

NEVER-MARRIED and CHILDLESS WOMEN
in MIDLIFE: An Exploration of the Issues

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ABSTRACT

Before we attempt to make, or influence policy as social workers, we have to know for whom we are making, or changing, policy. The experiences of never-married and childless women in midlife are rarely recorded in the literature. Despite feminist inroads, policy and research concerning midlife women are often based on the assumption and ideology that women in this age group are married and have children. As long as marriage and the nuclear family are seen as the only route for women, those who do not choose such a path will continue to be invisible, or to be seen as deviant. In an attempt to begin building an understanding of women who have, for various reasons, not married, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted in which twelve never-married and childless women in midlife, both lesbian and heterosexual, were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Categories discussed included: family background and relationships; work, income, education, housing; sexual history; reflections on aging and midlife.

The goal of this exploratory study is to provide information leading toward an understanding of the population and to provide a base for further research. The study illustrates the diversity of women even within an unrepresentative sample and points to the central importance of a sense of personal autonomy within the lives of never-married midlife women. The twelve interviews support existing research which suggests that education and long-term employment are factors in reducing poverty among women and presents a distillation of analytical categories into three core areas that reflect the respondent's perceptions regarding midlife and aging, work, and her never-married status.

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Introduction

Women are defined or made invisible by our gender. Until the 1920s, we were not deemed persons. We have been absent from language, subsumed under the generic "man," and until the lens of feminist analysis began to refocus the world through women's experience, were generally absent from philosophical, legal, religious and social science discourse.

Practitioners, researchers, theorists, planners and policy-makers are beginning to understand the lives of women. The understanding of variables such as socio-economic status, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation is eroding myths concerning women's roles in society. Much work since the late 1960s has focussed on the aging processes of men and women, while the research exploring midlife women has tended to dwell on biologically-related patterns such as menopause and the empty-nest syndrome (Giele, 1982; Baruch and Brooks-Gunn, 1984; Gee and Kimball, 1987). One group which seems to have received little attention in the research and literature however, is never-married, childless midlife women. My interest in research on never-married, childless midlife women or, spinsters, is personal. It has grown out of curiosity to understand more fully the circuitous route my life has taken away from marriage, as well as my own transition into midlife.

One day when I was about four years old, my mother asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Without hesitation I answered, God. Assuming the omnipotence of a supreme being

appealed to me as a child; in some ways, it still does. It does not take long for a young girl to recognize that she is not quite as equal as her brothers in the eyes of her family, or in the eyes of the world.

In my late teens I entered a catholic convent 3000 miles from my home. From the perspective of an adult, the reasons for leaving my family seem uncluttered by the religiosity of a "vocation." The convent was a way out, a new beginning; it was not marriage. Although I left, before vows, two years later, the experience of living in community with women from all over the country was central to me. I was treated as an adult, my talents were encouraged and I was surrounded by creative, intelligent women of all ages -- artists, scholars, musicians, cooks, spiritual mentors. There were also aspects of the life with which I was unable to cope and I asked permission to leave.

What is fascinating is, had I remained in the convent, my lifestyle would not be much different than it is now. Most contemporary nuns live in communal houses away from the larger Mother House; many are involved in social work, academia, education, writing, and politics (Curb and Manahan, 1985). Not all spinsters are ex-nuns; regardless of that, I was interested in the choices never-married women have made, or rather, the circumstances that have destined them to remain single, and the perceptions they have regarding those circumstances.

The purpose of my research was to explore the experiences of never-married, childless midlife women from a socio-economic perspective. Despite feminist inroads, policy and research concerning midlife women is often based on the assumption that women in this age group are married and have children (Giele, 1982; King and Marvel, 1982; Gee and Kimball, 1987). Consequently, women in this population are burdened with various role and societal expectations.

Throughout the literature review, and during the analysis of the empirical data, the thesis began to weave itself into three areas: first of all, an examination of women and aging with a particular focus on never-married women in midlife and the placement of never-married women in an historical context. Never-married women appear in history -- Victorian governesses for example, settlement house workers, communities of nuns, witches, women during the two world wars. The role of never-married women as workers within the context of the family was clearly a major consideration. Smith (1977) notes that the situation of women cannot be understood without relating it to the family. Sociologist S.J. Wilson (1982) states that:

Despite considerable change in the structure and functioning of Canadian families, certain ideas about women's domesticity remain entrenched in the public mind. These ideas have understandably been reflected in the way social scientists have analyzed family life. The assumption of primacy of the wife/mother role for women has several ramifications. In the first place, those women who are not mothers or wives are largely excluded from sociological consideration (p. 32).

As long as marriage and the nuclear family are touted as the only route for women, those who do not choose such a path will continue to be invisible or seen as deviant. Wilson makes an important point when she notes that because women are ignored in the conceptualization of sociology (or social work), they will necessarily be overlooked in empirical studies. "If women are not important theoretically, they will not be studied" (p. 7). The perceptions that the contemporary never-married women in this study had regarding their family and social networks, their work and private lives, and themselves as single women in an overwhelmingly coupled society, illustrate that there are diverse paths for women.

As the interviews for the study progressed along-side an examination of the literature, it became clear that a third pivotal area, labor force participation and the interweaving importance of education and finances, were major considerations to the respondents as well as to researchers. For this reason, a chapter on Never Married Women and the Labor Market was included.

The primary purpose of this study then, was first of all, through a thorough review of the literature to link assumptions made about women in midlife with an exploration of themes emanating from interviews with a sample of never-married midlife women. As the literature indicates, older women significantly outnumber older men in North America. Of those older women, the majority are unattached and poor. While the focus of the

research was an exploration of the lives of never-married midlife women in order to combat assumptions about who they are in midlife, a further question the study sought to answer was, would never-married midlife women be better prepared for their old age? A final goal was to outline implications for social work policy and practice.

The first three chapters then, will examine midlife and aging, view the status of never-married women historically and in contemporary society, and focus on never-married women and the labor force. The final chapters will discuss the empirical research itself, and its relationship to the literature. As the Canadian Government Report on Aging (1982) states, "The development of good policies and programs reflects upon good research. This in turn is dependent upon a reliable data base" (p.150).

CHAPTER ONE: Midlife and Aging

Reviewing the literature regarding never-married women was (and continues to be) at once disappointing and exciting; for while illustrating that research and literature on never-married and childless midlife women was generally limited, it meant that possibilities for study and research were limitless. It is also frightening. One has to ask why such gaps exist in research and literature, why certain groups in society continue to be discounted, or made invisible; why only particular theories are explored from particular perspectives; why only certain voices are heard over and over again. This chapter will review the literature regarding midlife and aging women, and how these categories relate to never-married women.

The chronological touchstone for the transition into midlife varies in the literature. Maas (1985) remarks that "midlife is marked by greater diversity among people in their patterns of living and development than at any earlier time of life" (p. 217). Brooks-Gunn and Kirsh (1984) are somewhat more subdued as they discuss specifically midlife women:

Not only is midlife an ambiguous phase, as illustrated by the fluidity of its upper boundary, the lack of consensus on the timing of certain life events, the multiplicity of markers used to define midlife experience, and the lack of any conceptual framework embedding midlife in the life cycle, but individuals feel ambivalent about it as well. To become an adult is often seen as the equivalent to the end of exploration and growth (p.21).

Some say the middle years stretch from 35 to 55 or from 40 to 60. Statistics Canada defines adulthood from 15 through 64. However, for most women in this current study, age 40 seemed to be an agreed upon critical turning point from youth to aging. One only needs to wander through card and gift shops to realize that this milestone, 40, is not seen as the continuation of exploration and growth into adulthood, but is rather, the focus of ridicule and pity.

Women moving into midlife face what Susan Sontag (1972) calls the double standard of aging. She describes aging as being a social judgment rather than a biological eventuality. Age is something diffused over a woman's lifetime; something she begins to fear in early youth. Women are "haunted by age" in a way men are not. They are sexually disqualified earlier in life, whereas a man's age is enhanced by the power he may hold in society.

Brooks-Gunn and Kirsh (1984) cite several midlife markers. One of the most obvious is chronological age which represents the physical, psychological and sociocultural indices of change. They acknowledge that cultural differences such as poverty, make this marker very problematic for many women. Other markers such as parenthood, or return to the work force, are not useful for all women. Hormonal changes and relationship demands do however, affect most women in midlife.

Cultural attitudes toward older women are generally negative. Williams (1979) notes that there are definite differences in the midlife experiences of women and men. Women are described

through the motif of loss -- loss of youthful beauty, vigor, children, reproductive capacity and often, loss of job or spouse. Certainly women socialized to build lives as exclusively wives and/or mothers, are unprepared for the roles of widow, divorcee or wage-earner. Consequently, depression is prevalent among this population of middle-aged women. Ford and Sinclair (1987) after interviewing elderly British women write that:

The western stereotypes of aging and the old are prejudicial and discriminatory...The danger of such stereotyping, as with all labels, is that the elderly, perceiving that society has little regard for them, thus come to have little regard for themselves (p.2).

Older women are not an homogeneous group with common histories, circumstances and needs (King and Marvel, 1983). The twelve never-married women in this present study illustrate that significant differences exist among cohorts. Women born between 1932 and 1939 for example, experienced a more varying political and social milieu than did those born during World War II or, post-war on the cutting edge of the baby boom.

The common, shared experience of most women in their late forties and early fifties has been that of homemaker. That trend is changing significantly however; young women are marrying later or not at all, bearing fewer children and combining home, education and career with varying degrees of success. For their mothers and grandmothers, exclusive commitment to traditional roles was not consciously made after careful consideration of varied options; it was the expected choice of responsible adult

women of their generation (King and Marvel, 1982). Many of these women could realistically expect to be divorced or separated before they reached old age, and to experience other transitions such as their children leaving home, aging parents, and menopause. Many of the transitions faced by never-married women are similar. One of the most crucial, is that of retirement or loss of work and hence, for many, the feeling of the loss of financial independence.

