and it is not that you have been there before but it's exactly what she would do. (Joan F., age 47)

Father died when I was seventeen. As I grow older, I realize what I have missed. Mother is meek but a go-getter. When she goes, my last pillar of support goes. (Lucy J., age 51)

Mother has always been self-willed. I admire her strength, but I don't want to be like her.
(Verna R., age 52)

The following ideas predominated from the inquiry above on role models and mentors:

1. Mother was the person subjects named most often as the individual they admired and would like most to be like. She fulfilled for one-third of the subjects the mentor role of providing emotional support and guidance into the adult world.

2. The findings support Levinson's (1978) statement that women receive less mentoring (especially outside the home) than do men.

3. Since subjects, for whatever reason, did experience less mentoring, they failed to benefit from a valuable source of guidance into the adult world, which had the added effect of limiting their opportunity to identify with persons, other than mother, who could exemplify other ways of being.

4. Subjects did not express a desire or need for role models nor did they reveal a consciousness that their options were limited by this deficiency.

Legacy generated. Levinson found, as a part of the work to be done on the Young/Old polarity, the desire among men in mid-life transition to create a legacy (i.e., to leave something of themselves of value to future generations). He

attributed the men's motivation for a legacy to the increased awareness at mid-life of their mortality and the basic human wish for immortality. His subjects differed widely in their beliefs as to what constitutes a legacy, but in general it was considered to be something representative of the ultimate value of their life such as material possessions, creative products, enterprises, or offspring.

In the female model, it was proposed that women who have followed the traditional path and produced children in early adulthood would, upon entering middle adulthood, see their children reach maturity and experience the positive emotions from the knowledge of a commitment fulfilled and a legacy generated. Unlike the male model, it was expected the women would consider their children their primary legacy and would have completed the major portion of this work at mid-life transition.

The analysis of subject's responses did not support or disprove the proposal. The Biographical Questionnaire, as it was structured, did not stimulate enough responses relative to the topic to arrive at a conclusion. Subjects did not spontaneously speak of a legacy or volunteer information related to the desire to leave behind something representative of themselves as did the men in Levinson's study. Ordinarily a strong need or desire that has not been met will be verbalized.

Masculinity/Femininity

Coping with the loss of youth in sexuality; easing of stereotypes. The practice is evident in North American culture, especially among males and in today's media (advertising in particular) of associating sexuality with youthfulness and physical beauty. The association of youth with sexuality promotes an expectation of decline in sexuality with physical decline (a phenomenon related more to the physiology of males) that tends to mask the true nature of the sexual experience of traditional women as they age and in particular of the middle-aged women of this study.

Because there is the easing of stereotypes for women in middle adulthood, especially in the stereotypical role of sex object as they near the end of childbearing years, the importance of sexuality to the lives of women in their forties decade was neither anticipated by the researcher nor was it predicted in the proposed female model. This is accounted for, in part, by the dearth of accurate information on the developmental process of sexuality in women during middle adulthood. The uninhibited manner in which subjects shared the experiences of their sex lives came also as a surprise and may be the most valuable research information in the study.

It is paradoxical that while our culture values the sexuality of the middle adulthood woman less with each of

her passing years, twelve of the fifteen traditional women of this study described this as the most sexually satisfying and pleasurable period in their lives. Anna P., a subject approaching forty-seven, expressed it succinctly, "I have found that sex doesn't run out. In fact, I enjoy it more now than ever before." It is as if the subjects have ignored the negative socialization to discover their own truth (i.e., an increased awareness of their own sexual potential). A valuable aspect of subjects' sexual maturing was the development of their own frame-of-reference for determining their sexual behavior.

The subjects' interpretations of their sexual experiences supported three general conclusions regarding transitions in their sexual behavior:

1. As young women they were inhibited by their own naivete and sensitivity to pregnancy.

2. During the mothering years they were conscious of tiredness, the lack of privacy in the home (particularly during children's adolescent years) and the lack of opportunity for spontaneous expression of sex.

3. Upon entering middle adulthood, they experienced more time for self, less concern for pregnancy (two husbands had vasectomies, three subjects had hysterectomies, and three subjects experienced cessation of menses), an increased awareness of their own potential for sex, and a new assertive attitude—fulfillment of self as well as partner.

When asked, "How important is sex to you?", fourteen subjects out of the fifteen affirmed the importance of sex to their lives.

Question: Have you experienced a change in intimacy or passion in your relationship(s)?

Verna R., age 52. Yes, I think I am less inhibited. I'm more relaxed not being afraid of getting pregnant. I think that is one of the inhibitions I have had—over the years we have grown more intimate. I looked over what I had and decided I wanted what I had.

Lucy J., age 51, (mother of five, in the process of divorce). Sex has been more important in the forties because I am more free with sex without the thoughts of pregnancy. I'm more relaxed. In earlier years, I was often tired—then it was more an obligation with my husband. I'm also less inhibited because of the sexual revolution, through reading.

Polly P., age 48. We don't have sex as much as we would like. Our children are the wrong ages—no privacy (ages 13 and 21). We try to get away every three months.

Jean S., age 47 (divorced at 35—several lovers during the past 12 years, only two of which were as old as she). I feared losing my sexuality but that isn't so. My sexuality peak began at forty. Things have come together in the last seven years—the maturity, the experience, the pleasure of being free, getting rid of hang-ups. The body is aging but the maturity seems to take over and the quality of loving seems to get so much better.

Ann P., age 47. There has been little change in our sex life in the last five years. Perhaps a little more quiet; more intimate, because we find each other more alone together. Actually, that part of losing the children is very nice.

Julia S., age 45. I am much more open. I was always so modest. I'm not as ashamed about

things . . . I have a lot more feelings and a lot more fantasies than I used to. I think about it more. When I was younger it didn't make much difference, but I don't feel that way now. I feel like I need it more.

Laura K., age 43. I have more energy than I had as a younger woman . . . my husband and I always went through hell and high water to keep up our sex life. Sex is very important to him. Sometimes it has been a matter of my giving in. He has had to accept a lot of changes in me (referring to husband's concern with her growing independence). I think I can give him the comfort of regular sex—every other night. I felt we had relations out of habit. I'm feeling freer to say, "I think I would like to wait."

Lenny S., age 40. I would like a fuller relationship both sexually and personally. I feel very sensual, very attractive.

Satisfactory sexual relationships did not hold partners together, nor did unsatisfactory sexual relations dissolve marriages. It was, however, a powerful form of communication between partners that contributed to the overall quality of the subject's life and served to strengthen or weaken the relationship. Five subjects, who will be referred to as A., B, C, D, and E, reported serious sexual problems at some time during their marriages. The problems were described as nonorgasmic by subject A, husband's abstinence (reason unknown) by subject B, husband's abstinence due to alcohol by subject C, and husband's preejaculation by subject D. Subject E reported that she regularly role-played sexual orgasm and intimacy with her husband. All the subjects remained in their marriages and all five described their

emotions regarding their sexual problems as a deficiency, not in sexual pleasure necessarily, but in terms of affection, attention, and affirmation from their partner. Each spoke of the need for more verbal communication and more dialogue on a feeling level. They wanted to know, to be told, to be assured they were loved.

Subject A. I don't get a climax. I never have. The only feelings I get is some kind of closeness. When he just pops into bed and has sex, I don't feel I have had anything—any closeness. . . . When we first got married he blamed it all on me. He would ejaculate too early. I have a lot more feelings now and a lot more fantasies than I used to. . . . I wish I felt like he really wanted to be alone with me. It's like we both live there and we both put an awfully lot of time on the children and the home, but we don't really work with each other. He never remembers my birthday or anniversary. He never remembers. I'll say, "How do I look?" and he'll say, "You look nice" and never look up. . . . If I say too much it makes him angry; it makes him feel guilty. That's why I am going to work. It is something I can do. He will have his work and I will have mine. Maybe at night, after working all day, I will be tired and won't want to talk either.

Subject F. The only thing we have in common is the kids. He doesn't listen when I talk. He doesn't take me seriously. We may be in the same room but we are not talking or sharing. I wanted private time with him when we were first married—more attention. I don't expect it now. I role play intimacy.

Subject B. We seldom have sexual relations and it disturbs me greatly. He has gone as long as six months without ever offering an explanation. It is a puzzle to me. I very much wish we were more intimate. . . . There is no dialogue about this. He is unapproachable. His concept of maleness does not embrace mutuality and sharing of feelings and openness. . . . It is a strain on the marriage. I wonder about what I am missing and what it would be like with another man.

Subject C. We might have had a good relationship for a while but it didn't last very long. Then after he started drinking there was just no sex. We never talked about our sexual problems. It was difficult to approach him. . . . I wouldn't say anything; I was always afraid. I don't think there was any way you could stand up against him. No, nobody could.

Subject C's marital relationship is also the most clearly defined example of the degree to which the sexual relationship and lack of communication within the marriage can affect the quality of life of each partner.

Question: Did you ever want any children of your own?

Subject C: Yes, I would like to have had children. The way things were I just didn't have any, and I resented it. But I never said anything. I guess we just never had sex enough for me to conceive. There just wasn't enough chance.

Question: Did you ever express that you wanted a family?

Subject C: I guess I didn't.

An example of what can be achieved when communication between partners is open was typified in the sexual development of subject D who for the first 14 years of her marriage did not experience an orgasm. What is not obvious in the limited responses of subject D to follow but was evident in the full interview was the subject's respect for her husband and her desire to enhance the marriage.

Subject D: I feel very sexual and it is great, but it wasn't always this way. The first fourteen years of marriage I didn't have an orgasm. Partly, he just wasn't able to last long enough.

I think, too, I was late in learning about sex. I was sixteen before I knew about intercourse. . . . Right before our anniversary I made the suggestion that we get more rest and that we try it every day—more like an experiment. We would try early when each was fresh and it was super.

Question: How often do you engage in sex?

Subject D: Every day, for the past eleven years.

Finally, the sexual development of some of the subjects entering middle adulthood included a maturing that could be identified as a reintegration of the Masculinity versus Feminity polarity. Since the reworking of opposites ordinarily results in a psychologically healthier and more centered behavior, examining this transcending of opposites where there appears to be growth in the subject's personality is appropriate. The growth may take the form of an expansion in consciousness or an increased awareness. The responses of Bobbie H., age 45, who spoke at length during the interview of the severe problems encountered in understanding and adjusting to her husband, and of Jean S., age 47, who has become disenchanted in her love affairs with younger men, are the most obvious examples.

Bobbie H. I think we both have learned what love is. It isn't the infatuation or anything. It is the suffering through all this crap together and finally getting to the point where you can look back on it and realize that that is what the love was—the getting through it; not in having the beautiful, loving relationship you read in books. I love my husband. I have seen the struggles he has had.

Jean S. I think that a woman in this age cycle has reached a maturity that she has worked hard to get, and I think at this time you really want to be on an equal basis with somebody and not having to keep raising more kids (referring to younger men) or having a man that is like a child.

Greater expression of assertion and mastery of the environment. This component of the female model was not explored with subjects. The selection by the researcher of subjects already engaged in behavior characteristic of assertion and mastery such as work or school served to bias the data and predetermine results.

Destruction/Creation

The Destruction/Creation polarity is concerned principally with effect and the reworking of painful experiences. This polarity is intensified at mid-life by the increased awareness of one's own inevitable mortal destruction and by having lived long enough to be knowledgeable, both as a recipient and deliverer, of harmful forces. Much of the work to be done on this polarity is on an unconscious level, and consists of a review of one's accumulated griefs and guilts. Often, intense periods of suffering and unrest are experienced before the subject is able to balance the destructive struggle for power and control with the life-affirming forces of love and nurturance.

Due to the nature of the Destruction/Creation duality, exploring its processes with subjects was considered unwise

since neither adequate time or appropriate counseling services could be provided. However, subjects were often working on the developmental tasks of this polarity and used the interview as a place to air their feelings. The need to integrate material was obvious in the way particular subjects consistently redirected the discussion to focus upon their problem. This was especially true of subject Laura K. A vignette of Laura's experiences will be used to illustrate the Destruction/Creation polarity and her effort to balance, what is to her, the confining female role defined by her husband and his desire for control and security versus her inner need to develop her own identity. The vignette provides insight into the evolving or long-term nature of the work on a developmental task (i.e., at every transition the polarity is rebalanced). Near the close of the vignette, it becomes noticeable that her developmental work has led to some firm conclusions upon which she will base an impending decision.

Larua K. is presently enrolled in school. She is married to a very traditional, highly successful, professional man. Her motherly functions include the rearing of three children of which she said, "The priority of my time goes to the children. Waiting two or three more years to complete my degree is not going to be the end of the world." She identified her mother and father as her role models and has idealized their marital relationship. "Mother and father

were very close and very romantic. In some respects, this has made things hard in my marriage because I keep comparing. I don't have that kind of marriage." She described her father as brilliant and her mother as his equal, and took further pride in her intellectual family heritage of being the fourth generation of educated women. "I didn't get the idea I should be a pretty, fluffy thing. . . . My parents rejected the typical model of femininity. I have always admired women of strength." Even so, until entering school, Laura's adult life has been a traditional one (i.e., educated with no vocational goal; whose mother and father are her ideal; married to a man whose career she enhances, and the mother of children who are her first priority).

Early in the dialogue, Laura introduced the polarity that remained, for her, the theme of the interview. It was the conscious pull within to center her growth toward more independence while her husband vied for more submission and control. This duality moved from the periphery of Laura's life to the center of interest. When asked in the interview, "When was the last major change in your current life status?" she responded with the personal changes in her selfhood as she embraced feminist values, and the crisis in communication this created in the marriage as her husband became increasingly threatened by the reality of his wife as a feminist. He expressed concern about her guidelines and where she would

level off. She described him as the type of individual who has to be in control or he feels out of control. Admitting all the while she has not been an obedient wife.

My first experience of sexism was after marriage. I didn't know that women were not supposed to be strong. My husband would say, "You shouldn't express your opinions; you shouldn't be so strong; you come on too strong." (Laura K.)

I responded to the above by inquiring of Laura whether she had not always been her own person and how was it that her husband was not aware of her values when they married?

Question: Did he have an idea of you that just was not you?

Response: I don't think I knew where he was. I didn't have enough clarity to distinguish between what was his problem and what was mine. He was attracted and repelled by my mind. I spent twelve years trying to be ever more submissive and it did not work . . . the agonies of the past have been in seeing my choices in terms of double binds. That whatever I did was wrong; whichever way I went was wrong. I felt guilty whatever path I took. Now, it is not even an option that I would say, "Yes, I will stop going to school." I know I can't deny it. I don't see the role of submission as an option.

As a method of communicating her husband's position and his unease with the observed changes in her behavior, Laura often responded in the interview with a dialogue in which she both gave and answered her husband's questions.

Husband: What you are doing now isn't too much for me to handle, but where does it lead?

Laura K.: Yes, I have changed and you have to decide if you can tolerate that, but I think it would destroy our intimacy for me to play games with you and pretend that I am the same person.

Husband: What scares me is, where are your guidelines?

Laura K.: There are no guarantees. That is the risk of life except that I do love you, and I do care about your feelings and happiness. . . . I did a paper on women in the Bible. He read the paper and our new communication went through a crisis. He didn't realize what a feminist I was . . . I think that what is missing is the guideline of control. My response has been to go on and be me.

Later in the interview, I asked Laura a question concerning what she believed to be the best time in her life. Again, she directed the discussion to the task she felt inward pressure to resolve. The firmness of the reply indicated she had made a difficult choice—one in favor of her own authenticity, and what is, to her, an endorsement of her true nature.

I have reached the point of feeling that whatever happens I can handle it. If my husband decides that he can't live with a feminist and there is a divorce I know I can survive.

The decision to become more fully her own person and still accommodate her husband's needs for security and power are the central issues of her mid-life transition—a turning point upon which she is presently embarked.

Coming to terms with anger and dependency. The comments of subjects regarding their nurturant roles as mothers were

positive. All subjects expressed a good feeling concerning their mothering. Responses such as, "Enjoyed being with them. I don't think I would have felt like a whole person," or "I'm most proud of my family," or "I feel I'm a good mother," or "I'm glad I'm a mother" were representative of subjects' feelings. Two subjects expressed positive thoughts about their nurturant roles but qualified them as follows: "I was a mother as fully as I could be, but I wasn't my own person," and "I don't think my dreams ever included me except in relating and being and doing for other people."