Midlife single women are not only heterosexual. In their unpublished exploratory study of lesbians and aging, Ashfield and Shamai (1987) note that the research that does exist regarding older homosexuals, is concerned primarily with gay males. Their study indicated that while isolation and stigmatization were perceived as a real possibility, aging was perceived to be less stressful than among heterosexual women and was attributed to lesbians' general rejection of the feminine stereotype. Kehoe, in her recent (1988) exploratory study of lesbians over sixty, states that "most manuals, which purport to be guides for women to age gracefully, never mention relationships with other women (sexual or otherwise)...and yet for many women...lesbianism is not primarily a sexual relationship at all, but a much wider female interdependence with broader human satisfactions that transcend mere physical attachment" (p. 1).

Midlife women, regardless of marital status or sexual orientation, are challenged to redefine our lives and goals.

Many of us return to school, change careers, decide to have children, or come to terms with childlessness. Some of us become caregivers to aging parents or relatives or face the deaths of our parents, siblings and friends.

In the early literature, adulthood was seen as a static and undifferentiated span between late adolescence and old age. The major contemporary developmental theories of Erikson, Havighurst, Levinson and Kohlberg (Huyck and Hoyer, 1982) assume that men and women experience life stages and developmental tasks in a similar way. Their research presumes that male experience speaks for both sexes, and that any deviation from the standard, or male norm, presupposes a lack in women.

Current psychological research, although it acknowledges development as a continuous and dynamic process throughout life, has tended to envelop women within the same definitions as men. Scholars such as Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982) and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) are challenging those theories that tend to disregard the impact of sex-role differences in human behavior. Giele (1982) posits a life-span perspective. Rather than using discrete and isolated events to characterize a person in a particular period of life, for example, empty-nest syndrome or menopause, this theory allows for the overlap and consideration of environmental influences, social relationships, and biological functioning. Lachman (1984) also adheres to this approach and cites the goals of life-span research as the examination of the nature and course of

development, as well as the search for antecedents and consequences of developmental change. She notes that a basic assumption of a life-span view is that development occurs through life.

Sociological research regarding aging has two major foci; micro and macro-level concerns (Gee and Kimball, 1987). The micro-level focusses on the individual and the individual's social relationships; while the macro-level deals with the structural components of society and their interrelationships. Gee and Kimball state that two competing theoretical perspectives -- the normative and the interpretive -- address both micro and macro issues. A normative perspective of aging, characterized for example, by what is known as structural-functionalism, would focus on themes of social order and the mechanisms of social control. That is, individuals, whose behavior is regulated by various societal rules, cooperate to create social order or equilibrium within society. With regard to aging, theories based on this assumption would, according to Gee and Kimball, "view the loss of roles in later life (particularly the work role) as important for the maintenance of the equilibrium of the wider society" (p. 6). The interpretive perspective, on the other hand, concerns itself with a more political focus in which conflict is the major assumption. "It focusses upon such issues as the causes of poverty among the elderly population, the role of values (ideology) in legitimizing age-related poverty, and the role of pension funds

as a source of capital (power) for governments, and corporations" (p. 7).

Gee and Kimball present a current synthesis of the sociological and psychological Canadian research on women and aging. Further, the authors critically evaluate the research literature on theoretical and/or methodological grounds and seek to identify gaps and suggest directions for further research. They acknowledge the complexity of aging, but note the degree to which it is tied to women's issues. "At the level of the individual, women are more likely than men to reach old age, particularly extreme old age. At the societal level, the aged population is increasingly composed of women and will become even more so in future years" (p. ix). Gee and Kimball, a sociologist and psychologist respectively, state that:

It is important to realize that the perspective or perspectives we use to examine women and aging are important not only for theory development and the interpretation of data, but also in the formation of political views and social policy (p.7).

Other scholars are taking a critical look at aging through an analysis of what they term the political economy of aging (Minkler and Estes, 1984). This perspective rejects the notion that aging or any other social problem, "can be viewed and understood in isolation from the larger political, social, and economic issues..."(p.10), and views age, gender and class as neglected variables within much of the gerontological research. Wigdor and Foot (1989) write that Canada will have to implement

plans now, regarding its aging population. They argue that issues demanding immediate attention relate to the labor market, pension and income maintenance, education, health care, housing and social services.

While each of these perspectives can be applied to the study of both men and women within the context of aging, it is the feminist perspective, against the background of the political economy of aging, that informs this research on never-married, childless midlife women. Feminist research emphasizes the subjective experiences of women. With regard to subjective experiences of aging, Garner and Mercer (1989) remark that the unique situation of older women is not just the result of growing older. "It is the result of invasive and historical socioeconomic and gender stratification in societies" (p.7). Gee and Kimball, in their discussion on feminism and aging, note:

A feminist perspective begins with the idea that the status and position of older women is not universal, but varies with the wider social, economic, and cultural context (p.10).

Gender and Aging

Gerontology is the study of aging, and according to Novak (1988), it has two goals. Scholars and researchers work to produce accurate knowledge about aging which is then applied by professionals in their relationships with clients. Research, he says, can help governments, social services agencies and professionals, to plan better programs for the elderly. In

addition, argues Novak, "gerontology in Canada has grown quickly in the last few years, but more research on aging needs to be done" (p. 15). While Novak points out that gerontological research will shape policy and begin to change people's attitudes toward aging, his work makes few references to women and aging, or to unattached aging women.

Census data (Statistics Canada, 1986) indicate that there are close to 13 million women in Canada. Of these, more than 2.5 million are between the ages of 40 and 59. Almost one-quarter million in that age group are single, widowed or divorced. The number of never-married women between the ages of 40 and 59 in Canada is just short of 162 thousand (161,940). Of the more than 300 thousand women between 40 and 59 in British Columbia, slightly more than 13 thousand are never-married. (No projections into the year 2000 were available).

Reinharz (1986) notes that what feminism and gerontology have in common is an attempt to create social consciousness, social theory and social policy which will improve the life chances of a specific group. Feminist theorists have long recognized that women represent a highly diversified group with cross-cutting allegiances to work, family, race, class, religion, ethnic group, age group and more. As Zones, Estes and Binney (1987) note, the current process of population aging in the United States (and Canada) is historically unique and has important qualitative (as distinct from quantitative) features that will be important in developing policy.

Social characteristics in old age are a product of social experience throughout life. That cumulative set of circumstances determines not only the likelihood of surviving to very old age, but the quality of life once those years are reached. The situation of very old women now and in the future is, and will be, shaped by life chances and opportunities that have been conditioned by their gender, socio-economic and racial/ethnic status over their entire life course. The explanation of their predicament lies in societal expectations and roles in the home and family, their location in the labour market, and their treatment through public policies, all of which must be examined in a socio-historical context... Social policy for the aging in general reflects the major structural divisions in society -- that is, in preserving in old age those social arrangements and inequities that are formed prior to old age. These conditions and the added impact of very old age and one's fate (or fortunes) with regard to health, survival and social support in the aggregate, constitute the challenge for social policy (p.282).

One of the major social indicators discussed in their work is income; and certainly, work and income was a primary theme discussed by never-married midlife women in the twelve interviews undertaken for this research. Markson (1983) comments that "cross-cultural studies have indicated that except through witchcraft, older women seldom held formal power or prestige in pre-industrial societies because they had little or no actual power over goods and resources" (p. 2). Today as well, women's economic status is of crucial importance (Gee and Kimball, 1987; King and Marvel, 1982; Simon, 1988; Warlick, 1983; Zones et al, 1987) since poverty is by far the most critical problem facing

older women. For divorced, separated or widowed older women, the cumulative effects of wage discrimination, occupational segregation, unpaid labor in the home, and interrupted workforce participation, coupled with their survivorship, place these women in a precarious position throughout old age (Zones et al, 1987). Long and Porter (1984), in discussing the economic future of midlife women, agree:

Midlife women are a heterogeneous group, exhibiting varying degrees of economic viability and vulnerability. Although they represent a wide range in educational attainment, labor force experience, occupational prestige, marital and family status, and health, they share the need to achieve economic security. For most women, economic security in the latter half of the life-span is often uncertain...A sound economic future can be obtained through a well-paying job with ample benefits and a pension plan (p. 150).

Notwithstanding the numbers of unattached female elderly living below the poverty line, Russell (1987) states that most discussions of aging tend to adopt a genderless view of the process, and that disadvantages associated with aging appear to be disproportionately the problems of women. It is ironic then, that despite the growth of research being undertaken in the area of women and aging, and women in midlife, there appears to be scant literature specific to women termed never-married (or ever-single) and childless. Indeed, a review of women's studies journals, policy journals, social work and sociology journals, reveal dearth of research concerning this group. Professionals,

including social workers in practice, administrative and academic positions, may be unaware of their biases toward women which render intervention at micro and macro levels ineffective. Gittins (1985) states that it is:

...important to consider how certain ideals and ideologies can be, and have been, imposed on people through the exercise of, among other things, religion, education, political power and social policy. Ideologies are not just something 'in the air', but can influence and determine the ways in which laws are formulated and in turn implemented (p. 3).

In addition to the fact that professional stereotyping of female clients has damaging repercussions, is the startling Canadian statistic that indicates that 31 percent of women over the age of 65 live below the poverty line. According to the National Council of Welfare (1984), women account for 33.1 per of low-income unattached elderly and "at last count there were approximately 337,000 unattached women over 65 and below the poverty line -- four times the 85,000 poor unattached aged men" (p. 64).

The implications of these statistics are enormous and reflect the ongoing subordination of women through ageism and sexism at every level of society. As mentioned earlier, this current study was curious to discover if never-married, childless midlife women were aware of this possible future.

Roebuck (1983) argues that it is essential that all aspects of female aging be studied more closely. She writes:

...if a valid theory of aging is to be developed we must have more studies of how women age and of their experiences with old age, and these studies must be freed from traditional assumptions and equations about female and male experiences. Such studies need to recognize, for example, that twentieth-century changes in marriage, divorce, childbearing and childrearing patterns have modified this even more. In addition, it must be recognized that by no means all women go through even a modified family cycle (p. 261).

Policy toward the elderly, particularly elderly women, is seen as a process of social construction linked to broad historical and contemporary social structural issues (Zones, Estes and Binney, 1987). More older women live alone now as evidenced in this study as well. The trend will no doubt continue and raise new policy issues such as the probable need for formal social supports for some elderly. Long and Porter (1984) argue that policy needs to respond to diverse needs of subpopulations and that an overemphasis on a woman's family roles has led to the characterization of midlife as a time of loss and diminishment for her. Too little research has been undertaken on women and employment, or the questions of how women's roles affect their economic viability at midlife and old age. Long and Porter note that occupational and marital careers are determinants of women's economic situation:

Many women now in midlife will face poverty in old age, given their current employment and marital history and the existing public programs available to them (p. 110).

Interestingly however, they write that a woman who chooses to work, to the exclusion of family roles, is still treated as a "denatured female." This notion of deviancy was felt by some women in the study, but did not appear to be linked to the fact that they worked, as much as to their never-married status.

In an international overview of women and aging, Garner and Mercer (1989) note that "trends in marital status...are integral components in the analysis of older women because the role of family is intimately linked to her social, economic and emotional well-being" (p. 19). They state that current trends, including an increase in the number of unmarried persons who live together, delay in first marriages and childbearing, more childlessness, greater work force participation by women, and a somewhat greater tolerance of sexual expression and life styles such as homosexuality, may signal changes in the lives of future older women.

What these and other researchers are concluding is that while old women today are more likely to live longer, to be poor and alone, to be less well educated and at risk of serious health problems, future cohorts may:

...be better educated, more likely to have worked outside the home, more likely to have managed their own finances, and to have interests outside the home. Hopefully women of all ages will continue to learn how to be better friends and to engage in even more effective networking. These changes ought to translate to more independence, more control over one's life, and a greater sense of self. Will this occur? (Garner and Mercer, 1989, p. 43).

This current study begins to answer questions regarding the perceptions of the future of never-married heterosexual and lesbian women who are now in midlife. An overview of recent history presented in the following chapter, provides a context in which to understand women who, for whatever reason, have chosen to remain outside the mainstream.

CHAPTER TWO: Never-Married Women Then and Now

In women's transition from subject to sovereign, there must needs be an era of self-sustained, self-appointed homes, where her freedom and equality shall be unquestioned.

Susan B. Anthony

...liberty is a better husband than love to many of us.

Louisa May Alcott

I believe we are touching on better days, when women will have a genuine, normal life of their own to lead...and will be taught not to feel their destiny manque if they remain single.

Geraldine Jewsbury

How are spinsters defined? Various sources state that a woman still unmarried over 35 is a spinster, while other historians define her as someone over the age of 50 who died celibate (Hufton, 1984). The etymology of spinster is derived from the occupation of "spinner", or one who spins. The Oxford English dictionary notes that the word spinster was not used to denote marital status until the second decade of the seventeenth century. Hufton mentions that in "parlance and in literature...the word came to connote an ageing woman and implied certain pejorative attributes -- such as narrowness of spirit and a tendency to gossip over teacups". She cites the growing numbers of upper-class spinsters in the eighteenth century, for the negativity expressed toward this group.

However, she says:

...when we consider the degree to which these women had to construct lifestyles for themselves and were often pushed into circumstances hardly consonant with their birth and when we note the struggles of working class women who had to find some means of support in a hostile world, then we should be considering how one changes the meaning of language. In my view at least, the definition of the word spinster should include some heroic attributes to convey the sense of someone who struggled against odds, and social disapprobation and yet survived and in some cases made the survival of subsequent generations easier (p. 374).

Then, as is often the case today, the notion of independent women seems difficult for society to comprehend. Nuns are still referred to as "brides of Christ"; healers/witches could not be allowed their own power without being said to be in league with the devil; formerly the notion of passionate female friendships was not questioned because it was not believed that women were sexual beings (Faderman, 1981). Today, women without men are pitied; often they are called lesbians, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The reasons women do not marry are complex (Raymond, 1986; Vicinus, 1985; Chambers-Schiller, 1984; Hufton, 1984). Authors describing spinsterhood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cite several social and cultural factors: the ratio of men to women varies during some periods; the economy; the costs of supporting a family. Women in the Victorian texts voiced their own reasons, such as the need to caretake families or the

felt obligation to contribute to the family economy. Others saw themselves as unmarriageable, while some women expressed fear of sexual intimacy and/or pregnancy and childbirth.

Chambers-Schiller, whose work is based on the writings of postrevolutionary northeastern American women, is interested in the "modern" reasons women rejected marriage. Many middle and upper class women wanted a greater intellectual life and rejected the idea of marrying men they considered their inferiors; others similarly decided that marriage would conflict with their self-development and autonomy; while others felt that their chosen vocations (writing, teaching, nursing) would be thwarted by marriage and motherhood. She quotes from an 1852 publication called The Young Lady's Counsellor: "A single life is not without its advantages while a married one which fails...is the acme of earthly wretchedness."

Victorian scholars, both social historians and demographers, seem unanimous in their conclusion that the number of spinsters is not important; for while they were a persistent minority, what seems to be important is the impact they had societally, particularly during the upheaval of Western philosophy and thought. Historically, the liberal ideas of freedom, individualism, independence and equality of opportunity developed with the bourgeois revolutions in Europe. Liberal ideology is built on the notion that human beings have a capacity to reason and, as a result, have moral worth and political rights. Liberalism is contradictory concerning women

of course, since while theoretically it recognizes individualism, there is no room for women's individualism or liberty. Citizen rights were for men.

The underpinning of liberal thought is patriarchal, not democratic. A patriarch, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means "father or ruler of a family or tribe." Liberalism did not transform the notion of separate public and private spheres in which women tend the hearth and men attend society; consequently, it was clear to women of the time, that liberal thought was intended for men only. Early liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecroft, recognized that women were excluded from citizen rights because of their sexual class.

Spinsters have always challenged patriarchal society. Gittins (1985) in writing about the advent of Protestantism, says that spinsters, widows and abandoned wives formed a substantial minority of the female population. She writes that "being 'outside marriage', and thus outside patriarchal control and authority, made such women threatening...economically, socially and sexually" (p. 41). Raymond concurs: "Women who were not married were abused and feared in an emerging social climate that placed marriage and motherhood at the top of the moral ladder to God" (p. 104). It is ironic that convents, formerly places of power and intellectual and spiritual stimulation, were disbanded and the nuns killed or sent out into the world unprotected (Raymond, 1986) while at the same time, innumerable women were persecuted and executed as witches.

Freeman and Klaus (1984) in their article on the "new spinster" of the nineteenth century, also say she was perceived as a threat to men and the family. Spinsterhood was connected to the increasing disfavor with which marriage was being seen because of economic dependence and a woman's narrow sphere of home and family. It was "...a form of revolt, a conscious choice to remain single, to work toward equality, and to reject the demands, restrictions and inequalities of middle-class marriage" (p. 395). Like the modern American spinster, her British counterpart began to see marriage as an option rather than as a necessity... "I've chosen my life as deliberately as my sisters and brothers have chosen theirs...I want to be a spinster and I want to be a good one" (p. 396).

In her fascinating text entitled Antifeminism in American Thought: An Annotated Bibliography, Cynthia Kinnard (1986) presents summaries pamphlets, books, magazine and periodical articles from the late 1700s to the 1900s, that provide an important glimpse of the debate surrounding such issues as women's rights, family, work, women's bodies, feminism and so on. For example, in a 1913 publication called Outlook, Ethel W. Cartland deplores

...the refusal of women to have children or the tendency to have only one or two. Intellectual and artistic women are singled out for censure, as is the educated woman, because 'with education for women has come also the knowledge of how she may remain childless' (p. 221).

Harper's Weekly in 1915, quotes a Dr. R.C. Brannon as saying that preventing large families has caused "an increase in insanity, tuberculosis, Bright's disease, diabetes and cancer" (p. 222). As summarized by Kinnard, an article entitled "The Redundancy of Spinster Gentlewomen" published in Living Age in 1900 says:

...that because there is a redundancy of women and a decline of marriage, young women are brought into increased competition for men. Those who fail affect an air of independence and indifference to the male sex and become exaggeratedly athletic. Blames... 'an unnatural preponderance of the sheer masculine in her blood.' This 'silly assimilation of male manners and male sports' is more pronounced among less attractive women and leads to 'hardening and roughening the feminine exterior... a strident voice, a self-assertive manner, a brusque and abrupt address of malekind, and a general lapse of attractiveness' (p. 307).

Kinnard notes that advances proposed by the feminists in areas of education, suffrage, dress reform, and economic reform were "opposed, blocked, attacked, and ridiculed."

In reviewing history, the irony is that little substantive change has occurred in attitudes toward independent women as we approach the 1990s. As it was two hundred years ago, the fact that women should have rights beyond the bounds of the patriarchal family, appears to upset proponents of the new right. Neoconservative attitudes and policies, exemplified in the abortion and pro-family debates in the United States and Canada, continue to oppose equal rights for women. In the mid-

to-late 1800s, a debate about women's work raged as it does now in the camps of the new right. According to some historians (Helsing, Sheets and Veeder, 1983) one event raised the "Woman Question" as no other -- the Industrial Revolution. In conflict were forces that drove needy women from home to factory, while at the same time making women at home and in the family the sole preservers of human values which found no place in the modern world. Keeping certain women in the home (middle and upper classes) reinforced low wages and the low status of women's work. The modern world, say Helsing et al. "required apparently irreconcilable social roles for women: their work outside the home and their presence in it" (p. 109).

Society was hotly divided over whether women's place was in the home or the work force. Should factory women, poor spinsters and prostitutes be restored to family life, or could a better place be made for them in the work force? Interestingly, Helsing et al. state that disproportionate attention was paid to the problems of single, unsupported middle-class women and that this attention may have been a deliberate decision by feminists of the period, to avoid the threat to home and family perceived in the employment of married women. Although perhaps refined somewhat, it is ironic to witness this conflict being played out today; for while proponents of the new right (a coalition of religious, economic and political men and women) want to dismantle the welfare state and return women to the home, the capitalist state needs women workers for its low-

paying service jobs. Once women are joined together in the public sphere, they begin to demand an equality that does not exist in the privacy of the patriarchal household.