Serious expressions of anger and regret associated with the nurturant role of wife were verbalized by four subjects each of whom had experienced a severe disappointment in their Dream of marriage and family. The quotations below are repeated on pages 79 and 80 where they are also relevant to the concept of Special Woman and the support of husband's Dream.

I wouldn't say anything. I was always afraid. I would do what he wanted me to do. I had very little influence. . . . That is one of the things that has bothered me. Anyone with any sense—why do you live with someone like that all these years? (Mary A., age 52)

My Dream was to put my husband through school and then have a family and home. I worked in an office for four years while he went to school. . . . He left me a year ago to go to the other woman. It was a shock—I felt used. I didn't regret any of it up to five years ago (beginning of husband's affair). I never felt used or trapped until then. . . . I think that life isn't fair. I have gotten very angry with God in the last year. (Lucy J., age 51, separated)

My husband felt it important to excell. When he married me, he saw me as an extension of himself. I was his prize possession. I was pretty and the envy of his friends. This was the type of thing a man wanted in a woman at that time. I got a job and worked while he went to school. . . . During all this time it was all the great and wonderful things he was doing, his accomplishments. I had no identity, no value as a person in my own right. I can remember his parents coming down for graduation and talking about how great and wonderful and what a good job he had done and everything, and no mention of any role I had played. (Bobbie H., age 46)

When I got married I stopped on my Dream and helped my husband with his schooling. . . . I wasn't unhappy about it. I wish I had taken some classes. I have some resentment that my husband didn't appreciate it and doesn't appreciate it now. (Julia S., age 45)

Attachment/Separateness

Letting go of children and protectors. This polarity was found to be one of the most difficult of the four polarities to grasp and apply to the everyday lives of subjects. Much of the developmental work of letting go of children and protectors (parents and sometimes husband) and of achieving a more integrated balance between Separateness with its focus on the inner self, and Attachment, with its concern for the outer world, was a process within the subjects that operated more on an unconscious than a conscious level. Although Levinson (1978) described this polarity well, the concept of increasing one's personal growth the last half of life by decreasing one's attachment to the strivings of the

outer world is profound, and is the opposite of the developmental needs of the first half of life with its focus upon expansion and establishment of the self in the outer world. The analyzing of subject's responses to the questions related to this polarity uncovered the following concepts that enlarge upon Levinson's (1978) description.

1. The permanency of the here and now is continually shattered by the moment to moment process of beginnings and ending.
2. Being human is the urge to hold fast while time moves forward.
3. Death and renewal are separate faces of the same process out of which is released the energy for growth and transformation.
4. Change that is expected, such as the natural seasons and cycles of life, promotes order. Unexpected change suggests disorder.
5. Stability inevitably leads to stagnation. Change is the essence of life.

The above concepts were experienced by subjects on a more conscious, practical level in the day to day problems of letting go of children and protectors and in giving up the outgrown roles and definitions of themselves.

The questions on the Biographical Questionnaire which revealed the most information on this integrative task were

those related to personal values, religion, mortality and relationship to children, spouse and parents.

When subjects were asked to elaborate on the question, How did you feel when your child/children left home?, the impact of the event on the women's lives was apparent. Whether it was a time of discontent or one of release and renewal, it was a time of change. The decrease in family responsibility and increase in personal time accompanied by the realization of a long-term goal or mission completed led the subjects into an evaluation of their life and a new concern for the future, "Where will I go from here?" The pattern of how this was experienced and the manner in which it was resolved by subjects varied considerably. For the ten subjects who were experiencing the departure of children, it was a transitional time often vaguely defined or identified in the beginning, and lasting several years. The departure of children was a major variable in the mid-life crises of five subjects. With the exception of one, all ten subjects were familiar with the concept of the empty nest syndrome, but knowledge or forewarning of the syndrome did not prevent the serious, unsettled, depressive feelings experienced by five of the ten subjects. Of the five subjects most seriously affected, four of these reported family and child rearing as their one dream or mission in life. The phrase spoken by two subjects, "My role is running out" was

expressive of these subjects' thoughts. Three subjects experienced the onset of mourning or loss with the departure of the first child, one subject with the last child, and one subject with the middle child. Conscious mourning or psychic pain did not always accompany the experience of letting go of children. Five of the ten subjects reported no problems and spoke of a sense of release. One subject spoke of concern that her foster son, nearly twenty, had not yet left home to begin establishment of his independence, indicating the acknowledgement of a social timeclock when subjects expect events to happen and become disturbed when they do not. All ten subjects experiencing the departure of children made what they considered major changes in their life structures during this period, which included entering school or taking on a new job, role or task. Subjects moved beyond the status quo to engage in new, risk-taking behaviors that moved them beyond the home into a more assertive stance in the outer world.

Information on the importance of a woman's children to her life during the forties decade may provide insight into the difficulty mothers experience in letting go of that segment of their life and in taking hold of something new. The researcher was surprised to find that eight of the fifteen subjects (five of whom were still married) reported their child or children as the most important person(s) in their life at that time, rather than their husband.

Question: How did you feel when your child/children
left home?

I was tickled to death! (Polly E., 48)

I see this period I am coming to as the first
emotionally and physically free period I have ever
had in my life. (Bobbie H., 46)

No problem, but I think there will be an
emptiness there when the last child leaves. I
want to go to work. I don't want to be there in
an empty house. (Julia S., 45)

I had a big adjustment to make. Henry couldn't
understand I could miss my children that much. But
they (children) did all right. . . . What role will
I go to from being a mother? I can't put my fingers
on anything I want to do. (Pat M., 42)

I actually came to Tennessee with the possibility
of dying (positive Pap smear). This move I needed
to do to let Joan go. My role is running out with
the children. That aspect of self as needed mother
is dying. (Jean S., 47)

I feel the impact of children leaving. It is
vague but nevertheless there. It has been hard
to know my feelings. I don't feel I am needed as
much. I don't have to look after someone else.
(Joan F., 47)

I enjoyed my children and I could see my dream
running out. When our daughter moved out that's
when it started, but I didn't pay attention to
it. My husband knew something was wrong. It
just kept getting worse. (Ann P., 46)

The need for integration of the Attachment (taking hold)
versus Separateness (letting go) polarity was apparent also
in the responses of subjects to the questions on religion.
Subjects interpreted religion as more than the service to
and worship of a creator. For them it encompassed a belief
in the development of the inner self and an increased

awareness that as they aged they would, in the process of letting go of others, stand more and more alone. Although it was never said, this would of course lead one to think of the need to develop inner strength and support. The women spoke specifically of their own mortality, their children maturing and leaving home, their parents' physical decline and death, and the possible death or divorce of their husband.

Three subjects rejected the researcher's use of the term religion and preferred the term faith in referring to their system of beliefs in a creator. One subject described herself as an agnostic and a second as a humanist. Each of the subjects expressed the importance of spiritual development in their current life and eleven subjects were at the time of the interview active in a church. However, all subjects were affiliated with a church when their offspring were young and all participated to a degree in church activities.

The reason we were in church was because when Gina went to school all her little friends were going to Sunday School. I realized this was painful to her. We didn't do this and she couldn't understand it, so we joined the church. (Bobbie H., 46, humanist)

We think it's our responsibility to see that they attend until they are older. (Lenny S., 40)

I went to church because this is what the children needed. (Lucy J., 51)

When the children were small I went to church two or three times a week. Now I seldom go—don't

get out of it what I think I should and I don't know whose fault that is—most certainly not God's. (Anna P., 46)

I felt trapped with four little kids the oldest under five. I handled it through church activities. It was a valuable outlet. (Joan F., 47, agnostic)

It was boring for me to sit home and tend little kids all day. I wasn't all that religious, but they had a nursery and teachers and it wasn't very expensive. It was some way to get out when I had no other way. I was lonely, very, very lonely. (Julia S., 45)

Three subjects specifically reported the church as an important outlet from the tedium and confines of early motherhood. Although the doctrine of the Christian faith is identified as a major source of the secondary status of women, the church with its emphasis on the family has evidently served the well-being of many women by providing a social option during the confining years of childrearing.

The change over time in the attitude of the subjects toward religion or their spiritual life stood revealed, in the interviews, as a change in focus from religious training for the children to the desire for spiritual development of the self.

Question: Have you experienced a change in your attitude toward religion?

Now I do it more for me than the children. I'm more comfortable with it. It feel it developing. I'm more spiritual and I don't know why. (Lucy J., 51)

Each year it is more meaningful to me and I am learning. All things seem to be coming together and I see spiritual things in everything. (Verna R., 52)

I feel like I'm starving. I'm thirsty. I spend a lot more time thinking about it (religion). I don't think I am getting any spiritual nourishment and I am not sure where to go to get it. (Polly E., 48)

I think the biggest change is seeing that God is not masculine. I think of God as a tender Mother caring for me. I feel it but the words sound strange, "My Mother which art in heaven." (Laura K., 43)

I don't know. It has always been important to me. When I was a young girl I wanted to be a missionary. Every day I find something new—some new truth or idea. I realize my responsibility to the church. (Mary A., 52, church pianist)

The greater interiority (turning inward at mid-life) discovered by Jung and confirmed by Neugarten (1964) and Levinson (1978) was for these women as much a function of opportunity as of age. As the subjects aged and their time commitments to others eased, they experienced increased opportunity to focus upon self. Even with the small N of this study, the women, clustering around age fifty whose children were leaving or had left, expressed more awareness of spirituality than those near age forty whose families were still intact. Also, the need to focus upon inner self as subjects aged became apparent. This greater interiority, or attention to spiritual life, or development of the inner self appeared motivated by the need to integrate into their

belief system a growing awareness that as they "let go" of children, parents, and possibly husbands they were also giving up outgrown roles and cherished parts of themselves as young adult, mother, and daughter, and would in the future stand increasingly alone. The disquiet and anxiety involved in this insight was evident in some of the quotations to follow, and was a contributing factor to the unease of those subjects in transitional or structure changing periods such as the mid-life transition. Not only were the women of this study learning during the forties decade to let go, they were learning also to "take hold," to seek within for the emotional support and direction needed as if to become their own parent and to nurture their own growth.

All subjects reported witnessing the physical decline, illness or death of a parent and these subjects, similar to those in Gould's study (1979), spoke of increased thoughts of their own death in relation to their parents, as though their living parents served as an emotional buffer or shield against their own mortality.

Question: Do you think of death or mortality?

More so because of the age of my mother and her illness. (Lucy J., 51)

Now and then in the middle of the night when I think about my mother dying and all I get frightened but it is not something that lasts. (Bobbie H., 46, whose mother is dying)

I think about it more than I ever have. It really hit hom in 1973. I came home from Germany and saw how my parents had aged. (Sarah C., 40)

Thoughts of my father's death (father still living) bother me. (Pat M., 42)

After so many deaths, first my husband, then my father, I was afraid I would die too. I prayed I would be able to raise my child. (Janie B., 41)

I don't mind dying but I believe I will live to a ripe old age like my ancestors. (Polly F., 48)

Reintegrating former selves. The need for reintegration of former selves, as experienced by the researcher and described in the Tentative Female Model (Figure 3, page 19), was not verified by the subject's responses. The five questions directed toward development of this idea produced little information. Subjects showed slight interest in their childhood experiences and expressed no desire to retrace old steps.

Increased involvement in the external world. It is paradoxical that the greater interiority (identified by this researcher as turning inward for direction) of the subjects was manifest in increased outwardly (worldly) involvement. The cycle of endings and beginnings was apparent. The ending, death, completion of one role, once accepted led, in various degrees, to a sense of renewal and the beginning of a new role. The ten subjects whose children had left or were in the process of leaving the home used the increased personal time to return to school or work outside the home.

The other five subjects anticipated the release and entered college to prepare for careers. Responses of two subjects, Lucy J., fifty-one, and Jean S., forty-seven, revealed the polarities women in transition experience as their role changed and the emotion of letting go was countered with the excitement of taking hold and structure building.

Lucy: I like being independent. It feels good becoming your own woman. I am looking forward to the time when Linda goes to college.

versus

When I was forty, I had had my last child by then and there was nothing to look forward to.

Jean: I felt like I needed to be out of the picture with my youngest daughter getting married. It was something that I had looked forward to in my mind—that when I had finished raising the children I could start having a life of my own.

versus

Let's face it, I don't think this transition thing is so easy. Here I am forty-seven years old and nobody has taught me or prepared me in any way for this except the little bit I have read.

To survive and to continue self-growth is to experience transition and the discomfort that accompanies it. The pain of transition is the pain of breaking through personal limitations and is a reoccurring process within each decade. Perhaps that is why every life is a hero's journey, and why Joseph Campbell's (1949) popular theory of the monomyth rings

true. The passage of life, in time, is an odyssey and we actually are crossing threshold after threshold, conquering dragon after dragon.

Formation of the Dream

The intent of the inquiry on the formation of the Dream was to determine how women entering middle adulthood come to make the important life decisions they do surrounding marriage, family and occupation, and to inquire if they, upon entering early adulthood, formed an image or a dream of the kind of life they could have, as an adult, as did the men in Levinson's study.

The societal context of the 1940s and 1950s was an influential factor in the Dream formation of these subjects. They reached early adulthood in a period when the societal directive for women was to marry and have children and for men to work. The quote of Laura K., whose parents were educated and high achieving, is indicative of the environmental expectations. "Back then a career is what you did if nobody wanted to marry you." As would be expected, the analysis of responses supports heavily the research on sex-role stereotyping, and the influence it has upon identity formation and the role of women. However, the value of the following data is not to confirm that sex-role socialization limited the options of subjects and inhibited their exploration of ways of being, although that is present in the data,

but is rather to explore how subjects perceived the process and thereby shed light on the nature of socialization in the evolution of the life structures.

When subjects were asked to recall their dreams and plans for life in early adulthood (approximately ages 17 through 22) the following principal findings surfaced from the data:

1. Subjects' primary aspirations were to marry. They sought no real vocational assessment of their abilities and talents.
2. Subjects appeared to mark time with either work or school until marriage happened.
3. They experienced a lack of direction and expectation from parents other than to marry.

The social conditioning that women do not have careers was so thorough for Mary A., the one subject in the study who has been employed all of her adult life (31 years), that when questioned she was unable to respond to her life's work as a career—the connotation to career being achievement, productivity and job before family.

Question: Did you have a dream or mission in life as a young adult?

Mary A.: I don't really think so. I thought at the time I'd like to be a missionary, but I didn't want to leave Tennessee, and the closest thing to it I could do was to teach. Then I started going with my

husband and I had been teaching when we got married. I didn't have time to think about anything but just earn some money. Of course I never stopped thinking about teaching as important. To me what I was doing was important. It wasn't just a job. But, as far as planning anything in the future I had no set goals. When I got married, I thought I would quit teaching and I drew out all my retirement, but I just kept teaching.

Eleven subjects (74 percent) said their primary aspirations had always been to marry. "I dreamed and fantasized of becoming a wife and mother and nothing beyond," was the typical response. Three subjects articulated marriage as a vague need or an inner feeling rather than any type of formalized plan.

When I was young I just thought I would get married with a houseful of kids. In the meantime, I went to work because I thought I had to do something. (Janie B., age 41)

I took teaching but I didn't want to. It was about all there was to take. I think I thought I would get married. (Julia S., age 45)

I can't remember a dream of marrying, but there was the strong need for that. Having a family and marrying wasn't a dream, but it was an inner feeling, a craving, a wanting security. (Jean S., 47)

The social conditioning to marry was experienced by three subjects as a strong parental directive with parent approval as the major reinforcer.

Get married, have children in that order, that's the way we were brought up. . . . No one said you had to, but the expectation was to go to college, meet a man and get married. (Karen C., age 43)

My mother is from the old school. The only way to leave the house was to get married.
(Sarah C., age 40)

I was never allowed to think any thoughts other than wife or mother. I never visualized anything else. Used to dream of twins. Oh, good Lord!
(Ann P., 46)

Two subjects, not included in the eleven above, spoke expressly of marrying at ages nineteen and twenty to escape an unhappy home and a dominating mother, with no mention of having explored other options.

Seven subjects entered college directly after high school, five of whom earned degrees. Two of the five formulated career plans which they abandoned soon after employment in favor of motherhood. Julia S., who seriously considered a career in archaeology, recalled, "When I mentioned it, people just laughed." She was also one of four subjects who became employed to help finance her husband's degree (Dream).

Once married, all of the subjects described their primary mission or Dream as that of enhancing their marriage and producing a family. Their image of self-in-the-world became intricately interwoven in their relationships with husband and his Dream and their commitment to children.