Freeman and Klaus (1984) remark that new employment opportunities for middle-class women radically altered the lives of late nineteenth century spinsters. Those who had some education moved from being governesses to such occupations as educators, nurses, or settlement house workers. The authors suggest that since studies show that the salaries of working women were very low, it may have been the independent lifestyle that was relished by spinsters.

In her article, Hufton notes that demographers studying the Victorian period tend not to be class specific, and that "definitive spinsterhood is viewed as an attribute dependent upon economic factors" (p.358). Consistent with other authors, she notes that female wages were not calculated to allow independent living.

In the course of my reading I was struck by the profound similarities between housing problems for Victorian and contemporary spinsters. Hufton describes what she calls "spinster clustering," or the "grouping together of women to rent some kind of accommodation where they could share costs of heating and lighting and the time spent at market, in food preparation, fetching wood and water, or picking up and delivering work" (p. 361). She details situations in eighteenth century Britain and France among industrial workers, spinners,

lace makers and so on. A spinster daughter might live with a widowed parent, or with brothers or sisters for a time; however, if she left the home to work in a village or town, she often lived with other unmarried women.

Middle-class spinsters were often provided with some income from property or business when parents or other relatives died. They were usually the kin-keepers within their own extended families and were often connected with their village churches in doing good works. More well-to-do women often lived together or were able to maintain rooms of their own. These situations parallel the modern "spinster clustering" evidenced in non-profit cooperative housing, women owning single homes or duplexes together, and experimenting with rural communal enterprises that include both living and working spaces. As is noted in Chapter Five however, most of the women in this study tended to live alone in rental apartments or suites.

In her accounts of nuns and of Chinese marriage resisters, Raymond (1986) makes the point that:

The historian or other interpreter, by gazing backward into the historical landscape, has been so accustomed to using the canons of hetero-relational scholarship that often good feminist scholars take them for granted in their work...For example, scholars will overlook the independent causality of women's choice to live, work and be with each other, in favor of scarcity or fear of men. Or, at best, Gyn/affective groups are seen as exceptional women, without past and without future. Gyn/affective history is treated not as "historical" but as "sheer occurrence," presumably springing from nowhere and having nowhere to go (p.147).

My interviews with contemporary spinsters support the historical texts in the similarities that exist for women across time. Comparable attitudes toward unmarried women still exist. Women outside marriage who work to support themselves continue to struggle with wage disparities, lack of education, often unaffordable and/or unavailable housing, threats to their safety, the possibility of having to caretake aging parents, fears of growing old alone, and additionally, homophobia if they are lesbian. On the other hand, as with Victorian spinsters who joyously rebelled against marriage and wholeheartedly embraced their autonomy, their contemporary sisters in this study, talk about the challenges they face.

Lovell (1978) writes that "singleness is known and understood as the antithesis of marriage. As such, it is commonly thought of as an unnatural status and as a manifestation of cultural incompetence. Traditionally, sociologists and lay members alike have considered singleness to be a form of deviance" (p.23). Stein (1981), in his discussion of single life, supports that fact and notes that the "never-married person has been consistently treated as a member of an insignificant and deviant group, worthy of study only for its departure from the normal married state" (p. 7). Braito and Anderson (1981) argue that:

...given the fact that of the over sixty-five population 8 percent are never-married, it is important to understand this population when establishing social policy. The never-married population is diverse and it is important to determine what their current lifestyles, mental health, happiness, concerns and problems are (p. 327).

The never-married should be focussed upon as a legitimate research concern if adequate policy is to be developed and implemented for this growing population. In their discussion of the ever-single elderly, Braito and Anderson (1983) write:

We have no knowledge of current ever-single elderly women to determine how they have coped with living in a deviant status. We have no baseline information on which to gauge the changes that will occur over time as social norms change. We have little idea how they differ from married, widowed or divorced elderly women.

People in the ever-single marital status only recently have been studied as a separate focus. Most often they have been included in the single group that also includes separated, divorced and widowed...Our knowledge of the ever-single person over 30, who has moved out of the so-called appropriate age at which most men and women marry, is limited...For theory development and application, the need for investigating the implications of marital status becomes important (p. 195-196).

A work that provides the most comprehensive examination of never-married elderly women is Barbara Simon's Never Married Women (1987). Simon explores the lives of 50 American women between the ages of 66 and 101 years of age. A similar, but much smaller, Canadian study was undertaken by M.F. O'Brien (1985). O'Brien conducted indepth interviews with 15 never-married women in Prince Edward Island who were more than 80 years old. There appear to be no studies of never-married midlife women. Certainly however, comparisons can be made along the continuum from mid-life to old age in light of two specific social criteria -- being old and being female.

In her study, Dr. Mary O'Brien (1985) asks why a research question should focus on a segment of society that presumably has passed the stage of life where women's issues are important? And, why single women? She answers that these women are found in large numbers among the client populations of service providers and policy-makers for society, and that two-thirds of women over 65 are living below the poverty line in Canada.

As more and more women live into their 80's and 90's, it becomes increasingly important that their experience of the aging process and old age be better understood for the sake of correcting stereotypes and setting forth models of successful aging (p. 3).

Simon's (1987) study asks why higher percentages of American women are remaining single, and points to the projected tide of never marrying among contemporary women that heightens the importance of investigating the experience of women who chose single life at a much earlier points in this century. As with O'Brien's study, and my current research on mid-life never-married women, issues of work and income are crucial.

When research has been done, never-married women are studied in counter-point to the married, widowed or divorced. In an interesting summary of her work using data from the Bonn Longitudinal Study on Aging, Insa Fooker (1985) compared women of differing marital status over time. (The Bonn Longitudinal Study on Aging began in 1965/66 and followed two cohorts of originally 221 women and men, who were born between 1890-1905,

up until 1976/77).

Her study selected a small number of women (39) and found evidence of variability among old-aged women as well as of developmental growth-oriented change. One interesting finding is that while structural variables have a profound impact on older women, Fookien discovered the impact of women's attitudes toward the future -- a positive attitude appeared to be indicative of a successful pattern of aging.

Echoing research which maintains that there is no such thing as a typical old woman (King and Marvel, 1984; Simon, 1988; O'Brien, 1985), Fookien's research veered from studies in which women in old age may seem similar to one another only if compared with male contemporaries. Her study was qualitative. She notes that demands on the size of the sample, sampling procedures, and generalizability of the results, had to be reduced. What remained, she found, had to be regarded as a small and selective sample, but one that exhibited the advantage of longitudinally obtained data. Her primary variable was marital status.

...there is reason to believe that the manifestation of a given marital status...refers to quite different experiences of one's life situation. Skimming through some gerontological literature, one might get the opinion that the situation of married women is a taken-for-granted norm of female existence in old age, whereas so-called single women are looked upon as a deviant minority...Factually the reverse is true: Being married in old age is an exceptional state for women, while being single is the common thing (p.82).

Braitto and Anderson (1983) comment that current never marrieds "can inform us of the factors associated with being able to survive when the normative marriage net is circumvented" (p. 217). If relevant policy for this population is to be developed, it will be necessary to undertake longitudinal research as well as direct inquiry into lifestyles.

What is noteworthy, is that spinsters exist and have existed throughout history. They are a persistent minority who need to be heard. This research will, I hope, through the voices of the contemporary single women, both lesbian and heterosexual, add an important piece to the fragmented picture of women.

One overarching theme of concern to the women interviewed for this current study, as well as for women in the Simon and O'Brien studies, was the importance of work and income to their attitudes on growing older. Work and income are crucial to independence. To provide a link to the empirical sections of the paper, the following chapter will examine some of the factors for women's income "insecurity."

CHAPTER THREE: Never-Married Women and the Labor Market

Occupation segregation is unlikely to disappear or even lessen appreciably unless major revisions occur in our ideology of gender and the division of labor between the sexes...Ultimately, job segregation is just a part of the generally separate (and unequal) lives that women and men in our society lead, and, unless the overall separateness is ended, the separateness within the occupational system is unlikely to end either (Oppenheim Mason, 1984:169).

In 1970, members of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada tabled 167 recommendations in an exhaustive study that was the culmination of a mandate by government "to inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada and to recommend what steps might be taken by the federal government to ensure for women, equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian Society" (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1983). In the twenty years since the report, it is sobering to reflect on the relatively few real gains made by women.

Probably nowhere is the devalued status of women illustrated so vividly as it is in the labor force, and within the Canadian economy. Women are generally low paid, segregated into dead-end jobs with no benefits and, even if they have an education, usually will earn less than a man in a comparable position. If they are single, divorced, separated or widowed, it is likely

that they (and their children) will live in poverty despite income transfers at some time in their lives.

Labor force statistics and labor economists focus on the ever-increasing labor force participation of married women with children, and cite this family/work attachment as a primary reason for the wage differential between men and women. Never-married women in the labor force however, have work lives which not been interrupted by marriage and/or children, yet, as is illustrated, their wages, benefits and opportunities for training and promotion often fall below the standards of their male counterparts.

Income Distribution

Gunderson (1983) suggests that issues of income distribution have been neglected by both economists and policy makers. Inequitable distribution in the market appears to be a given and therefore:

... the focus is on redistribution policies within a market economy, rather than on the more fundamental question pertaining to social justice or the ethics of how the basic distribution of income itself becomes established through all of our social institutions (viii).

Gunderson's statement is pivotal. A basic share of income does not accrue to women; and until recent limited legislative amendments such as pay equity provisions and affirmative action programs were implemented in certain sectors, lip service was

paid to the inequity.

In his discussion of income distribution in Canada, Ross (1980) notes that between 1951 and 1978, the bottom 20 percent of Canadian family units habitually received approximately four percent of total Canadian income, and the top 20 percent received approximately 42 percent. Ross adds that women in each quintile received an income between one-half and one-third that of their male counterparts, and that this has been stable since 1951 (p. 85).

Various factors influence income distribution (Ross, 1980). The first is that many income recipients possess different characteristics and opportunities; secondly, there is the influence of government tax and social security programs; and finally, the influence of earnings differentials. There are other characteristics such as age, social class, ethnicity, race and region which also affect income disparity; for women, it would seem obvious that the inequities in personal income are due to income differences associated with sex. Economists, particularly those of the neoclassical school however, do not believe that sex discrimination is a factor (Block and Walker, 1982).

The Issue of Gender within the Work Force

The historic exclusion of women from the public worlds of business, finance, economics and politics means even less is known about how women live and work, and the resulting invisibility is reflected in public policies and legislation. The world of women - the private world of the home, the family, community, and limited areas of the labour force -- if seen at all, is seen as peripheral to those who plot Canada's economic future (Women and the Economy Committee, 1986).

The science of economics is "simply a system of distribution of the work, resources, and wealth of a society. It is the sum total of all divisions regarding what work is to be done, who will do that work, and who will benefit from it, and the allocation of capital, resources and wealth" (p. 13). As Women and the Economy Committee (1986) point out, "economics" in its original Greek is oikonomia and refers to the management of the household. The terminology of economics, such as "marketplace," sounds homey and harmless, but rather than addressing the household, it has more often focussed on business and government.

An underlying issue in a discussion of women's labor force participation is the prevalence of what Abramovitz (1988) terms the ideology of the "family ethic." The family ethic accepts women's economic dependence on men, sex segregation in the market place, a gender division of society and in general, supports the conditions that underpin female subordination in both the public and private spheres. This ethic flies in the

face of the fact that according to Statistics Canada, the ranks of women in Canada's work force are increasing dramatically while men's participation is declining ("Women's Rush to Work Force," 1988).

According to the Globe and Mail article, Statistics Canada 1986 census figures show that the increasing number of women at work accounted for 94 percent of Canada's employment growth between 1981 and 1986. In addition, the percentage of Canadian working-age women choosing to participate in the labor force rose to 55.9 percent in 1986, from 51.8 percent in 1981. The article notes that more women with children are going out to work, boosting their participation rate in the labor force to 61.2 percent from 52.1 percent.

Even greater increases were shown in this category among married women with children under six years of age. Their participation rate went to 62.1 percent in 1986 from 49.5 percent in 1981. According to Statistics Canada, the participation rate of single (never-married) women aged 45 to 64 is 61.7 percent. Single women aged 45 to 54 working full-time for a full year, earned approximately \$25,668 while women aged 55 and older earned \$22,522. This is consistent with findings of the twelve interviews with never-married women, half of whom were earning \$25,000 or less despite working from their teen years.

Abramovitz suggests that the fact that the family ethic is under attack has engendered two mainstream policy responses: a move to restore the family ethic, and a move to reformulate it.

The "pro-family" platform of the New Right, the Moral Majority...the rise of religious fundamentalism, the moralistic response to AIDS, the media spotlight on research telling single women over thirty that marriage is out of their reach, and the amount of media attention given to professional women who have interrupted their careers to return home are just a few of the better known attempts to focus women exclusively on marriage and family rather than work and other independent pursuits (p. 8).

A more liberal response, on the other hand, seeks to reform the family ethic so that women can manage both home and work. "Supermom" will handle each of her roles with minimal pressure with the help of pay equity, daycare, flextime and so on. Where is "superdad"? While some of the terms of the family ethic are undergoing change to match new social and economic trends, says Abramovitz, the core of the ethic -- a gender division of labor that assigns only women to caretaking roles in the home -- does not appear to be in serious jeopardy. This division of labor is dismissed almost as a given in both neoclassical and Marxist theory. Abramovitz points out for example, that Marxist analysis "did not include the relationship of women's domestic labor to capitalist production, nor did it define the reproductive sphere as a potential source of women's oppression" (p.27).

Joshi's (1986) analysis suggests that while the assumption of domestic responsibilities greatly hampers a woman's earnings,

the major disruption of women's employment is motherhood. She notes that there is a prevailing assumption that "any female may have to take on a domestic responsibility, which also naturally would interfere with her work performance" (p.262). This attitude is often reflected in the low educational, occupational and wage expectations of women who may not even leave the labor force for domestic reasons.

Knights and Willmott (1986) note that conventional studies of work and employment have remained oblivious to any problems concerning gender distinctions within the labor process. They state that the impact of radical feminism has represented a fundamental challenge to conservatism's complacency regarding the role of women in modern culture.

In combination...the historical expansion of women's employment, the renewed and uncompromising vigour of feminist discourse, and the limited assistance of anti-discrimination legislation give a tremendous impetus to theory and practice concerned with reconstructing gender relations both in and out of work (p. 2).

Labor Force Participation

The labor force consists of persons who are working or looking for work (Statistics Canada, 1986). Gunderson (1980) describes the basic theory of labor force participation as one that is usually tested with data on married women since they are assumed to have considerable flexibility to respond to the determinants

of labor force participation. When dramatic labor force participation rates are highlighted for example, it is generally in regard to the burgeoning participation of married women with children.

While this is extremely important in the overall discussion of women's participation rates, little information is highlighted on those women, termed single/never-married by Statistics Canada, who have been in the labor force their entire lives, or who have work lives comparable to men. As well, some married women with children, or single mothers, have always been attached to the labor force -- domestic workers for example. The white, middle class wife and mother, a statistical phenomenon, is seen as a relatively new addition to the labor force. Women have always worked and historically, the wage differential has existed since men and women first earned wages. Day (1987) for example, writes that a list of pay scales for harvesters from 1440 shows women earning less than men for the same work.

In her discussion of occupational segregation in the United States, Roos (1985) notes:

On the whole, they [the data] suggest that never-married women are more like men in their labor-force behavior, in the sense that they are more likely than married women to participate in the labor force, and to work full time when they are employed. At the same time, however, despite their greater labor-force commitment, never-married women are concentrated in very different jobs from those in which men are employed, working in clerical jobs and the female professions rather than in higher-paying male employment....The female professions do not differ very much in

prestige, or average pay, from the kinds of jobs in which married women are employed--clerical, sales, and service work. Thus, although marital responsibilities affect the kinds of jobs in which women work, these differences are not large and for the most part do not translate into differences in prestige or wage rate (p. 154).

Roos's comments apply to half the participants in this study; most of whom were in traditional female jobs and careers. For three of the twelve however, long-term employment, some prestige and reasonable income, was accorded their positions -- one was a school principal, one a respected journalist and another a labor union executive.

Abramovitz (1988) notes that policies and programs have tended over the years, to reward women whose lives include marriage, motherhood and homemaking but to penalize women who did not, or could not choose that path. This group, which includes single mothers as well as never-married women, could not expect protection, and often faced social stigma and economic insecurity.

As a dominant social norm the family ethic articulates the terms of women's work and family roles. According to its rules, proper women marry and have children while being supported by and subordinated to a male breadwinner. Even through major transformations in the political economy, the family ethic has persisted. In colonial America for example, women's role in the home was expected to be an economically productive one. Since the Industrial Revolution however, the family ethic geared the female homemaker's duties toward consuming (rather than

producing), maintaining the health and well-being of family members, socializing children to their proper adult roles, caring for the sick and aged, and overseeing the maintenance of the household (p. 3).

Perhaps one of the most profound changes to women's labor force participation in modern times was during what Hewlett (1986) calls the "aberrant" 1950s -- the decade during which the women in this study were either in their teens or twenties. Up until the late 1940s, both single and married women had been increasing their labor force participation at an unprecedented rate. Between 1942 and 1945, while 14 million American men were in the armed services, an additional five million women workers were employed. They worked at formerly male jobs in addition to traditionally female roles, and government policy encouraged their new work roles by contributing for example, to community child care facilities.

Just as its policies supported women during the war, the postwar years saw economic strategy begin to change in preparation for returning service men. Despite the fact that the economy was booming, women were now encouraged to leave their wartime jobs and return home to help restore a sense of security to the nation.

Interestingly, many women did not want to return home. Many were fired if they did not quit, and in a final move to force them home, government closed the child care centres. Women were lured home through government subsidies to their husbands. The

GI Bill provided free education to married men, while the Highway Act built roads and subsidized homes in what became known as the suburbs.

The trademarks of the period -- an extended baby boom, a glorification of domesticity, a turning against careers for women, an impressive elaboration of the maternal role--all run counter to modern values and contradict previously existing trends (p. 232).

Regardless of marital status, or the length of time spent in the labor force, the wage gap between men and women exists. Needless to say, various theories from neoclassical to Marxist, purport to be able to account for this disparity. Neoclassical economic theory for example, admits the possibility of economic discrimination but views it as a temporary phenomenon (Schmid, 1984; Hutner, 1986). It is seen as a paradox or deviation from the rule in that two, equally productive people, receive the same wages independent of sex, age or race. When women point to their low average full-time earnings however, they are told that they earn less because their work is worth less (Hutner, 1986).

The workings of the marketplace will tend to eliminate discrimination because competing, profit-seeking employers will bid against each other for the cheap, underpaid labor and will up its price to the level of what it's worth. And workers will move to the jobs that reward them best for their ability and productivity (p. 9).

Given that women have been in the labor force for generations, the invisible hand of the market has been slow to eliminate discrimination against them.

How are women discriminated against and how is this discrimination explained? Discrimination is an enormous and complex topic even when specifically related to labor force economics. As Gunderson (1980) notes, economics has a great deal to say about discrimination which can occur against various groups and within various markets. He says that "the economic analysis of discrimination provides a good application for many of the basic principles of labour market economics. In addition it indicates the limitations of some of these tools in an area where non-economic factors may play a crucial role" (p. 344).

Various reasons and sources are cited for sex discrimination in the labor market (Gunderson, 1980; Schmid, 1984). Economists suggest that it exists because males prefer to work with males; or, that erroneous information is provided by women and about women about their own worth in the market; statistical information which judges individual women on the performance of some women; and finally, so that men may protect their own higher paying jobs. The sources of discrimination are named as employers, male co-workers and consumers.