The role of Special Woman (one who sustains and enhances husband's Dream) found by Levinson was not adequately probed by the questions on Dream formation in the Biographical Questionnaire. Subjects seldom voluntarily spoke of their

role in relation to the accomplishment of husband's Dream, and those who did were largely those subjects who experienced serious disappointments within their marriage. The anger of feeling used and of being in the nurturant role without adequate recognition or appreciation is evident in the remarks to follow, especially those of Mary A., Lucy J., and Bobbie H. It is possible those subjects not experiencing regrets in the relationship with their husband took for granted their enhancement of the marriage and of husband's career.

I wouldn't say anything. I was always afraid. I would do what he wanted me to do. I had very little influence. . . . That is one of the things that has bothered me. Anyone with any sense—why do you live with someone like that all these years? (Mary A., age 52)

My Dream was to put my husband through school and then have a family and home. I worked in an office for four years while he went to school. . . . He left me a year ago to go to the other woman. It was a shock—I felt used. I didn't regret any of it up to five years ago (beginning of husband's affair). I never felt used or trapped until then. . . . I think that life isn't fair. I have gotten very angry with God in the last year. (Lucy J., age 51, separated)

What I wanted was always second. I have been committed to my responsibility to raise my children. Now I want to get more in touch with myself. (Jean S., age 47, divorced)

Before he and I were married, we decided I would stay home and raise the children. The children have been raised almost. I feel I have done my job. (Ann P., age 46)

My husband felt it important to excell. When he married, me, he saw me as an extension of himself. I was his prize possession. I was pretty

and the envy of his friends. This was the type of thing a man wanted in a woman at that time. I got a job and worked while he went to school. . . . During all this time it was all the great and wonderful things he was doing, his accomplishments. I had no identity, no value as a person in my own right. I can remember his parents coming down for graduation and talking about how great and wonderful and what a good job he had done and everything, and no mention of any role I had played. (Bobbie H., age 46)

When I got married I stopped on my Dream and helped my husband with his schooling. . . . I wasn't unhappy about it. I wish I had taken some classes. I have some resentment that my husband didn't appreciate it and doesn't appreciate it now. (Julia S., age 45)

My duty and obligation is first to my husband. My children's and husband's welfare are above my own. I know where my duty lies. I may not like it but it is there. We live simply and close to the earth. It doesn't cause tension. (Karen C., age 40)

I don't think my Dreams ever included me except in relating and being and doing for other people. (Lenny S., age 40)

Some self-awareness, among subjects, of the close proximity of identity formation and Dream, and the evolving nature of both, was expressed in the remarks of Ann P.,

In my teens I was Miss Ann. When I married I became Bill's wife, Mrs. Smith, and my name Ann was gone. Then when my children came along, I was Bill and Debbie's mother. Last year I joined the "Y" and Ann came back. College students call me Ann and I like that.

It should be noted that Ann P. was one of the four subjects who experienced a serious depression when her children began to leave the home. The transition in identity for Ann, from becoming Bill and Debbie's mother to becoming Ann,

one-onto-herself, was not an easy passage. The closeness in association of identity and one's Dream was further expressed in the responses of Polly E. and Lucy J. who spoke of judging their own self-worth in relation to their children's successes and failures.

Question: What have been the disappointments of motherhood?

That I couldn't fix Jim (Down's Syndrome). I wanted normal, healthy children and mine have not been and I am ashamed. I know it is not my fault. I feel guilty. A woman tends to judge herself by her children. (Polly E., age 48)

When the oldest got divorced and when our daughter starting living with a man, I felt guilty about that. I couldn't really have done anything. I just feel guilty. Is that logical? I even felt guilty when my daughter brought home a bad report card. (Lucy J., age 51)

The subjects witnessed the evolving of their Dream as aspects of it, such as bringing children to maturity, were lived out and the incorporation of new goals was felt. To expand upon their Dream in a manner that gave greater expression to the self was characteristic of all the subjects' transition into middle adulthood.

Additional information on the development of the Dream during mid-life transition is to be found in the section on Attachment/Separateness.

Chronology of Subject's Adult Life Course
Noting Developmental Periods

The intent of the fifteen figures to follow (Figures 4-18) is to present in visual form the adult life course of each subject picturing the developmental periods of transition and stability as they were recalled. The figures are a chronology, noting specifically the age at which a significant event took place and the interpretation placed on it by the subject. Significant events are changes described by the subject that are not random, short-term, or momentary. When possible, verbatim responses were included to increase accuracy. A sloping plot was used to designate structure-changing periods of transition, and vertical plots the structure-building periods of stability. The angle of the slope in the life-line should be read as a rough estimate of the degree of unease or disharmony during periods of transition. The focus of the study is on the years forty to fifty. The years twenty to forty, as they appear on the life-line, were less carefully probed.

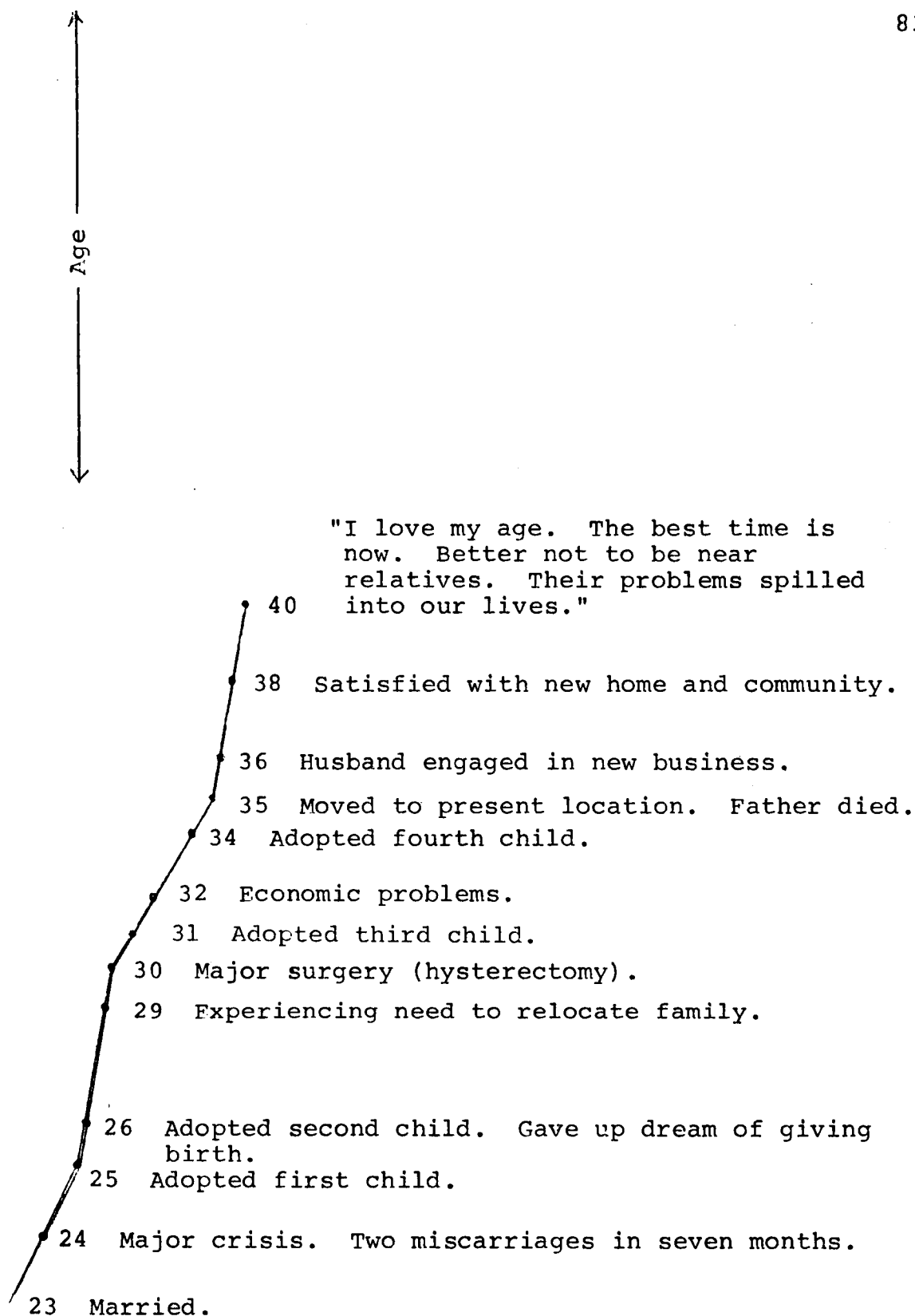


Figure 4. Karen C.

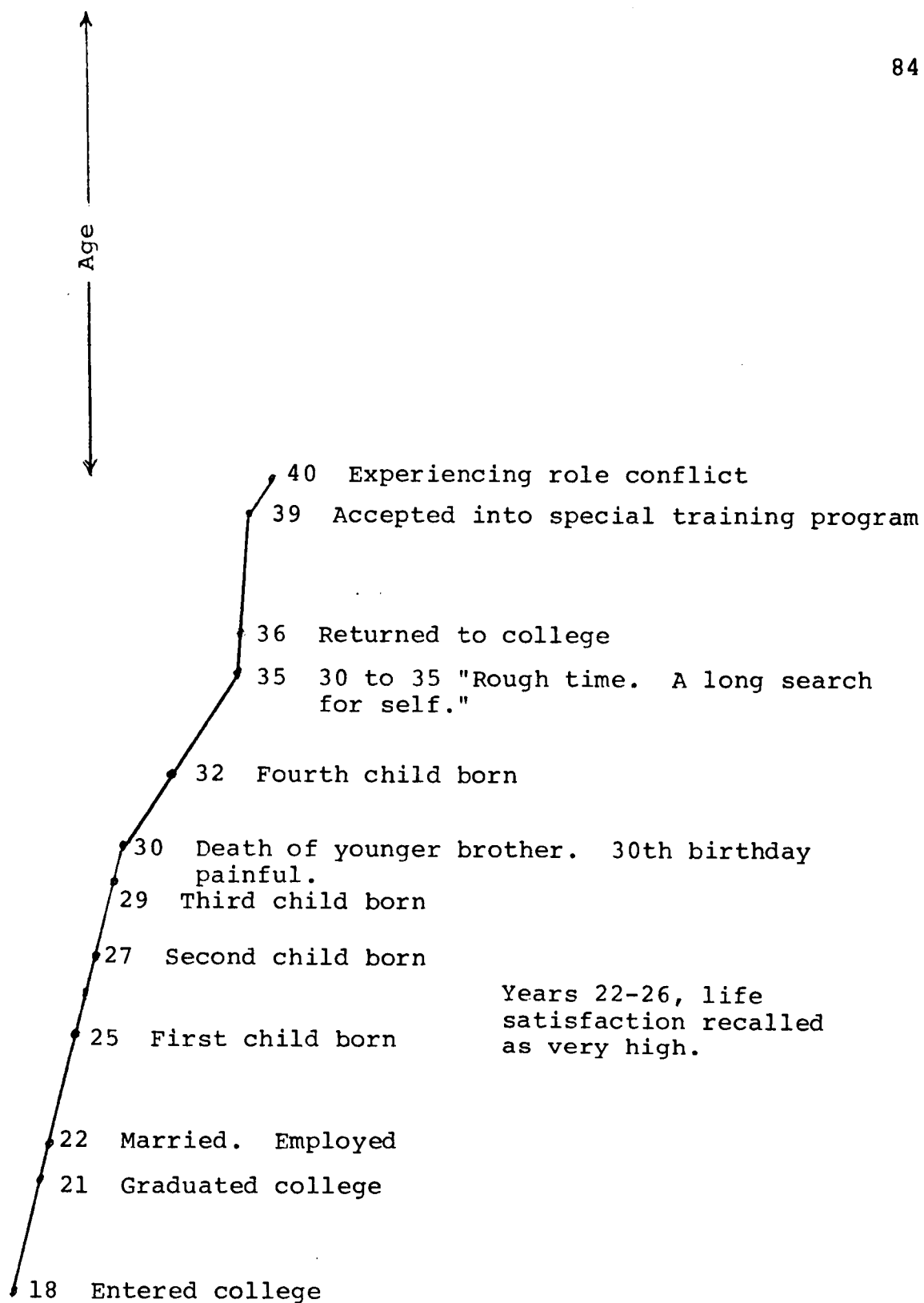


Figure 5. Lenny S.

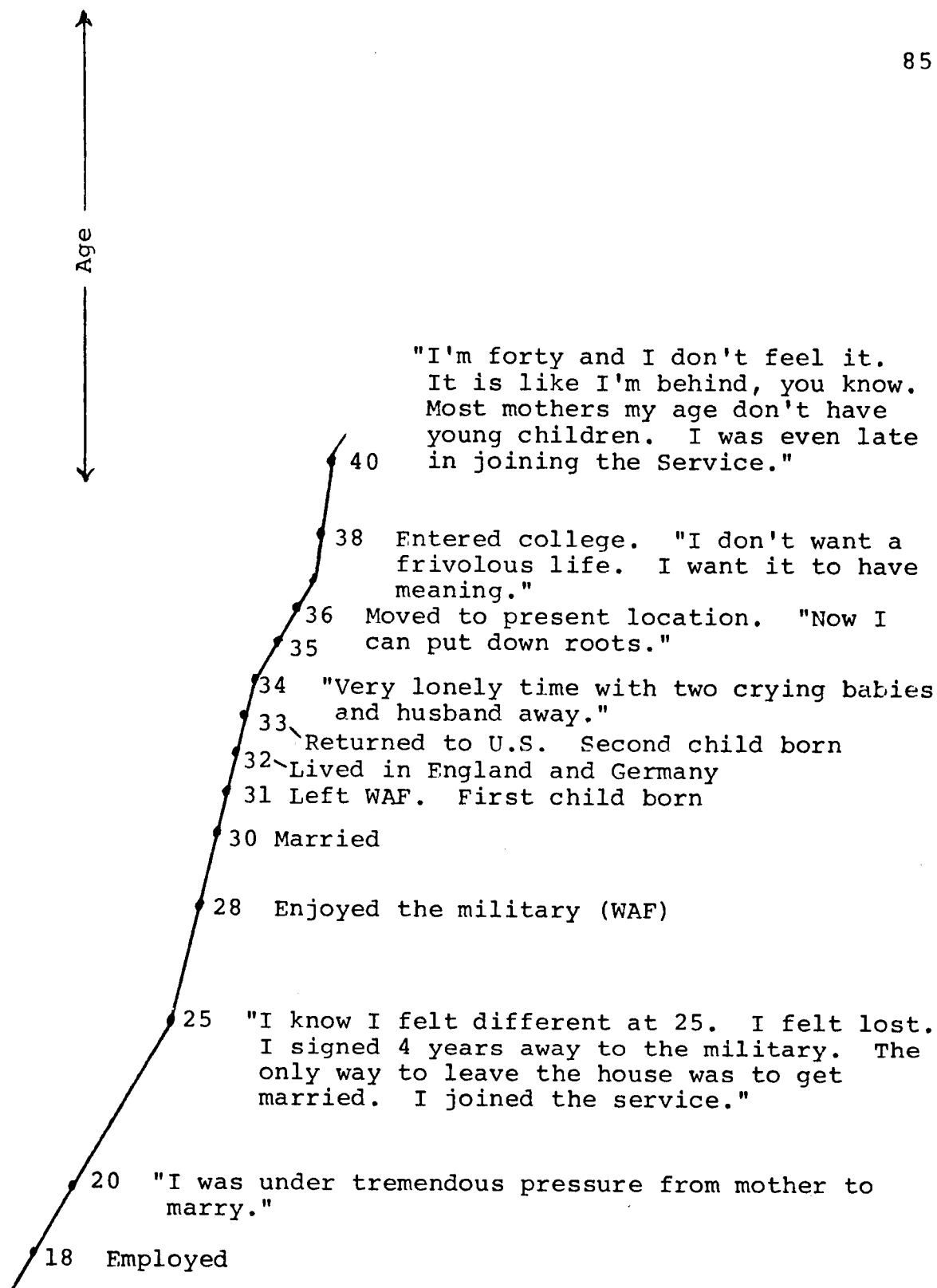


Figure 6. Sarah C.

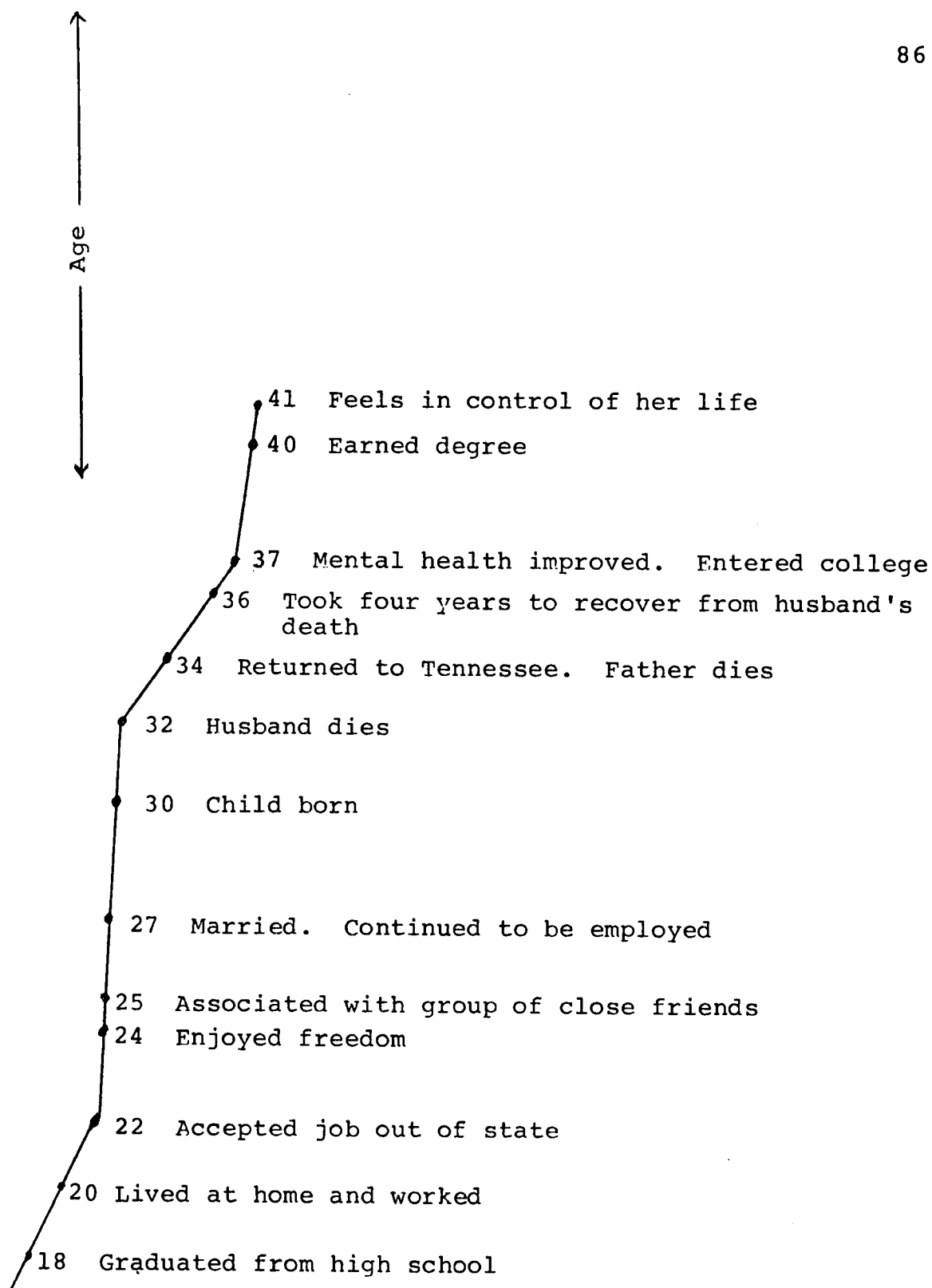


Figure 7. Janie B.

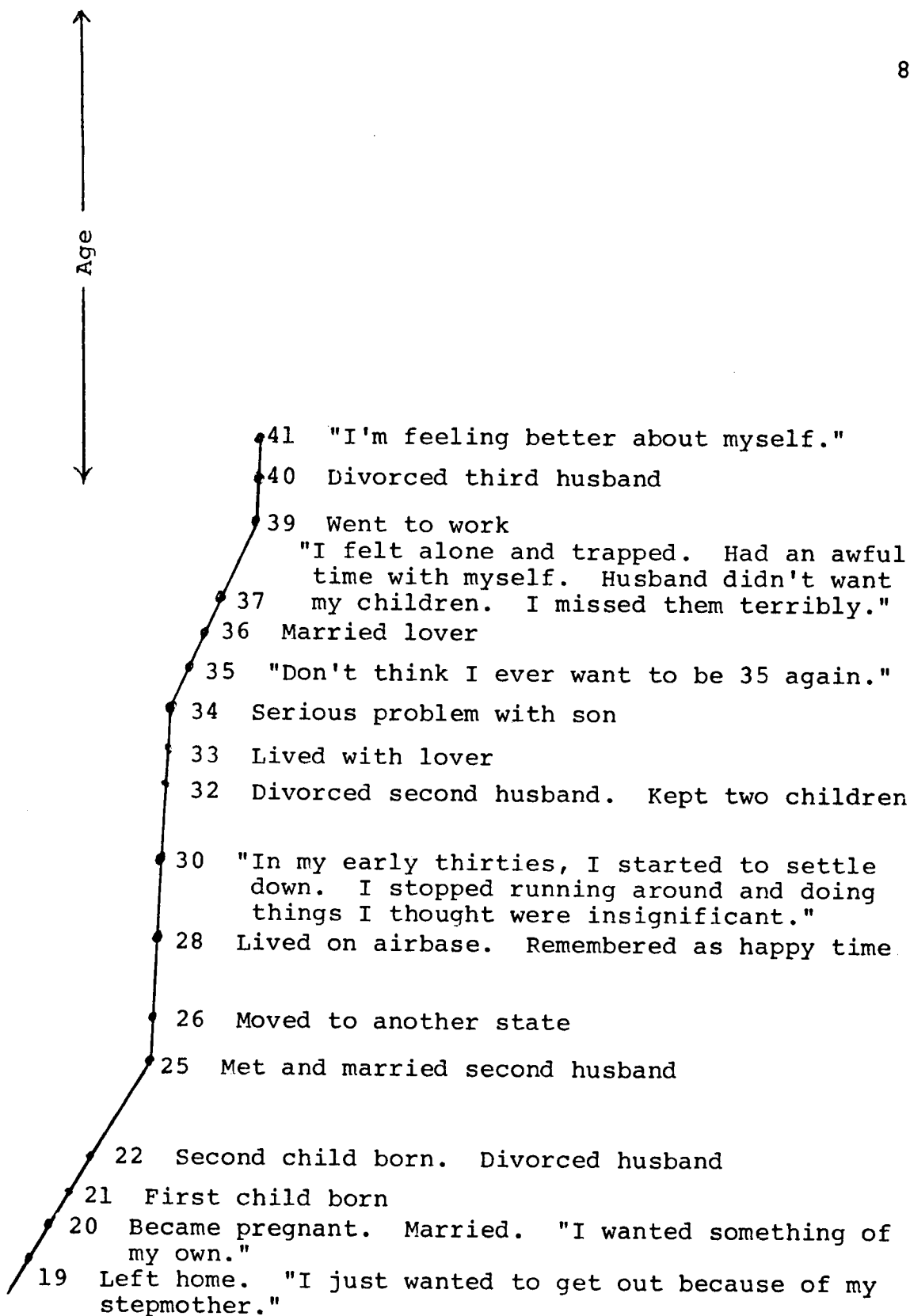


Figure 8. Pat M.

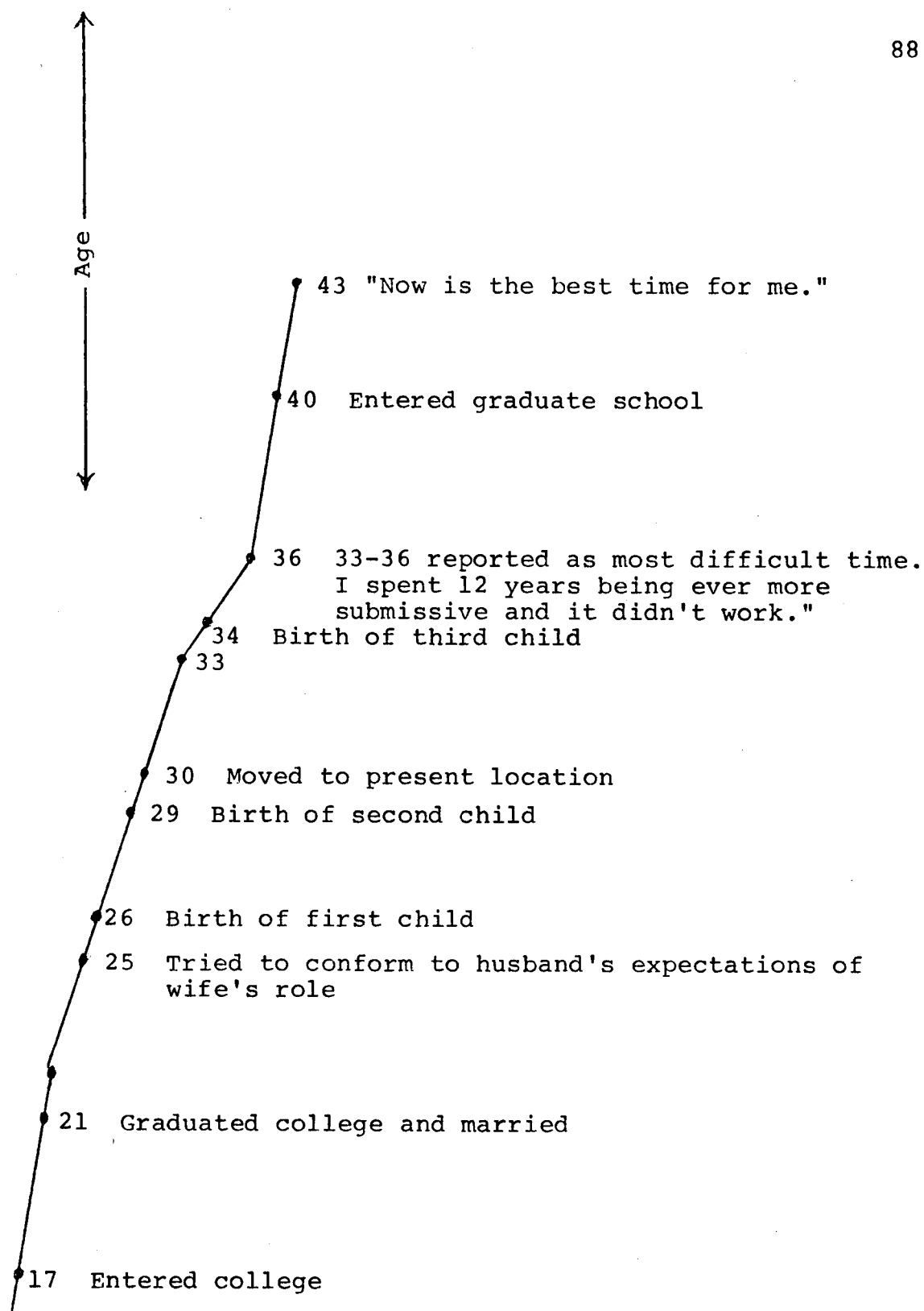


Figure 9. Laura K.

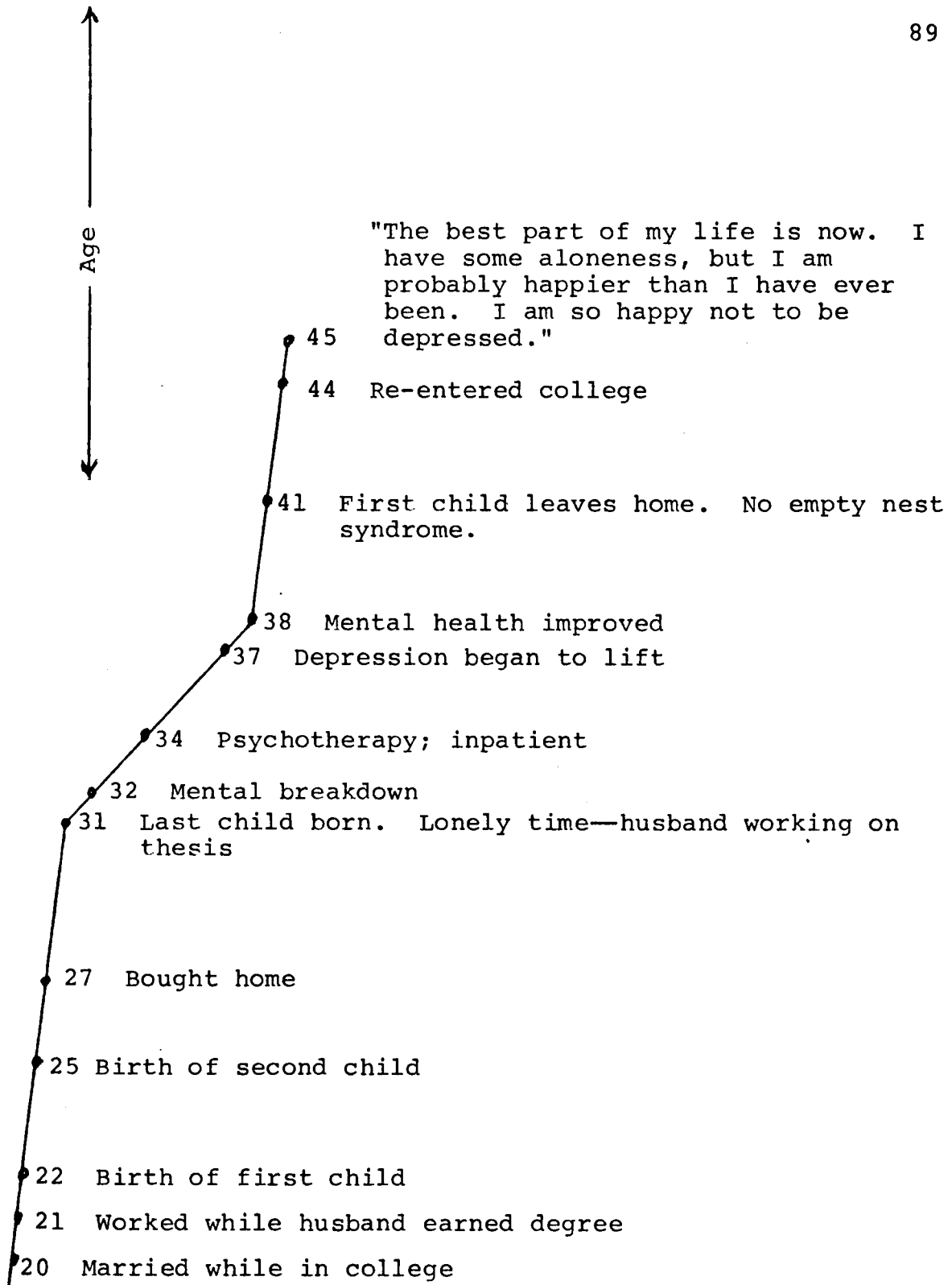


Figure 10. Julia S.