It is evident from Gunderson (1980, 1983) that the theories of supply and demand are important in the discussion of sex discrimination in the labor market. The demand for female labor for example, is reduced relative to the demand for equally

productive male labor. On the other hand, women tend to be segregated into female-ghetto jobs that lower their marginal productivity and their wages. As Culyer (1980) notes in his discussion about the law of supply, owners want the highest profits possible; thus they will obviously maximize profit by hiring from the secondary or peripheral market which is occupied predominantly by low-waged women and minorities.

A further rationale for wage differentials is outlined in a non-competitive theory of discrimination (Gunderson, 1980; Schmid, 1984). Here, discrimination leads to a segregation of males and females, not wage differentials. Firms not adverse to hiring women (at lower wages) would increase their profits. The demand for women would boost wages until the male-female wage differential was eliminated. Needless to say, despite the neatness of the theory, wage differentials do persist and discrimination does not seem to have declined.

In her research into Canadian incomes, Rosenfeld (1980) also discusses competition theory and the split labor market where the focus is not on individual characteristics which differ by sex, but on competition between men and women in the labor market and on differences by sex in group bargaining strength. She notes that in a split labor market, there is potentially unequal pay for equal work. The trouble is, that while there is sex segregation, it is difficult to say whether there is unequal pay for equal work, since it is difficult to find men and women in the same job. She says:

Although the split labor market approach potentially accounts for differences in levels of income, it does not account for differences in careers except to the extent that the jobs left open to the lower paid group are those without promotion potential.

Rosenfeld's research showed that both in the United States and Canada, men and women "differ in their occupational and industrial location at any time, in the income they receive, and in their patterns of advancement over their work lives" (p.393). According to Boyd and Humphreys (1980) if income differs, it is due to compositional differences between groups with respect to their education and other income-relevant characteristics. Human capital theory attempts to define productivity in this way-- wage differentials exist because it is assumed men and women use their human capital differently. Gunderson (1980) points out that women traditionally have a shorter stay in the labor market and therefore it is difficult for them to recoup the costs of their personal human capital investments. If they spend intermittent time in the labor market, their human capital investment depreciates and they tend not to accumulate labor market experience. For these reasons, Gunderson believes that women themselves and the firms that could be their potential employers, are reluctant to invest in female human capital formation that is labor-market oriented. Again, this theory does not seem to account for women who have not had labor market interruptions. Unmarried domestic laborers, factory workers, and clerical workers all seem subject to sex discrimination. Female

university graduates for example, may invest thousands of dollars in their education, yet statistics illustrate (Labour Canada, 1986/87) that they will continue to earn less, and be promoted less often than their male counterparts.

Gunderson (1980) makes certain generalizations on the empirical evidence of Canadian studies to determine how much of the wage differential reflects discrimination.

On average, females tend to earn 50 to 60 percent of what males earn in a year. This adjusted ratio may reflect wage discrimination, the segregation of females into low wage firms, occupations and industries, as well as differences in productivity-related factors such as education, training, experience, and absenteeism and turnover. Differences in these productivity-related factors may reflect unconstrained choices and they may reflect pre-labour market discrimination, perhaps in education institutions or in the household (p. 352).

While Gunderson points out that it is difficult to say which of these factors contributes to the earnings differential, he suggests that:

...discrimination within the labor market probably occurs more in the form of the segregation of females into low wage occupations, industries and establishments, rather than in the form of wage discrimination within the same establishment. In addition, discrimination outside the labour market, in particular within educational institutions and households, may be partly responsible for differences in such factors as the labour market orientation of education and training, or in differences in absenteeism and turnover or continuous work experience (p. 353).

Boyd and Humphreys (1980) confirm Gunderson's conclusions. Basing their analysis on 1972 census data of income attainment by men and women in the 1973 Canadian native-born labor force who were full-time employees, full-time female employees earned 62 percent of the mean income of their male counterparts. However, Boyd and Humphreys note that women's human capital skills were comparable to men's in educational and status attainment. They conclude that female full-time native born paid employees earn less than men "because they do not benefit from their income relevant characteristics in the same way as men do" (p. 406). The reasons for this relate to the impact of women's location in either the core, or the periphery, market. Their study asked if sex differences in income and income attainment processes of native born men and women are conditioned by location in core and periphery labor markets:

The analysis indicates that 1) such men and women are almost equally distributed into the core and into the periphery industrial sectors of the Canadian economy; 2) the income attainment process of male workers in the core does not differ from that of male workers in the periphery, whereas female workers in the core industries receive a higher rate of return for their years in the labour force and education when compared to females in the periphery; 3) differential evaluation of characteristics by sex remains a major source of the lower income of women within labour markets. However, the extent of income discrepancy and the impact of such differential evaluation varies by core-periphery location (p. 410).

Rosenfeld (1980) makes an important point when she says that the ideology that women are wives and mothers, not "workers" persists even when women are employed, and thus makes their labor market behavior easily manipulated. Indeed, Abramovitz (1986,1988) concludes that the notion that women belong at home has historically sanctioned the unequal treatment of women in the market, while the resulting economic insecurity has often forced them back into the home.

Eisenstein (1981) points out an obvious contradiction seemingly overlooked in neoclassical analysis, that despite its rhetoric regarding women's place, capital needs cheap market labor, as well as unpaid domestic labor, to care for those who cannot work and to reproduce the labor force. Women are therefore caught in a double bind which ideologically supports pro-family policies (women at home with no income, unless they are domestic workers in which case they receive less than minimum wage in a generally white household) but which forces them to fill slots in the periphery sector of the labor force. The policies do not seem to include adequate child care facilities.

The 1980s have seen a right-wing backlash against gains for women both economically and socially. Gender inequality is perceived as an immutable and almost divine given, and those who wish to expose the fallacy, such as feminists, are seen to be destroying the structures of society. What neoclassical analysis does not appear to take into account, is the already changing

structure of the family where for example, more Canadians than ever are living outside the traditional two-parent family (Women in Canada: A Statistical Report, 1985). Other significant trends include the fact that people are marrying later and divorcing and remarrying in large numbers; couples are having fewer children or delaying or foregoing childbearing. In husband-wife families, the fertility rate was 1.3 children in 1986 (Statistics Canada, 1987).

How can gender inequality in the labor force be transformed? Researchers and policy makers offer a variety of solutions. Gunderson (1980) notes that the primary foci of public policy have been equal pay legislation, equal employment opportunity legislation, affirmative action, and policies to facilitate female employment and to alter tastes and attitudes (p.358). Rose-Lizée and Dussault (1980) recommend policies that will include equal pay legislation, laws prohibiting discrimination in hiring and promotion, massive improvement in working conditions and wages in firms which hire mainly women, government contributions toward job creation policy and full employment as well as improved minimum wage laws. Their final recommendation is unionization.

From their research, Boyd and Humphreys (1980) believe that the income gap will not be closed by endorsing policies to upgrade women's human capital skills. Data suggest, they say, "that sex disparities in income will attenuate in Canada only when stronger legislation regulating the private sector is

enacted" (p. 411). They support the suggestion that "optimal strategy may well be one of a well-enforced equal opportunity legislation combined with equal pay legislation" (p. 411).

...ameliorative action concerning male-female income inequalities will not only entail the strategies proposed by economists concerning government expenditures in core and periphery industries, but also may require a more active intervention on the part of unions, governments and occupational associations in the establishment and monitoring of equal pay and equal opportunities policies (p. 411).

Concluding her discussion of sex differences in socio-economic achievement, Rosenfeld (1980) concurs with other researchers that "equal pay and equal opportunity legislation be effectively enacted, while acknowledging other important needs of women in Canada such as for child care, better labor organizations, and affirmative action" (p. 393). These policy recommendations cannot be implemented efficiently without, according to Joshi (1986), complementary changes outside the market sphere; these include policies that would enable women to combine parenthood and employment as successfully as most men, as well as fiscal policies that would change the domestic burden within the family.

Gunderson (1980) argues that equal pay and equal opportunity legislation can be seen by some as "policies designed to raise the price of discrimination" through court proceedings and fines. Underlying this fear is the notion that the discrimination of employers, employees and consumers against

women will be enhanced because of the legislation, rather than altering their tastes and attitudes.

My sense of gender inequality as it relates to income redistribution is that it is an enormous issue with no facile solution to be found in legislation alone. The prejudices underlying women's inequality in general, are so complex as to seem ridiculous. If women are invisible in the academic, medical, psychological, social, legal, church, and philosophical arenas, then it is no surprise that they are absent from the socio-economic sphere as well.

Women know that they are poor, that statistically they will outlive their husbands, that more than one-third of them over age 65 will live in poverty, that despite their education they will make less than their male counterparts, that despite media hype about career women, society still expects them to be wives and mothers. Gunderson (1983) says that "neglect of income distribution issues by economists probably reflects the fact that economics itself does not provide the tools to make formal statements about whether one distribution of income is better than another...economists have tended to recommend separating the issues of economic efficiency (resource allocation) from issues of equity (distribution)" (p.3).

Global solutions to the problem are needed, but feminist theorists, social workers, researchers, sociologists, community workers and others committed to changes in inequality have struggled with the issue for generations. It is more than

legislation. It is a matter of rethinking gender relations; recognizing sexism and misogyny and eliminating it from our educational and political systems, from our spirituality and religion, from our notions of family, from our ideas about relationships, from our attitudes about what constitutes "fairness" and equitable distribution. It is about recognizing how various groups within our society are treated and making links for example, between issues of women's economic situation and defence spending. It is about working on all fronts, always. The policy implications then, are never-ending. One issue is clear though, changes are needed in economic decision making. Women's varying perspectives must be included whether or not they be full-time labor force participants.