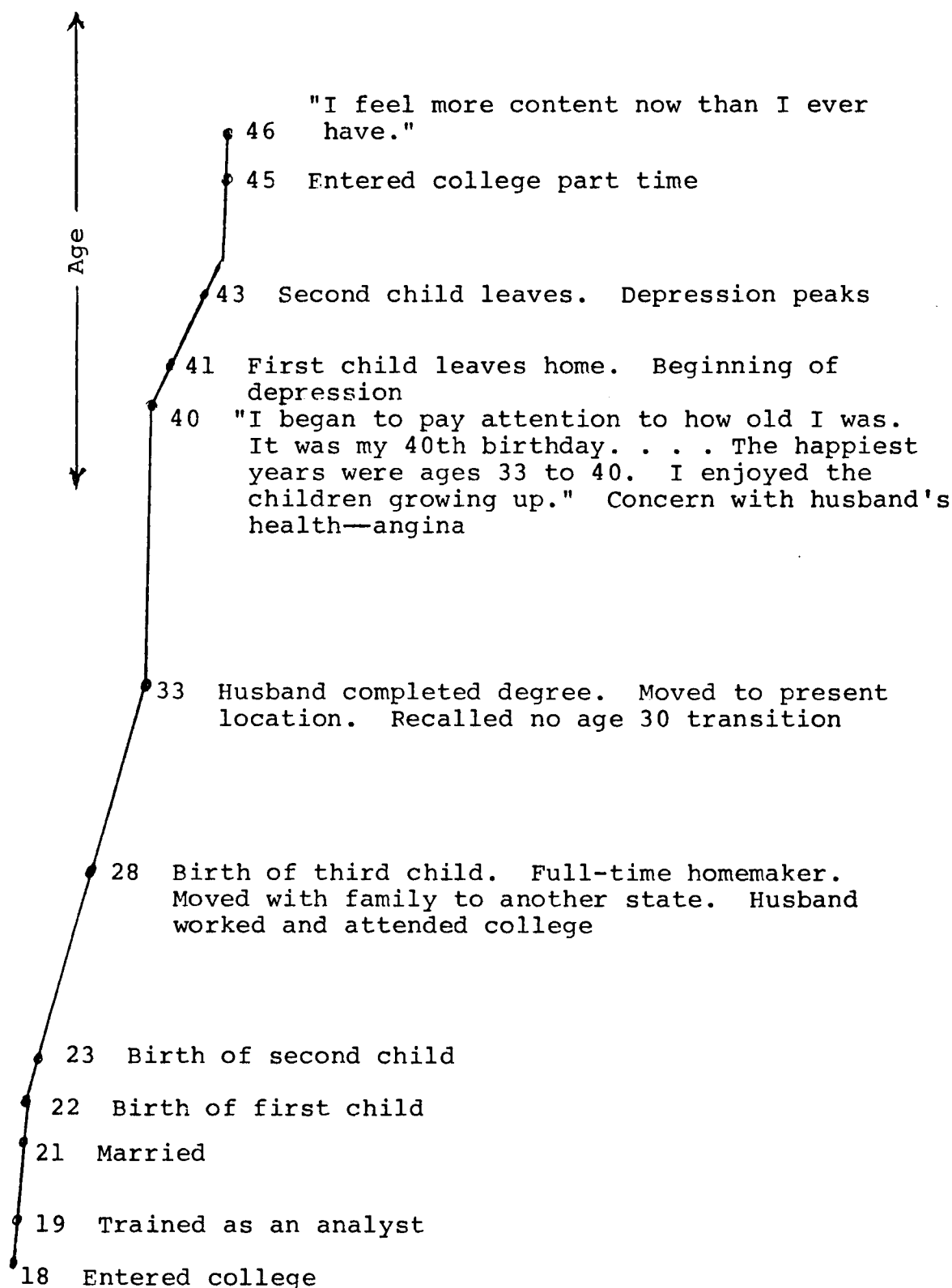


Figure 11. Ann P.

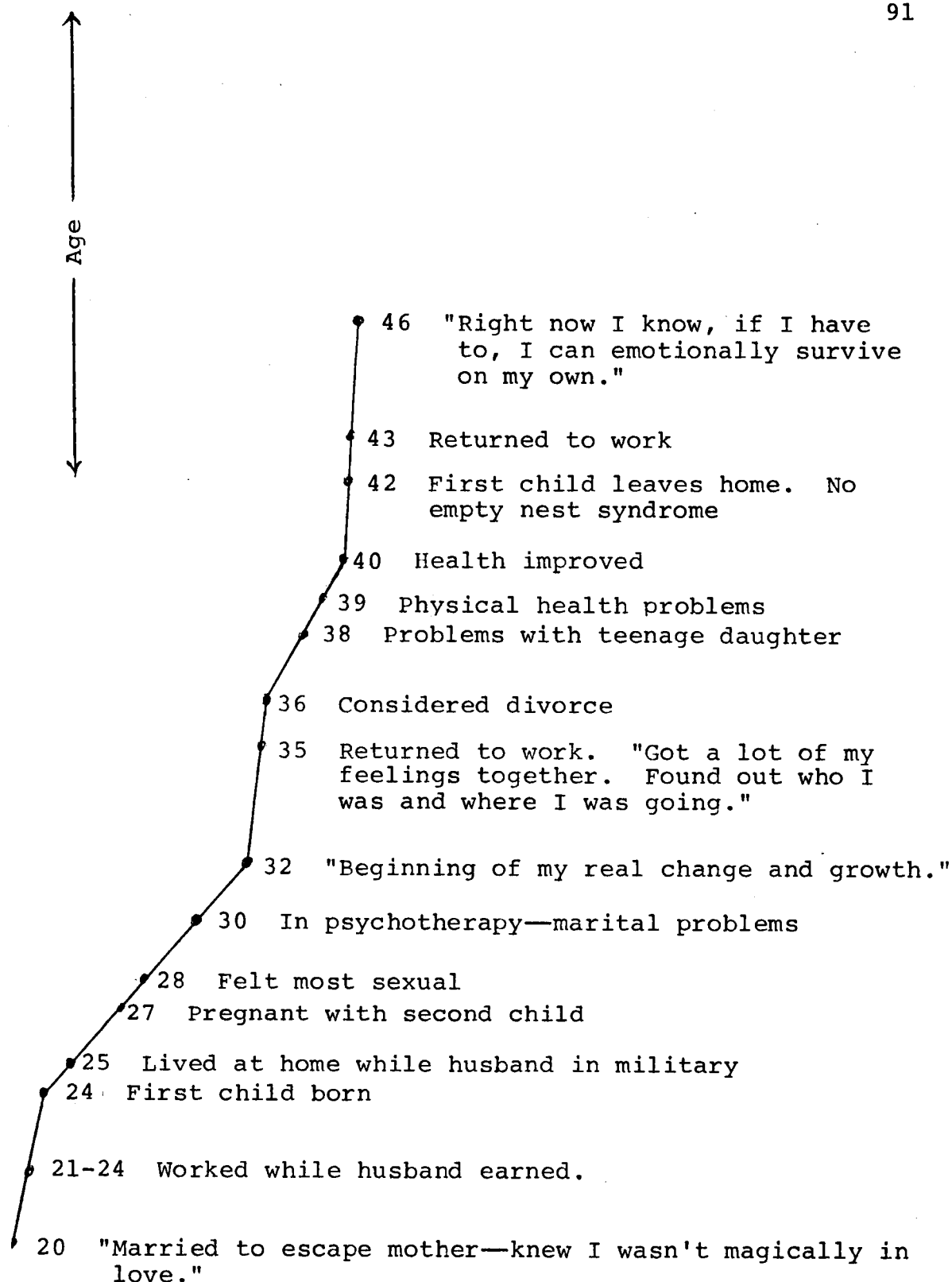


Figure 12. Bobbie H.

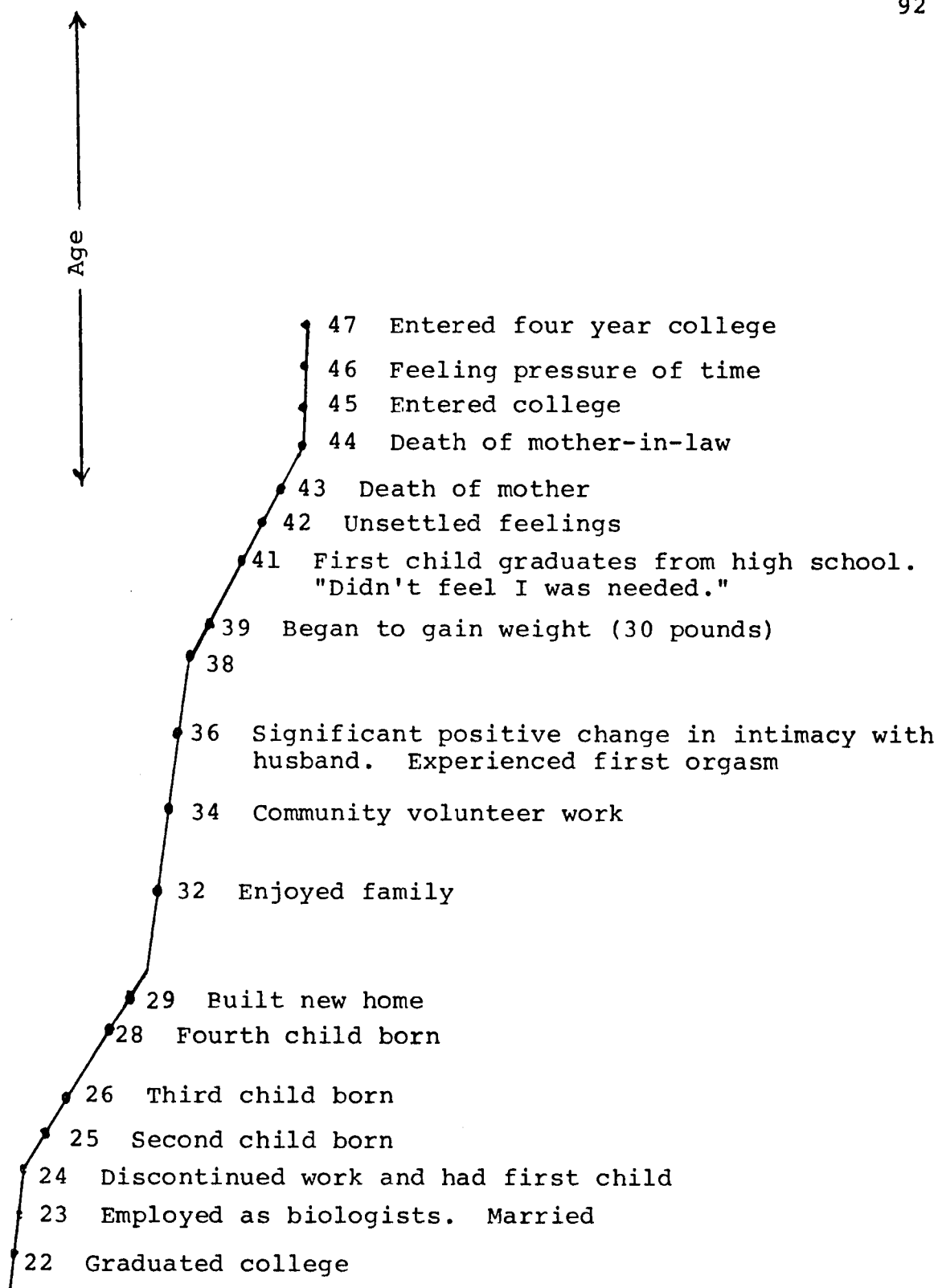


Figure 13. Joan F.

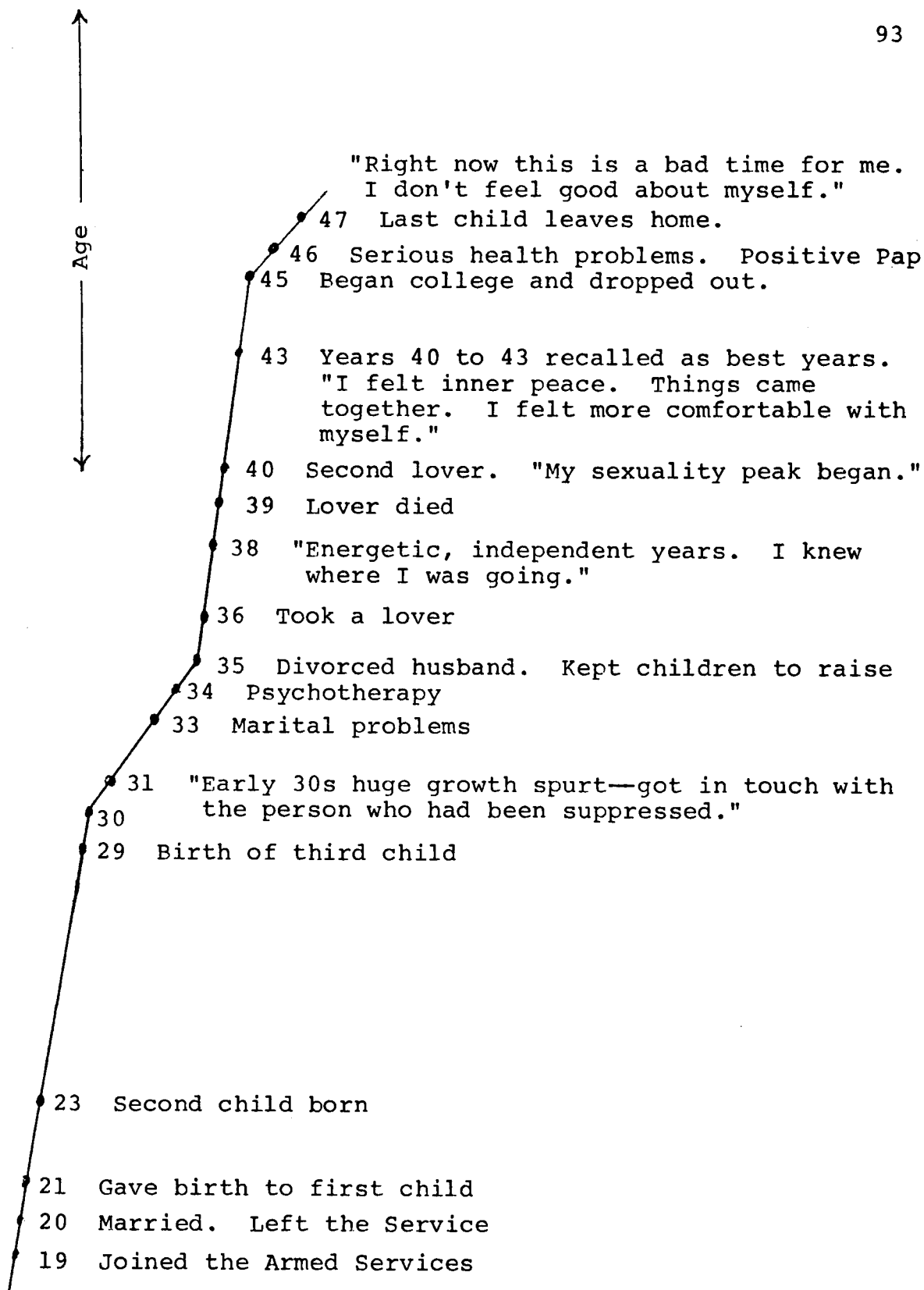


Figure 14. Jean S.

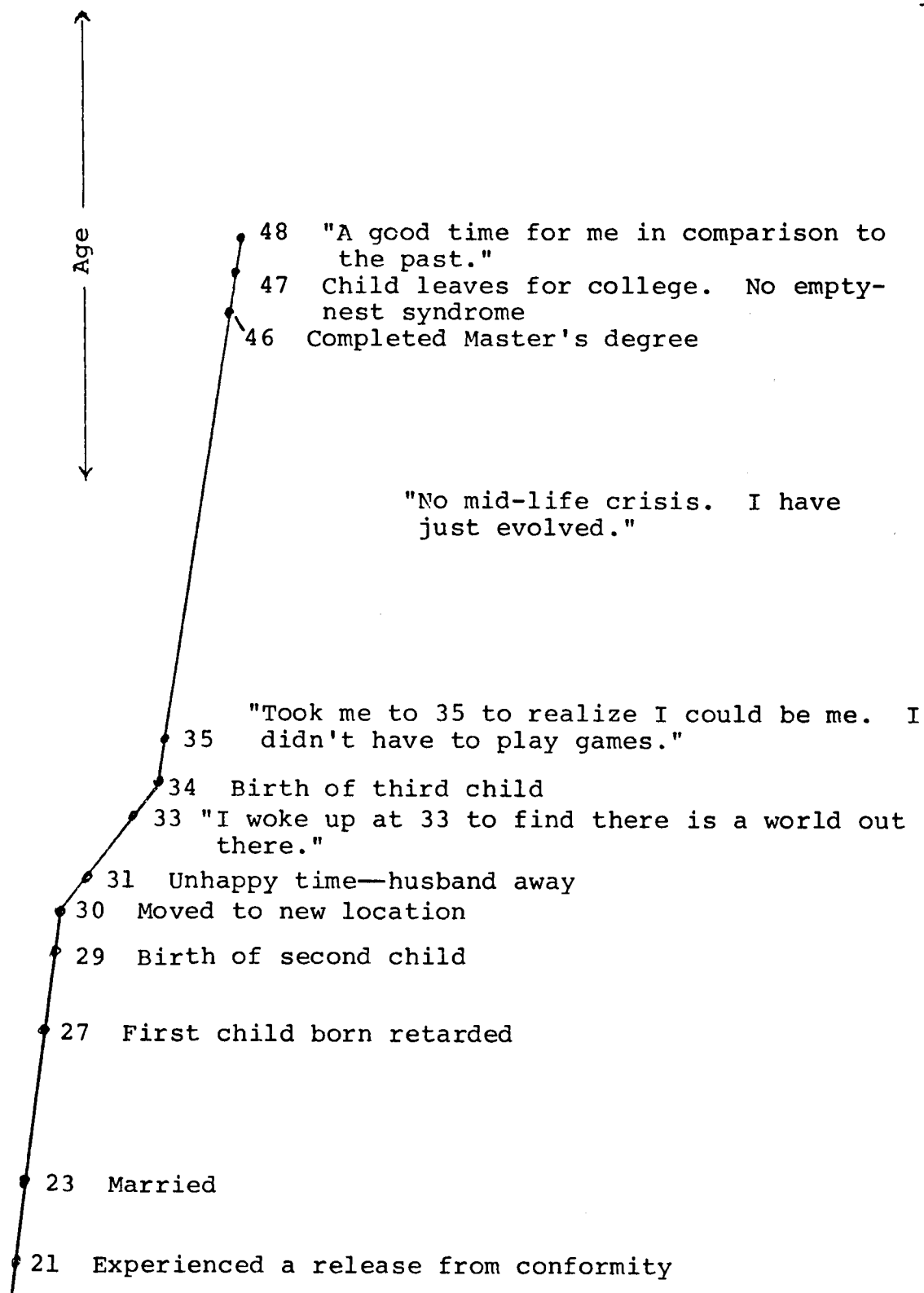


Figure 15. Polly F.

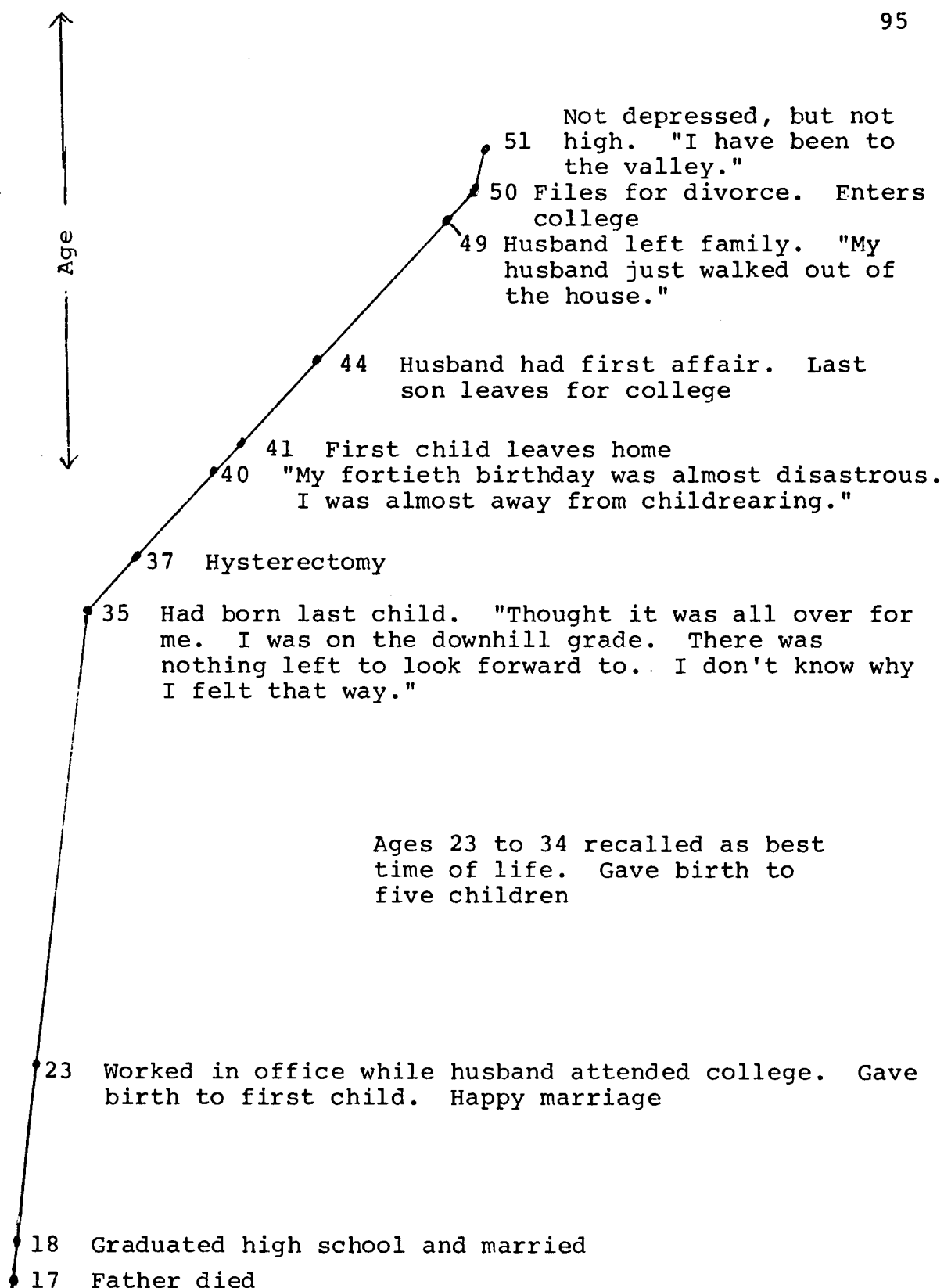


Figure 16. Lucy J.

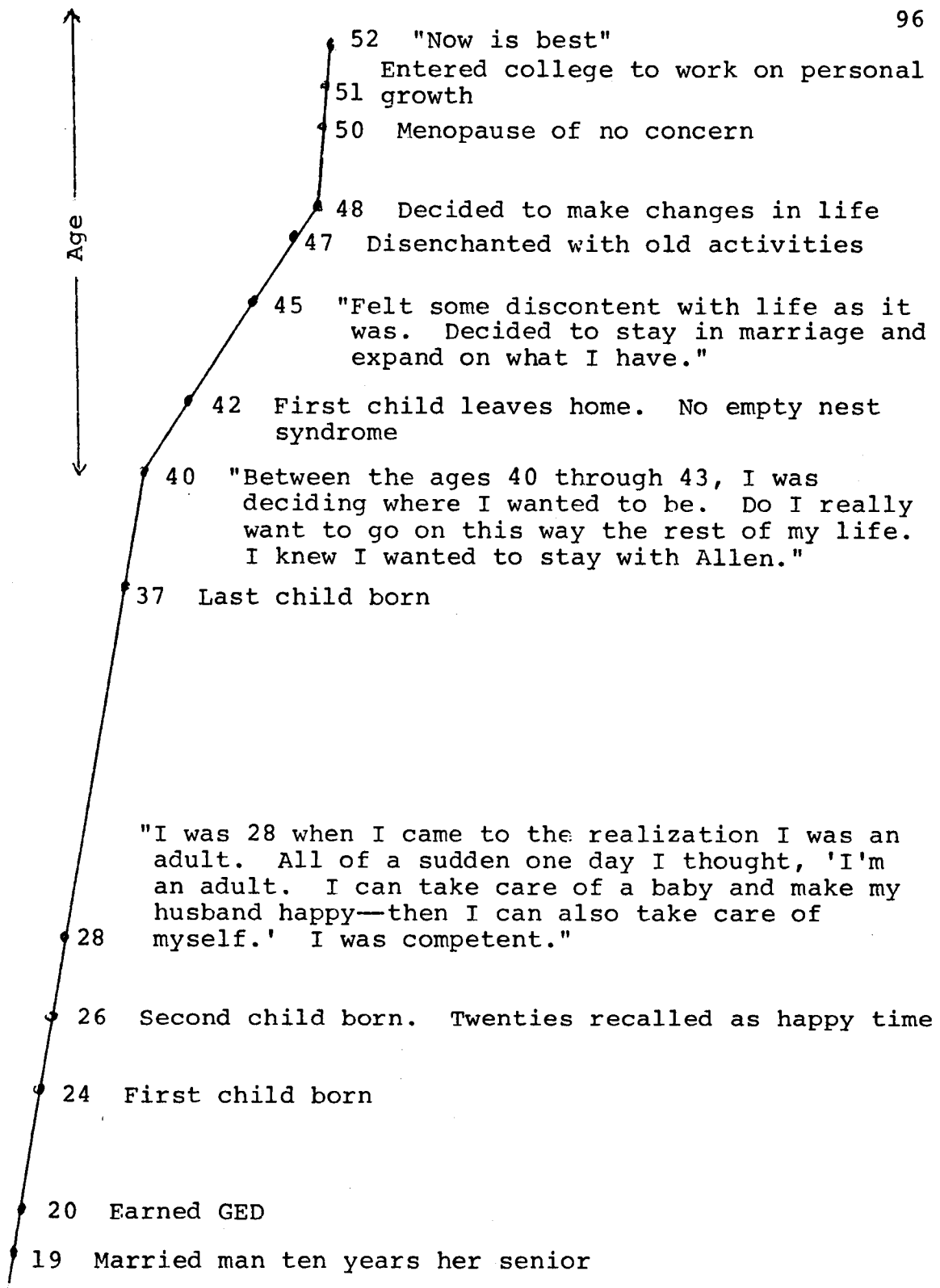


Figure 17. Verna R.

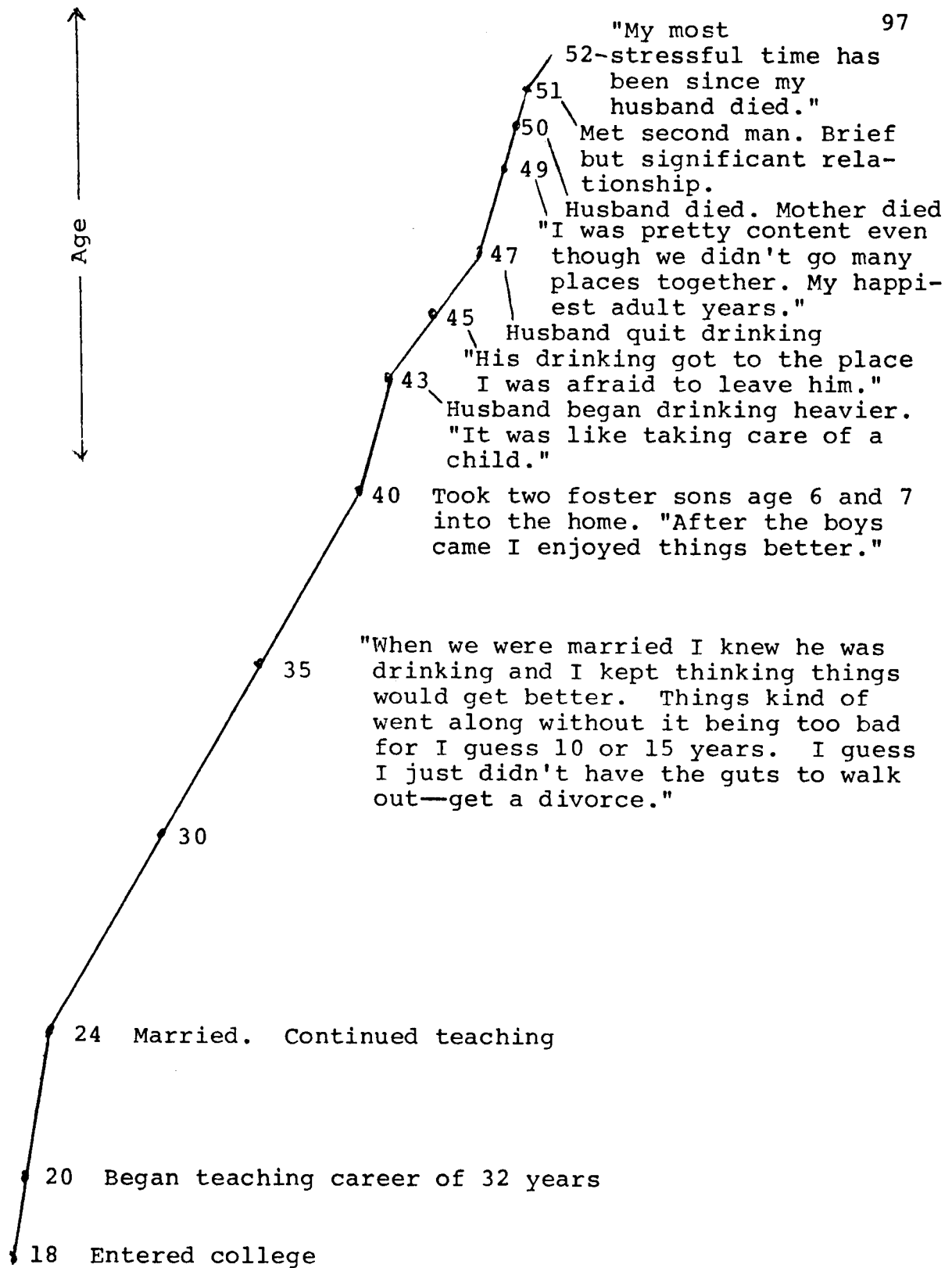


Figure 18. Mary A.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

This study is concerned with that aspect of Levinson's life stage theory which deals with the formation of the life structures of individuals entering middle adulthood.

The study's data support the contention that a model of the evolution of the life structures of men conceptualized by Levinson is applicable to the study of women. Levinson proposes that the basic order of development is the same for both genders and recommends further research along the lines of his investigations with men to validate his findings for women. It is not necessary that the age-linked periods of his paradigm be the same for both genders in order to apply his model to women. Discrepancies between the life courses of the two genders did appear as Levinson's principles were applied in the present study. Such differences are likely to serve in the establishment and refining of a life stage model for women. Where differences in adult development between the genders are thought to be predictable, the hypothesized difference could be used to construct a modified or tentative model for comparison and the testing of suppositions as was done in the present study. The nature of the male mid-life transition was compared with current knowledge

on the female experience and the contrasts observed were used in constructing the Tentative Female Model.

Criticism of the applicability of Levinson's theory to the lives of women has been sharp. Barnett and Baruch (1979), authors of a critique on the research and theory of women in the middle years, describe his model as inappropriate due to its emphasis on occupational commitment and the more singular progression of events that men's lives tend to follow, without giving proper consideration to the more varied role patterns and combinations of roles women lead. The criticism is valid. There is a problem of fit between Levinson's theory, with its stages and chronological ages tied closely to career development, and the experiences of women. The differences in fit, however, served as crucial points for testing the proposals in this study. Levinson's model remained viable for this study of women because the components comprising it, such as developmental periods, developmental tasks, transitions, integration of opposites and life structures, are conceptualizations of processes of development which are gender free. The components and processes of a model should not be confused with the information collected once the model is applied.

Association of the Mid-life Transition with Age

A highly defined transition at mid-life emerged in Levinson's interviews with the fifteen men in his sample who

had completed that developmental period. The men made significant changes in their style of work and living.

To aid in determining if the subjects in this study experienced a transition at mid-life and to examine the association of the mid-life transition with age, a diagram of the adult life course of each subject was plotted (see Figures 4-18, pages 83 through 97). The most accurate conclusions to be drawn from the diagrams were as follows:

1. A sequence of structure building (stability) and structure changing (transition) periods were discernible in the evolution of subject's life structures.
2. A transitional period emerged in each decade (i.e., decades of the 1930s and 1940s).
3. More variability was experienced by women concerning the age of mid-life onset (ranging from 36 to 47) than was reported by Levinson (1978) who does not believe that a true mid-life transition can begin before age thirty-eight or after forty-three (page 191).
4. The duration of the mid-life transition was found to be three to five years and is in agreement with Levinson's results.

These findings affirm Levinson's theory of a mid-life transition around age forty, but are not conclusive. It is difficult to determine with accuracy the age of onset of a transition or its completion. Subjects of this study often

reported it as beginning with a vague feeling of restlessness rather than any clear happening or culminating event. That the subjects did not see their lives with enough clarity, at the time, to grasp the process of growth in which they were engaged was characteristic. The subjects in their early forties did not recognize themselves as being in transition. Unless the transition was an obvious crisis such as those who received therapy or divorced or relocated, subjects did not tend to recognize it until they had moved into a more stable period. Subjects in their early forties recalled their thirties transition while subjects in the late forties and early fifties recalled their mid-life transition.

The association of transitions and developmental periods with specific ages is one of the more controversial, but promising aspects of Levinson's theory. The possibility of normalizing and standardizing the natural process in the development of adult life structures, as has been done in child and adolescent psychology, has far reaching implications for the understanding and planning for a better adulthood. Levinson is firm in his conviction that adult development is age-linked and his determination of the ages of onset and completion of transitions may well be accurate for the seasons of a man's life, but until he is able to provide a better standard for determining age-linked behavior than is presently available in his model, researchers will continue to have difficulty in applying this aspect of his theory.