Although I am aware of not addressing the experiences of women from different racial/ethnic backgrounds and classes, and that one cannot generalize from white, middle-class women, what I have discovered, or had reconfirmed in this chapter, is that regardless of marital status, length of time in the labor force and human capital characteristics, capital's distribution of income to women falls far short of that allocated to men. In their discussion, Long and Porter (1984) note that sex differentials in earnings often attributed to women's intermittent labor force participation, persist in lifetime earnings curves even of women with no intermittency.

When women enter the market, employers seem to be able to rationalize paying them less, often for work in the least stable and most uninteresting jobs, on the grounds that they are secondary earners -- even though they may be single! The idea that women belong in the home has historically sanctioned their unequal treatment in the market place, and has rationalized their exploitation on the job (Abramovitz, 1988).

The following chapters present the empirical study of never-married midlife women, and illustrate the crucial position of income through wages or pensions to each respondent. Income security is the fulcrum on which her experience of aging and of being single is balanced.

CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology

An exploratory study is a beginning. It is a mapping of the territory. It is an exciting first step, and a frustrating realization of where a researcher could go if only... she had more time, more money, or a research team.

An explorer has a sense of where she is going, believes she is carrying the right equipment and has prepared for her journey through discussion with other explorers, and by reading their works.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines explore as: "Inquire into; examine by touch; examine (country) by going through it." The word is rooted in the latin word meaning to flow, and in the French, to search out.

This exploratory study of never-married and childless women in midlife is an inquiry into...and an examination of the "country" inhabited by these often-feared and ridiculed spinsters noted in the Victorian period. Since there is little empirical data available on never-married midlife women (Gee and Kimball, 1987; Baruch and Brooks-Gunn, 1984) an exploratory, qualitative method was chosen whereby women were interviewed using an interview guide approach (Patton, 1983). Patton describes an interview guide as:

...a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. An interview guide is prepared in order to make

sure that basically the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material. The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously and to establish a conversational style -- but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined (p. 200).

In view of the fact that little research has been done regarding the variations among women (Baruch et al, 1983; Gee and Kimball, 1987) one function of the present study was to examine the comparative richness within the sample; that is, comparing never-married women with one another, rather than with or against men or, married midlife women. In addition, within the "comparative richness," I was interested in whether or not these future elderly women would be in the same statistical position as unattached old women today -- living alone in poverty. A further goal, stimulated by both the literature and the interviews with the respondents, was to focus on issues of work and income, so central to a woman's personal autonomy.

I had an idea of the group I wanted to study and a sense that the research would take shape using qualitative methods. In an article in the Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, Lord, Schnarr and Hutchison, (1987) identify several characteristics of qualitative methodologies. These include:

1. Qualitative methods are naturalistic: no attempt is made to manipulate the research setting. This approach increases the participants' level of comfort and strengthens the validity of the study (Patton, 1980). Although the qualitative researcher does not change the setting in any way, he or she does take into account the "systems or environment of which the subject is a part" (Bercovici, 1981, p.133).

2. Qualitative research is holistic: it is based on the premise that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The qualitative researcher seeks to understand the gestalt, the unifying nature of particular settings, events, perceptions or interactions...

3. Qualitative methods acknowledge the subjectivity of human behaviour: (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975); in Denizen's (1982) terms, qualitative methods aim to "particularize" life experiences. People vary and their experiences and perceptions differ. Qualitative research enables this amazing diversity to come alive. The researcher reaches out to people, listens and empathizes in order to understand the context of people's lives (Agar, 1986; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975; Patton, 1980). He or she gathers "personalized" data which emphasize individuality and common human concerns rather than numbers and labelling (p. 36).

The interviews took place between February 1988 and September 1988, and were an attempt to elicit each woman's interpretation and perceptions of her own life and choices. Most sessions lasted from two to four hours. The shortest interview was 1.5 hours with a woman who, although she was interested in participating, was reluctant to answer many of the questions. Because of the qualitative nature of the data, the women's own words are used as often as possible.

Probably the most important aspect of a qualitative approach for this study was that it allowed the voices and experiences of never-married midlife women to describe their own lives. The use of in-depth questions with numerous probes was a way to "hear" the lives of ordinary women; for as theologian Nelle Morton

(1985) notes, women need to "hear each other into speech."

Hearing of this sort is equivalent to empowerment. We empower one another by hearing the other to speech. We empower the disinherited, the outsider, as we are able to hear them name in their own way their own oppression and suffering...Hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures and image a new system. A great ear at the heart of the universe -- at the heart of our common life -- hearing human beings to speech -- to our own speech (p. 128).

Story telling is an ancient ritual among women, one that has been diminished as women's speech and language has lost influence in the broader culture. In telling her story, a woman gives shape to her experience. As hundreds of women tell their stories, the patterns of our commonality and diversity emerge. We feel less isolated. The stories of never-married women are few.

Veevers (1980) in her study of voluntary childlessness within marriage, found that conventionally constructed instruments such as questionnaires, were not "subtle enough to pick up the intricacies and fine points which really differentiated the orientations and attitudes of childless persons from their more traditional counterparts" (p. 177). The initial use of a survey interview for this study seemed similarly inappropriate until there is a more accurate sense of the never-married midlife woman.

An exploratory and qualitative approach allows a feminist research model, one that values the process of the research in

addition to possible conclusions or outcomes. As Charles (1987) writes, this paradigm affects the type of research problem formulated, the kinds of questions asked, the manner in which they are asked, and the understanding of the words shared by these women. Researchers Stanley and Wise (1983) note, that with a feminist perspective, each participant's point of view is perceived as a valid source of knowledge for the researcher. Oakley (1981) describes feminist research as interactive, implying a two-way process where the relationship is essential to the quality of the information.

When we see the term "single," we often associate it with young women or men -- as in the pre-yuppie lifestyle of "swinging single;" or we think, widowed, divorced or separated. Quantitative analysis of marital status gives us indicators and trends. In contrast, a qualitative study, allows the voices behind those numbers to be heard. It provides an opportunity to listen to the perceptions and experiences of never-married women for example. As O'Brien (1985) notes, with this method there is a de-emphasis on "facts" and an emphasis on collecting descriptive data which help the researcher to see the world as the research subjects see it. Qualitative research methods include participant observation, personal documents and open-ended interviewing (Bogdan and Taylor, 1985). This study relied on open-ended interviewing.

The Selection of Participants

The lives of women interviewed for this study reflect the lives of Canadian-born and immigrant women born between 1932 and 1947 and currently living within the boundaries of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (Vancouver and its surrounding municipalities).

Initially, I had hoped to interview as diverse a group as possible -- varying ethnic backgrounds, social classes, able-bodied and disabled, lesbian and heterosexual, native women, and so on. However, as I began discussing the study with friends, professors and professionals, it became clear that attempting to incorporate such diversity among only twelve women, would dilute the exploration.

The sample was not drawn from a particular women's organization or centre; it was non-random and employed both self-selection as well as networking techniques. Notices requesting participants were placed in the Vancouver Sun (the evening daily) and Kinesis (Vancouver Status of Women monthly newspaper). A notice was provided to a large circulation Vancouver community weekly, but they did not print it. A notice was picked up by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women; I posted flyers, spoke to groups about the study, used networking through work, the university community and social circles. Women I interviewed at the beginning of the study, provided me with names of friends they had spoken to who were interested in taking part. In addition, I was interviewed

on a CBC Vancouver morning program about the study, and received several letters from women in small towns throughout British Columbia.

Several married women responded to the notices. No lesbian women responded to the initial call for participants, so a second notice went out inviting never-married lesbians to contact me. Because I decided, given the time limitation of the study, to interview only twelve women, I wanted even this unrepresentative sample to reflect differences in sexual orientation. While heterosexuality is one more assumption placed on women, Raymond (1986) notes that women unconnected to men are often accused of being lesbians. I had concluded all the interviews when I was contacted by a woman who described herself as bisexual. I was not able to meet with her.

In the beginning stages of the research, I was considering a study that would include the broad category of "single" women; that is, never-married, divorced, separated and widowed. As I began to read, it was evident that there were some studies on these other categories of single women and I decided at that point to narrow my research to never-married and childless women. I vacillated regarding what age groups on which to focus and finally chose women between 40 and 60 years of age. I wanted to interview women under 65 who were still considered work-force participants, since the literature indicates that long-term participation supposedly contributes to a woman's financial security in old age.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews based on Patton's (1980) interview guide approach. As Patton writes:

The interview guide simply serves as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure all relevant topics are covered. The interviewer is required to adapt both the wording and the sequence of questions to specific respondents in the context of the actual interview (p.198).

I developed a broad interview schedule (See Appendix A) using a compilation of several schedules (Ashfield and Shamai, 1987; Baruch et al., 1983; Belenky et al. 1986; McCannell, 1988) as well as questions and topic areas indicated by the literature that would be specific to never-married and childless women. These included: reasons for, and perceptions of, never-marrying, how sexual and intimacy needs were met, childlessness, social contacts, views of self, and work and financial issues. These same general categories are evident in the Simon and O'Brien studies mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, I did not discover these studies until I was concluding my own interviews. Simon's work had not been published and I did not uncover references to O'Brien's research until my own work was well underway.

The interview guide was designed to include several major categories that would provide a framework for analysis from the words of the never-married women who were interviewed. Each woman was asked the same series of general questions accompanied

by numerous probes depending on her interest in a particular category. During the first interview, I began with a question about date of birth, and moved immediately to the general category of self. It became clear during the probes and conversation within that category, that self-disclosure was too intrusive at the outset of the interview. In subsequent interviews, questions which may have been considered more intimate were discussed later in the interview after greater rapport had been established. As well, within certain categories such as personal finances and housing, women began to discuss work or family history; and within the education category, finances or self would be discussed. In this sense, the Interview Schedule literally became an interview "guide" to which I could refer during the conversation.

In general, the guide provided categories for analysis such as perceptions regarding midlife and aging, finances and work, and a woman's perception of her never-married status. Categories were chosen because of their links to the literature, particularly for example, the schedule prepared by Belenky et al. (1987) and because of their subjective importance to me in examining the lives of never-married women. Themes within each category were analyzed as they emerged during the line-by-line examination of the the transcripts (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Strauss, 1987).