There still remain a few authorities on the female life cycle, such as Penelope Washbourn (1977), who view menopause as an age-linked event of the mid-life transition. Since the average age at which women in the United States experience menopause is now forty-nine (Notman & Nadelson, 1979). this is late for the onset or completion of the mid-life transition. Menopause did not arise in the interviews as a significant event or problem for discussion. According to Williams (1977), only 4 percent of the women who experience menopause mention it as an important worry.

Nature of the Mid-life Transition

Both men and women subjects find the mid-life transition to be a time of crisis. Approximately 80 percent of the fifteen men in Levinson's (1978) sample experienced what he described as tumultuous struggles within the self and external world,

Every aspect of their lives comes into question, and they are horrified by much that is revealed. They are full of recriminations against themselves and others. (page 199)

He spoke with special concern about the feelings of guilt his subjects experienced as they acknowledged their past abuses of power and use of aggression as members of the dominant gender.

Five of the subjects of this study did not describe experiencing a mid-life transition. One of these five

commented that she had just evolved. "No mid-life transition. I have just evolved." Two others reported "now" as a good time in life after experiencing a difficult age thirty-two to thirty-seven transition in which one subject became an inpatient and one experienced a depression after the death of her husband.

Five women subjects experienced mid-life transitions that were mild in nature. They did not seek professional help with their stress or make unusual changes in their lives. Verna R.'s case is typical. She recalled ages forty through forty-three as a time when, "I was deciding where I wanted to be. Do I really want to go on this way the rest of my life?"

The mid-life transition of five subjects (50 percent of ten subjects who were or had experienced mid-life transitions) were described by them as very stressful or tumultuous. Two subjects sought therapy, one subject tried unsuccessfully to relocate and start anew, and the crisis of two subjects culminated in divorce. The subject who attempted to relocate spoke of her transition as being a very difficult time in her life. "Right now this is a bad time for me. I don't feel good about myself. It is a floundering time. I'm anxious to get in control of my life."

A comparison of the transitions of the male sample, as they were described by Levinson, with those of the females of this sample indicates, in this instance, a higher incidence of severe or tumultuous crisis in the male group. This may

appear unusual since the public acknowledgement that men even experience a mid-life transition is comparatively new. Women have historically been associated with depression and crisis at mid-life (Washbourn, 1977). However, a pronounced change of recent years has been the steady movement away from middle age as the peak time of depression in women toward a younger age group (Al-Issa, 1980).

The tendency in American society to evaluate women as losing their physical attractiveness and sexual desirability upon entering middle adulthood while considering men of the same age as mature and distinguished suggests that the loss of personal power, along with general biases and disadvantages of being female, creates greater transitional problems for women. Either women have more elasticity to cope with stress than do men, or the transitional problems of females are no more severe than their male counterparts. Kuhlen (1964) believes women generally show better adaptations than men to middle age. Neugarten (1968) found the personalities of transitional women to be more integrated than those of transitional men, and middle-aged women to be less worried than men about their bodies.

An analysis of data from the Young/Old polarity of this study provides some insight into how it happens that a mid-life women's personality could show better psychological adjustment than her male counterpart. The women subjects

arrived at the mid-life transition with a positive, new knowledge about themselves acquired in the thirties. The information acquired was self-knowledge of knowing who they were, of what they were made, and what they wanted. They expressed it as being more inner-directed, more independent and self-sufficient. One subject expressed it cogently, "Right now I know if I have to I can emotionally survive on my own." It was this solidifying of subject's identity that enabled them to integrate the negative aspects of aging in a manner that was not diminishing to the self and encouraged a majority of the subjects to respond with "now" as a good time in their lives. Being forty or fifty was not as bad for the subjects as what they had been conditioned to believe. The fear of aging may have been worse than physical aging itself.

The new development in a women's sexuality found in the responses of subjects to the Masculine/Feminine polarity also lends support to the probability of the better psychological adaptability of women at mid-life than of men. Women reach their sexual peak at about age thirty-eight (Sheehy, 1976). While men entering middle adulthood must cope with the knowledge of their waning sexual powers, women are coming into their own and affirming their sexuality. The subjects expressed having learned, over time, enough about their sexual selves to be relaxed, less naive and

inhibited, and more desirous of a full sex life. It is a paradox that the time when women start being disqualified by society as sexually attractive persons is just the time when they have grown up sexually.

This study also points to the disparity between what marriage partners need and expect sexually from their relationship and what they may be able, over time, to attain. One-third of the subjects had experienced during some period in their marriages serious sexual problems, and this excludes the disclosure by two subjects of their husbands' infidelity.

Differences in the Male and Female Models as
They Relate to the Dream, Mentors
and Role Models

The male mid-life transition reflects the differences in American society in socialization of the sexes and the heavy emphasis placed on males to develop a career and climb the ladder of success. Levinson (1978) found the mid-life transition to be a time when the male

. . . comes to be less driven by ambition. . . .
It is a time to modulate the powerful imagery of
the ladder . . . and to give more emphasis to the
intrinsic value of his work and products. (page
252)

He found it to be a time also for modification of the Dream, the personal quest myth that gives purpose and meaning to life. He observed that his subjects used the mid-life transition as a time to give up their mentors so they might become mentor's themselves and foster the growth of a younger

generation. His subjects expressed, at this time, the desire to create a legacy in order to leave something of themselves of value to future generations.

The women of this study grew to young adulthood at a time when the implicit sex role expectation was to marry and raise a family; according to O'Leary (1977) this has changed very little. Subject's early adult development did not include the formation and living out of a vocational Dream as did Levinson's men, but it did include the Dream of becoming a wife and mother. On the surface this appears appropriate for women following the traditional path, but the responses of subjects regarding this were disturbing. The formation of a Dream adds purpose and vitality to life. It also gives direction and implies qualities of courage and strength when associated with the hero or personal quest myth. The Dream is clearly associated with the motivation to achieve. At a time in life when individuals should be, and men generally are, engaged in the task of exploring life's options, assessing their abilities, and establishing a separate identity, the subjects reported marking time until marriage happened. Subjects' Dream formations in this study were found to be directly associated with a lack of direction, expectation and encouragement from their parents to do other than to marry. This was expressed quite clearly by the subjects who spoke of " . . . getting married, having

children, in that order. That's the way we were brought up," or "I was never allowed to think any thoughts other than wife or mother," or "I went to work because I thought I had to do something." This is not to say that each woman should have a vocational dream, since some women may desire to be full-time homemakers, but it does call attention to the social practices that interfere with dream formation. Sex roles which are and have been narrowly defined interfere or limit the evolutionary range of the life structures of women. The statement of Angrist (1969) that flexibility about future plans (as contingency planning) is built into the process of female socialization or the suggestion of Douvan (1960) that it is important for a girl to remain malleable enough to fit the value system of a potential mate describes accurately the socialization of these subjects.

The developmental work on self-assessment, exploration, and identity formation left undone in subject's adolescence and early adulthood came up for reworking in their thirties and forties transition. The women in the sample began early adulthood significantly behind men developmentally (using identity formation as the criterion) but by mid-life transition had equaled or surpassed them. While the male sample was engaged in reducing the excessive power of the Dream and in becoming less concerned with recognition and power, the female sample sought to expand their horizons and explore

roles outside the home. What causes middle-aged women to flower and men to peak is not yet clear or understood Lehmann and Lester (1978).

Upon marriage, the subjects tended to clarify their expectations of self and their Dream of marriage and mothering in a manner that gave purpose to their lives and enhanced their ability to fulfill the commitments of motherhood. Eight of the fifteen subjects reported their child or children as the most important person(s) in their lives, and all but two of the ten married subjects placed their children ahead of their husband on their priority list. Subjects spoke of their Dream as an evolving one and identified it as "running-out" or "dying" in the forties as they foresaw their children reaching adulthood and the possible death or divorce of their husband.

The letting go of children was met with positive expectation by 50 percent of the women who looked upon it as the first free period in their lives, when they could put themselves first and focus upon their own personal needs and self growth. The 50 percent who did experience severe emotional pain were women who reported family and child-rearing as their one dream or mission in life and had failed to plan and explore any further. These findings agree with those of Lowenthal et al. (1975) who suggest that in general, "family-centered women, in comparison with their male

counterparts, or with women who have more involvement with the outside world, are likely to suffer the psychic consequences of such early deprivation in the later stages of life" (page 240).

Similarities can be drawn between the findings above on the effects of Dream formation in the establishment of subject's identity, and to the analysis of data on the effects of mentors and role models to the development of identity. Both the Dream formation and available mentors are important basis for investigating and implementing new roles. However, both were found to be less well utilized by the women in this study than by the men in Levinson's sample. Mother was the person subjects named most often as the individual they admired and would like most to be like. She fulfilled for one-third of the subjects the mentor role of providing emotional support and guidance into the adult world. Women subjects seldom gave or received mentoring outside the home. They also seldom looked for or selected fictional or real life role models, outside of their mothers, on whom they could pattern their behavior. According to Bandura (1969), modeling is a basic procedure by which behavior is learned and it is through adequate models that we become more able to identify with the age beyond. Sheehy (1976) noted this problem and suggested that a woman's reluctance to identify with role models other than mother is due, in part, to our cultural preference for youth. Women

may be more hesitant than men to identify with the age beyond. Women are only now becoming their sister's keeper instead of her competitor. Levinson noted the need in mid-life men for some form of tangible advancement in status or recognition to mark their move into the more senior position of middle adulthood. Transitional women of this study did not express a similar need for recognition to make a place for themselves in the middle adult generation.

All proposals in the female model were not addressed. Specific components such as (1) Legacy generated, (2) Greater expression of assertion and mastery, and (3) Assume senior role were left largely unexplored. Subjects did not spontaneously share information on these topics and the Biographical Questionnaire as a stimulus was deficient in generating subject responses.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

Introduction

A conception of the formation of the life structures of women entering middle adulthood, based on a theory of adult male development of Daniel Levinson and associates, is offered in this study. The focus of the inquiry is on the period of time between the ending of early adulthood and the beginning of middle adulthood known as the mid-life transition. A Tentative Female Model of the mid-life transition was proposed using, as a guide, Levinson's paradigm of the evolution of the adult male life structures. His model was selected because it is the most complete model available, and because there were no comparable models of the developmental processes of women. This female model explores the suitability of applying a theory of adult male development to the life course of women.

A review of the literature revealed both a lack of theory and of practicable methods for examining the process by which adults develop over the life cycle. Even more limited is the body of knowledge on psychosocial growth during middle adulthood. Studies of these years are hampered by the general fear of aging, decline and restriction. The

few studies which are available on middle-aged women have tended to focus on a woman's losses—of attractiveness, reproduction, and of the mother role, rather than on a discovery of the personal growth or positive attributes that develop with age.

Levinson's theoretical constructs draw heavily upon the work of previous developmental psychologists, particularly Jung and Erikson who proposed sequential, predictable, age-related changes in adult life. A major contribution of Levinson has been to refine and expand upon their principles to include his own theory for the study of the character of a person's life which he describes as the evolution of the individual life structures.

The goal of the present study was to adapt an existing male model of research design to the life course of women entering middle adulthood in order to generate a theory on how women in this age period change and the impact of change on their life course. The study specifically addressed itself to the following research questions: Do women go through an unsettled period of transition around age forty? If so, what is the nature of the transition? Does it vary from the male model in the manner described in the female model of the mid-life transition? Does it appear to follow the same age-linked pattern? Are alternating periods of transition and stability discernible in the life course of

women aged forty to fifty? Do traditional women form and live out a Dream?

Method

The general method developed to derive theoretical concepts of women's development was to draw contrasts and comparisons between the variables proposed in the female model of the mid-life transition, the male model of development by Levinson and the actual responses of subjects as they were transcribed and tabulated. By a constant comparison among these three groups of the components (variables) of the models previously designated, points of similarity and difference were determined and the concepts proposed in the female model affirmed or disproved.

A selected sample of fifteen subjects was chosen from a specified age range of 40 to 52 years of age and from a combination of familial and occupational roles weighted toward the traditional women.

The method used for gathering data was the biographical interview. It is a structured research method that combines a clinical interview, in that specific topics are covered, with a conversation between friends in which the subject can feel free to tell her story. The specific topics to be covered were selected for their appropriateness to the developmental period under investigation.

The subjects of the study were interviewed a minimum of three hours each. All of the interviews were tape recorded

on audio cassettes and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interview data was organized so that all subject responses to a specific interview question or questions would appear together. Once all responses to a specific topic were grouped, both the group and the individual subject responses could be tabulated and contrasts and comparisons made.

A life-line was constructed on each subject to illustrate the sequential structure changing periods of transition and the structure building periods of stability. The plotting of the life-lines was accomplished by noting significant events of the subject's life, the age at which it occurred, and the emotions surrounding it. The diagrams facilitated a comparison between Levinson's proposed age-linked phases and the onset and termination of periods in the subject's lives.

Major Findings and Conclusions

The major findings of this study support the premise that Levinson's model of the evolution of the life structures of men entering middle adulthood is applicable to the study of women, and that his conceptualization of the mid-life transition with its specific developmental tasks and age-related periods is relevant to the study of women as well as men.

Alternating periods of transition and stability were discernible in the adult life-course of the women subjects

of this study, including a distinct mid-life transition of three to five years at approximately age forty. More variability concerning the age of onset and termination of the mid-life transition was found with these subjects than in Levinson's study and is accounted for, in part, by the lack of any clear-cut demarcation between periods. Subjects often reported a transition as beginning with vague feelings of discontent rather than any culminating event.

Both Levinson's men and the majority of subjects in this study found the mid-life transition to be a time of severe crisis. A comparison of the transitions of the two groups revealed a lower incidence of severe crisis in the female sample (50 percent of the ten subjects involved) than in the male (80 percent of subjects) sample. Analysis of women subjects' responses to the developmental task of reintegrating the polarities of Young/Old, Feminine/Masculine, Destruction/Creation and Attachment/Separateness suggests reasons as to why the observation is accurate.

Women subjects described experiencing aging in two forms, an "inner form" that refers to the unseen inner self and is closely aligned with how one feels and an "outer self" or form that refers to the physical body and is what one sees when she looks upon it. What subjects saw was not what they reported they felt. The aging of inner self was described as, "I don't feel old. I know I'm not a kid, but

I don't feel different," or "Mentally I still feel young on the inside. . . . It's just a shock when I look in the mirror." There is an aspect of agelessness about the woman's inner self that continues to grow and to be renewed as it evolves through the developmental periods of early and middle adulthood. The fears of aging verbalized by half the sample were more associated with the negative cultural attitude toward aging, particularly of women, than with the physical process of aging itself. Subjects reported that being age forty or fifty was better than they had expected or been socialized to believe. They spoke of entering the forties decade with a new awareness of themselves; an awareness of being more inner-directed and possessing more of a sense of "being myself."

The pressure of time as a limited quantity acted as a catalyst upon the women's lives—verbally expressed by a subject as follows: "Whatever you are going to do you had better get on with it." Defining what it was they wanted to "get on with" contributed to the unease of the mid-life transition and involved subjects in an evaluation of their past life and an assessment of their present life structures. The anxiety common to the transition served also as a forewarning to subjects of the need for life changes, for the letting go of outworn roles and the development of new ones as they experienced the physical decline and death of parents,

the letting go of children, the possible loss of husband through death or divorce, and the certainty of their own mortality. A fundamental characteristic of subject's transition at mid-life was the growing acknowledgement that as a woman ages she stands increasingly alone. To develop is to learn to nurture one's own growth.

The "letting go" of children as they departed the home was viewed with relief and a sense of accomplishment by 50 percent of this sample of women experiencing the departure of children. One subject verbalized it as, "The first emotionally and physically free period I have ever had in my life." Unsettled, depressive feelings associated with the lessening of the mother role were experienced by the other half—the majority of whom reported family and childrearing as their one mission in life. The ending, death, completion of one role, once accepted, led, in various degrees, to a sense of renewal and the beginning of a new role. In essence the pain of transition was the pain of breaking through personal limitations and was a reoccurring process within each decade.

The mid-forties and fifties was found to be a potentially exciting time sexually for women. The majority of subjects reported this as the most sexually satisfying period of their lives and attributed it to an increased awareness of their bodies, the overcoming of inhibitions, a decreased fear of pregnancy, and more privacy as children departed the home.

This can be the time for a sexual renewal of a marriage and as such would be an important task of the mid-life transition. Disclosures of subjects revealed also the fragileness of sexual adjustment and the difficulty in achieving a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. One-third of the subjects had experienced, at some time during their marriages, serious sexual problems which affected the quality of life. In addition, two subjects reported the infidelity of their husbands. An obvious concomitant of poor sexual adjustment was the lack of verbal communication between parties. Subjects voiced needing to know, to be told, to be assured they were loved.

When subjects were asked to recall their dreams and plans for life, 75 percent said their primary aspiration had always been to marry. As young adults, they formed no serious visualization of self other than as married and sought no real assessment of their abilities and talents as did the men in Levinson's study. Subjects' unawareness of their options was traceable, in large part, to a lack of direction and expectation from parents to do other than marry.

The interview questions directed at gathering information on subject's role models and mentors revealed the importance of mother to the formation of identity of traditional women. Mother was the person subjects named most often as the

individual they admired and would like most to be like, and 75 percent of the subjects named her as the dominant parent—using such terms as "strong" and "self-willed" to describe her. Subjects did not express a need for other role models, nor did they reveal a consciousness that their options were limited by this deficiency. Only two subjects described participating in a mentoring relationship outside the home.

A number of issues discovered by Levinson in the male mid-life transition were either absent or of little importance in the life space of transitional women. While the male sample was engaged in reducing the excessive power of the Dream and in becoming less concerned with recognition and power, the female sample sought to expand their horizons and explore roles outside the home. Levinson noted the need in mid-life men for some form of tangible advancement in status or recognition to mark their move into the more senior role of middle adulthood. Transitional women of this study expressed no need for recognition or achievement to make a place for themselves in the middle adult generation.

Gould (1978) proposes an intriguing problem for life cycle researchers that is relevant to the treatment of distressed, unhappy, individuals. He believes we should be able to predict and label the mourning and discomfort that

accompanies every major growth step. If this were possible, adults could then be spared much of the pain and misunderstanding of significant life events. To a degree, adult developmental studies are doing this. Hopefully, as data from biographical interviews is amassed, patterns will continue to emerge enabling researchers to better distinguish between clinical depression and the normal pain and grief encountered in personal growth.

The subjects here grew to young adulthood in the late forties and early fifties. Their present life styles, values and expectations were influenced by the special character and cohorts of that historical period. A replication of this study in ten years would reflect the impact of social change in this country and its effect upon the life structures of middle-aged women.

On the following page is a simplified diagram (Figure 19) of the female model depicting the changes supported by subjects' comments.

Implications

Studies of normal, healthy women are rare and those of middle-aged women even more so (Williams, 1977, page 360). This study calls attention to the normal development of the middle-aged woman.

AGE 47

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

1. Reappraise the past
2. Assume senior role
3. Rework Inner Polarities

A. YOUNG/OLD

- (1) Mind and body dissonance - new mind, body relationship
- (2) Aging better than expected
- (3) Mother as role model and mentor
- (4) Becoming more inner-directed

B. MASCULINE/FEMININE

- (1) Most satisfying period sexually

C. DESTRUCTION/CREATION

- (1) Come to terms with the anger of nurturance
 - a. Unfulfilled expectations from Dream of marriage

D. ATTACHMENT/SEPARATENESS

- (1) Letting go of children and protectors
 - a. Empty nest positive experience for half
 - b. Nurture own growth
 - c. Learning to stand alone
- (2) Increased involvement in external world

AGE 36

Figure 19. A Simplified Female Model of the
Mid-life Transition Supported
by Subjects' Comments

The negativism and misinformation surrounding a woman's entry into middle adulthood is widespread. Much of it is a carry-over from earlier days when mid-life women were characterized by Freudians as rigid, depleted, and developmentally stunted (Freud, 1933). The medical profession of the time was not above questioning the purpose of a woman once she had outlived her reproductive capacity (Notman & Nadelson, 1978). If the truth can counteract the pervasive dread about middle age, then continued studies, such as this, are helpful in generating theory and amassing data until accurate norms are available.

Middle age is one of the great taboo topics. Consequently efforts need to be directed toward promoting among women in the middle years, a discussion on the course and meaning of their lives. Now that women can look forward to two or three decades of postparental life, it becomes more necessary that they understand and use their potential in order to be wise women, active in community decision making, and influential in the welfare of the nation as well as the family.

A close comparison of the adult female life span with the male life span should be of particular interest to psychologists, career counselors and educators. An examination of the major points of divergence (i.e., where the adult development of one gender differs noticeably from the other)

tends to reveal male and female contrasts in socialization. Individuals, such as career counselors and educators who are responsible for the design and implementation of programs to assist people in breaking out of stereotypes and developing new aspects of themselves, might apply what has worked successfully for one gender to the other. An early opportunity to examine or develop a Dream would facilitate the career development of women. Additionally, some institutions and organizations have initiated formalized plans for the selection of accomplished, high achieving women to act as mentors for younger women with promise.

Life cycle research has special meaning for institutions of higher education. If a better climate is to be produced on an undergraduate level for adult education, increased knowledge of the evolution of adult life structures is needed. Empire State College in Saratoga Springs, New York, has developed an experimental program on adult learning in the context of adult development, using as their theoretical model of the life cycle the works of both Gould and Levinson (Lehmann & Lester, 1978). Continuing education will play an increasingly valuable role in providing options for adults at mid-life and beyond to change careers, to keep abreast of the rapid social and technical changes, and to assist our population, whose longevity has increased, to remain productive for a longer period of time over the life cycle.

The need to identify and come to terms with the cultural forces that now restrict adult development is evident. The identification of specific biases, such as the double standard in aging, or the pressure on daughters to marry before exploring their options, or the lack of honor of aging in our society is necessary in alerting public consciousness to the personal and social gains to be made when biased behavior is no longer the norm and sex roles are mutual.

Suggestions for Further Research

The scope of a study similar to this, in which a female model is proposed, could be limited to the investigation of fewer variables. A model could be designed with either more or fewer components. An in-depth study of the development of any single component which has emerged as crucial such as the formation of the Dream and its relation to achievement motivation, or the death of mother as role model upon the lives of women, or the isolation of experiences responsible for the increased sense of personal power of mid-life women, or the association between spirituality and the increased inward orientation characteristic of middle age would be a contribution.

Investigations of the formation of the individual life structures of women in all phases of the life cycle are needed if we are to project a complete and accurate lifespan theory of women.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The task of the interview is to gather information on the evolution of the woman's life structure. The themes to follow, and the questions within the themes, were selected as the most useful in yielding data relevant to an understanding of the life course of women entering middle adulthood.

All of the major themes will be covered with each of fifteen subjects, but the ordering will be flexible to allow for the uniqueness of each subject and each interview. The questionnaire serves as a guideline to insure that these areas of the subject's life not discussed spontaneously, will be included.

Opening

"Before we begin, do you have any further questions about why we're doing this, what the purpose of the study is, how you will be involved, etc.? Okay, you're (age), right? Why don't you begin by telling me something about your life at this point?"

Current Life Themes

S. will give some data regarding current life themes. Get a general idea of her current life status before

proceeding: where she lives; with whom; how long in area; if working, where; if not, how does she spend her days? Who are the most important people in her life at this time? If not enough of a picture develops, ask S. to describe a typical weekday and weekend. Gain a sense of how long things have been going on this way, when the last major change in her current life status was. When a clear enough picture emerges, pick the first theme S. has mentioned and ask: "When was it you first got the feeling you were no longer a young adult? What was the feeling like? Have your feelings changed?"

For each area, assess: (1) the importance placed on this area in the woman's life; (2) her current level of satisfaction; (3) degree of conflict or anxiety; (4) how much things have changed; (5) when did things change (at what age); (6) what important "marker events" signified change; (7) expectation of future change; (8) extent of anticipation and/or anxiety concerning expectation of future change.

I. Sense of Self in World

A. Does S. have a Dream or a mission in life? What is the nature of her mission or Dream? What extent is it defined, developed, completed? What has happened to it over time? Who are the major character(s)? To what extent is the Dream connected to the process of living or has it died, been abandoned? To what extent does it incorporate familial and extrafamilial aspects?

B. Body awareness: How aware is S. of her age? How content? To what extent does she experience herself as growing older? What does she do now that is different from other times? Ask: "How do others respond to your age? What differences do you notice between then (leaving young adulthood) and now?" How concerned is she with her health? Does she have any major health problems? When did they occur? Does she feel physically attractive? How important is this to her? How much time does she spend getting ready in the morning? How sexual does she feel? How often does she have intercourse? Does she have sexual dreams and fantasies? How often? How important is sex to her? How energetic does she feel? How much food/sleep/exercise does she require? Any major weight gain or loss? How is emotional health of S.? Any unusual problems with sleep? Any problems with depression or mood swings?

C. Time perspective: To what extent does she experience time as "on her side" or against her? To what extent does she feel young or old; a young adult or aged? What does it mean to her "to age." Is she continuing to "grow" or change? Ask: "Do you think about death or mortality? What are the nature of your thoughts? Is time of concern to you?"

D. Personal Identity: If S. financially dependent on others? If so, to what extent? How does S. describe herself. Ask S. who makes decisions at home. Ask S. if she feels responsible for the circumstances of her life.

E. Personal values: Religion? Politics? Sex? How different is she from her parents/husband in having these views and how do they feel about her feelings?

F. Social awareness and involvement: How aware is S. of what is going on in the world and in this country? How influenced is she by current social concerns, particularly the women's movement?

G. Her general relation to her socio-cultural world.

II. Family of Procreation (where relevant)

A. Relationship with Spouse: What is the nature of S.'s relationship with her husband? How much time do they spend together? What do they do? How intimate/passionate are they with each other? How do they divide labor? To what extent do they respect/like/criticize each other? What does she like about him and he about her? Dislike? What do they disagree about and how do they reconcile disagreements? To what extent do they compromise? To what extent would she feel lost without him? How important is he to her in her life? To what extent does she feel accepted/understood? To what extent has her marriage changed over the years? How does she feel about the changes?

B. Relationship with children? How does she feel about herself as a mother? How much time does S. spend with children? Grandchildren? Doing what? What have been the satisfactions/compromises/disappointments? How has S.'s role

changed in the last five years? To what extent is she a mother like her mother; how does she feel about that?

III. Family of Origin

A. Parents: Are parents living? If so, what kind of people are S.'s mother/father? Extent of current involvement with parents? How often does she see/call/write to them? How close does she feel to them? Has relationship to parents changed in the last five years? How lost would she feel without them? How responsible for them does she feel? If one or both parents are deceased, ask S. how she responded to the death or deaths. How have their deaths changed her life? Ask: "How do/did you and your mother relate to each other? What are your thoughts about her now?"

B. Siblings (where relevant): Names and ages of siblings. Otherwise, similar questions as with parents.

C. Other Relatives: Who? What is the level of her awareness of other relatives, her extent of contact with them and knowledge about their lives? Particularly, what is the extent of her knowledge of her grandparents and family background?

IV. Relationships with Men

A. Man Other Than Husband: Extent of sexual involvement? Is S. living with someone, have a steady boyfriend, more than one relationship, a few casual relationships, no contact? If living with someone, ask questions similar to those under spouse.

B. Extent of Peer Friendships: Does S. have male friends? How does she get along with men? To what extent does she feel accepted, respected, intimate, dependent, equal, controlled, cut off?

C. Extent of Mentor Relationship or Role Models: Is there any woman or man she particularly admires, would like to be like, feels influenced by? What woman or man does she admire most? Any fictional or real-life heroines/heroes?

V. Relationships with Other Women

Same as for men

A. Assess general identification and empathy with other women, relative likes or dislikes, comfort, intimacy? Assess time spent with friends.

VI. Extrafamilial Involvement

A. Work: Does S. work? What is the nature of her work setting? How much time is spent on work? To what extent does she choose to work for satisfaction vs. financial needs? What is her current level of status and leadership in her work setting? How important is her work to her? Is it a "career" or just a job? What is her level of competence? What are her aspirations for success, desire for fame, fortune, creative expression? How does/did she reconcile issues of work vs. family?

B. Membership in Groups and Organizations: Same as for work.

C. Hobbies, Leisure Activities, Daydreams: What does S. do for fun? Extent and nature of time spent in various activities? What new activities are occupying time of S.?

Developmental History

Fill in the gaps in S.'s developmental history not covered in the discussion of Current Life Themes. In between the first and second interviews, develop a chronology of each woman's life so that the major life events for each year are included. Concentrate on the years 40 to 50.

In Retrospect

(At beginning of each successive interview after first) ask: "Did you have any thought during the week about our last interview? What did you think of it, how did it go, etc.?"

Termination

What are S.'s final feelings about the interview experience, about me? What did it mean to her? Did she gain any new insight about herself? Would she recommend doing it to her friends?

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE LETTER SENT TO POTENTIAL INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

Dear _____,

As you have expressed an initial interest in being interviewed for my doctoral dissertation, I want to take this opportunity to tell you more about my study.

I am interested in finding out about the ways in which women in our society become adults—what happens to them after adolescence, what kinds of changes take place in their lives. The fact that some women are married and others are unmarried, some work outside the family and some don't, some have become mothers and others have not, means that the ways in which people "grow up" is not exactly the same for everybody. I want to find out something about how you see your life now, how you got to where you are, and where you see yourself going from here.

I have decided to interview women in their forties. In interviewing you, I will join you in an attempt to reconstruct your life story—the various chapters, subplots, major and minor characters that are unique to your life and no one else's.

I am requesting two or three interviews with each person—probably an hour and a half each and ordinarily spaced about a week apart. We can meet wherever it is most

convenient and private: at your home, or my office, or elsewhere if you wish. I prefer to tape record interviews so that no information will be lost. The only persons listening to the tapes will be a few colleagues helping me with the study and myself.

The study will be written up as my dissertation. Where excerpts are used from individual interviews, all identifying information such as your name, town you live in, place you work, people you might have mentioned during the interview will be disguised or withheld. Detailed notes or transcripts of the interviews will be available to you if you are interested. When the study is completed I'll be happy to send you a summary of what I've found and to discuss it with you if you wish.

I am sorry that I am not able to pay for your time. What I can offer is a chance to review your life until now and perhaps, to get some additional perspective on it. This is an exploratory study. My purpose is to discover something rather than to prove or disprove already existing ideas. We really don't know enough about the life course to prove or disprove anything at this point. This is not the kind of research where I'm going to be trying to have you tell me something without telling you what my purpose is. I believe that people can contribute the most to a study when they know as much about it as possible—not the least.

I'll call you in a few days to answer any further questions and to see whether you would like to participate. If you would like to phone me, please call during the day at 483-0816, or in the evening at 986-5712; I will accept collect calls. I hope the project will interest you and I look forward to talking with you further.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I understand that the purpose of this study is to develop a more comprehensive picture of how women in our society become adults and what kind of changes take place in their lives as they enter middle adulthood. I have been informed that I will be asked to share my personal life experiences during three interviews with Jo Ann Thompson of an hour and a half each spaced a week apart. I have been promised that all identifying information such as my name, occupation, town of residence, and any such identifying information of persons mentioned by me during the interviews will be disguised or withheld in the writing or discussion of the dissertation. I also understand I can withdraw from participation at any point without penalty. I am aware the interviews will be tape recorded and I have given Ms. Thompson permission to use direct quotations from the interviews at her discretion. I have also been informed that data will be tallied shortly after each interview and all tapes erased. If I have any further questions regarding my participation

in the study, I will have the option of contacting the
experimenter at the address and phone numbers listed below.

Name _____

Date _____

Jo Ann Thompson
Roane State Community College
West Tennessee Avenue
Oak Ridge, Tn. 37830
(615) 483-0816 work number
(615) 482-5660 home number

VITA

Ira Jo Ann Thompson was born in Osceola, Arkansas, on December 11, 1930. She moved to Lenoir City, Tennessee, in 1947, and graduated from Lenoir City High School in 1949. At that time she entered Tennessee Technological Institute, where she received the Bachelor of Science degree in August 1952 in Health and Physical Education.

She taught in the Tennessee public schools for four years before earning a Master of Science degree in Educational Psychology and Guidance from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in August 1961.

From 1961 through 1963 she worked as a guidance counselor at Alcoa High School and from 1963 to 1972 as a counselor at Oak Ridge High School.

In 1973 she was employed by Roane State Community College as a counselor and psychology teacher, where she was chosen by the faculty to receive the "RSCC Outstanding Service Award" in 1980.

She earned the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Educational Psychology and Guidance in March 1982.