There is strong internal validity with this approach, since the world view of the participants is the basis for the data. A

major threat to validity of course, may be the interviewer/subject bias. Face validity is good but because of the small sample, external validity overall may be considered weak. What is important is that it is an attempt to fill in the gaps in information and research regarding the lives of never-married women. As well, there was a strong attempt at a non-judgmental, process-oriented, conversational technique. At one stage in the research plan, I was going to include a questionnaire as well as a number of scales: for example, social support, and self-esteem. I decided against these because they seemed too intrusive to be used in conjunction with the personal nature of the interview; as well, it meant the analysis would be more time-consuming.

All interviews were audio-taped with permission of the woman being interviewed. In addition, I wrote notes during the interview about what the respondent was saying, the interview setting and mood. All women but one were interviewed in their homes at a time convenient for them. I agreed to meet one woman in a west side bistro/coffee bar mid-afternoon, and would not recommend it for the distraction. I borrowed a tape recorder and bought inexpensive tapes. For the most part, all interviews are of good quality. Unfortunately during one of the sessions, I was so intrigued with our discussion that I taped over part of the interview. A good reason for taking notes.

Before we began, each woman was asked to read, and then sign, an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Although most women

signed with their full signatures, those who preferred, were asked to initial the document. The consent form outlined the scope and purpose of the research and under whose auspices it was being conducted. Each woman was assured that her participation in the interview would be held in strict confidence. I explained that I was taping in order to ensure the accuracy of her responses, and also so I could review them more thoroughly. I also mentioned that if at any time she was uncomfortable with the interview, we would stop at her request. During several different interviews, the session was stopped to allow the woman to regain her composure after a particularly difficult section. None of the women seemed to be aware of the taping once the interview was underway.

I hired someone to transcribe the first four interviews verbatim. The expense proved too great to continue; consequently the last eight interviews were not transcribed word for word. I drew a margin down one side of a long piece of paper and while I listened to each tape I transcribed the essence of my questions in the narrow margin, and wrote short sentences and key phrases in the wide margin. I listened to each tape a second time and added phrases or words to the pages I had previously written, in order to gain as complete a sense as I could without an entire transcription.

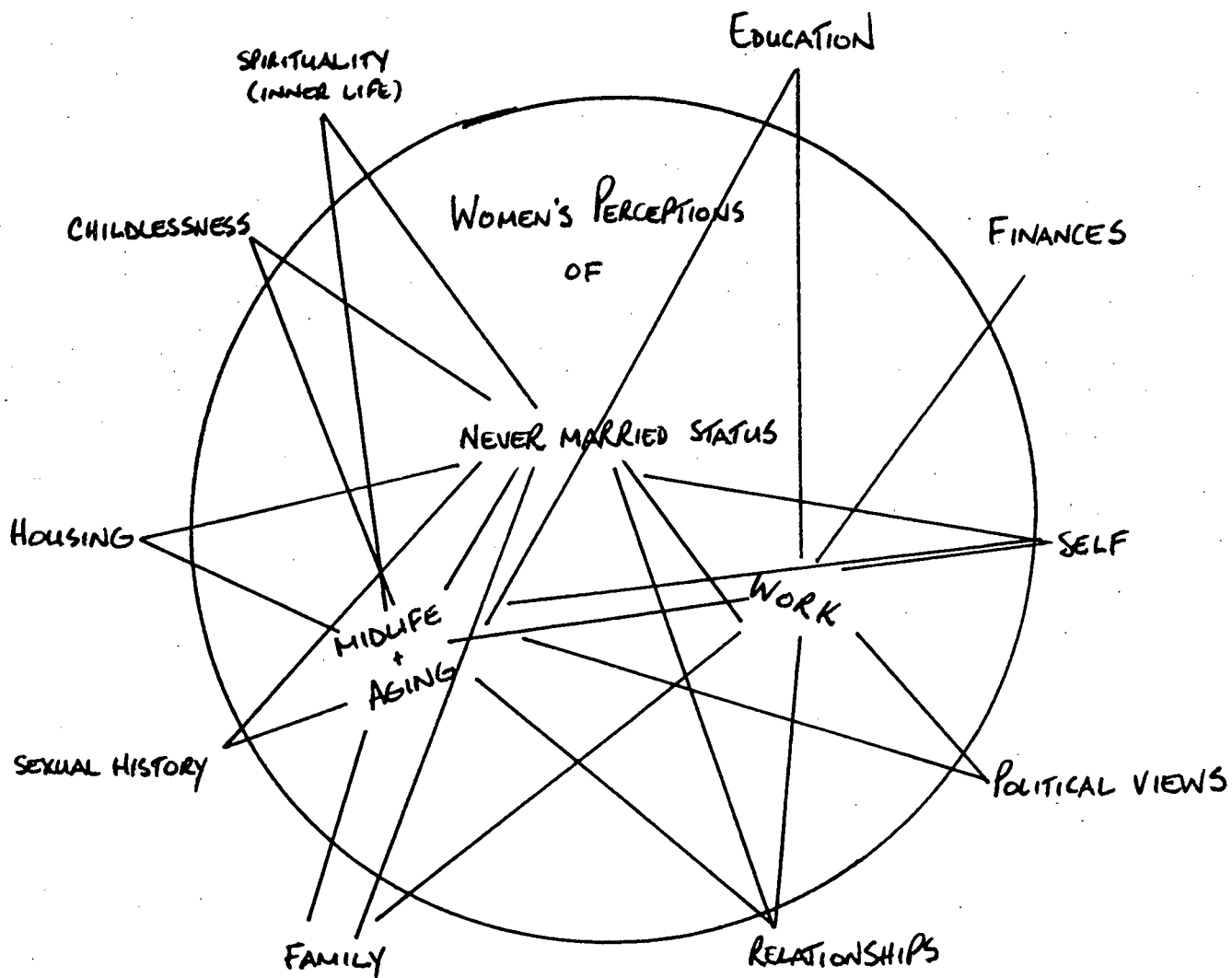
As mentioned previously, major categories used in the data analysis included: reflections on midlife and aging, work life, housing and financial situation, education, family and

relationships, reflections on 'never-married status, self, childlessness, sexual history, politics and spirituality. I reviewed all responses at least six times, then classified and analyzed them according to these categories (Miles and Huberman, 1984; O'Brien, 1985; Strauss, 1987). From the four verbatim interviews, emerging themes and patterns were extracted to develop a system which could be used for all twelve interviews. For example, under the major category of midlife and aging, a consistent theme in the four verbatim transcriptions, and subsequently all interviews, was concern for the physical manifestations of age. This was consistent with the literature review which describes the double standard of aging experienced by most women. Again, under the category finances and housing, a consistent theme was that the majority of the respondents lived alone in rented accommodation. This theme corroborated the literature review which indicates that the majority of elderly women live alone, and will require social support. As a final example, under the category work, the overall pattern was that each respondent had worked since her teens; nonetheless three women earned \$26,000 or less and paid more than half their income on rent. Six women earned \$35,000 or more. Again, these themes have links with the literature which while arguing the marginality of women's economic status, at the same time indicates that women who have been continuously employed are the least likely to experience poverty at midlife or later.

During the analysis of the interviews, some categories, for example work, finances and housing, and education were collapsed since the data were closely related and had in fact, tended to overlap throughout the actual face to face interviews. The categories relating to background and self-description meshed in the final analysis, as did relationships and sexual history. Womens' descriptions of their political and spiritual views were coupled. After the categories had been collapsed, they resembled those established by O'Brien (1985) who, for example, also linked education and career in one category, and the experience of aging in another.

At the outset of the study I had expected to present a synthesis of findings within the discrete categories of the interview guide. However, as I worked through the transcripts toward a final analysis, the data emerged into three core codes: a woman's perceptions of midlife and aging; work; and each woman's perceptions of being never married. Interview categories fed into the three codes. This crossover and interrelationship among the core codes and categories is illustrated in Figure I.

FIGURE I



The study has several limitations. The sample is too small and unrepresentative of never-married women in midlife. There is little ethnic diversity reflected among the twelve. In addition, they are more highly educated than the literature indicates for women in their age groups. While three women had health problems serious enough to warrant disability pensions, most women were generally able-bodied and healthy. As mentioned previously, the cost of having four interviews transcribed, prohibited me from having all of them transcribed verbatim (The interviews averaged sixty pages each for a total cost of more than \$400.00). Using a more succinct interview schedule, rather than the detailed and wide-ranging instrument that was developed, would have allowed me to transcribe all twelve interviews for a more detailed, richer and more varied data base. As Ashfield and Shamai (1987) note regarding their research, "the nature of an exploratory study made it difficult to determine which, if any, questions should be deleted" (p. 8).

CHAPTER FIVE: Findings

The twelve women who agreed to be interviewed were born between 1932 and 1947. The older women were children at the outset of the depression, while the younger women were born after World War II as the first wave of the baby boom. At the time of the interview, six respondents were between the ages of 41 and 46, while six were aged 50 through 56. All lived in Vancouver or its municipalities, although several had lived in rural Canada during their childhood. Eleven women had been born outside British Columbia, and four were born outside Canada. Of the eight Canadian-born, seven were Caucasian and one was Asian. Three women were British immigrants, one of whom was born of British parents and raised in Argentina. Parents of three of the women were German, Yugoslavian and Ukrainian; the parents of half the respondents had immigrated to Canada.

Most of the women worked in traditional female occupations such as nursing, clerical, or teaching, although one was a respected journalist, another a certified general accountant, while another was an executive in a high-profile British Columbia labor union. Given the sample size, their earnings were above the Canadian average for women in the labor force. As mentioned in Chapter Three, single women aged 45 to 54 working full-time for a full year, earned approximately \$25,668 while women aged 55 and older earned \$22,522.

Four women had undergraduate university degrees, two had some university, and two had degrees from a technical institute. One had attended secretarial college, two had completed high school and one had a grade 11 education. Three women earned \$50,000 or more; of these, one had attended secretarial college. One woman, in addition to two years of university, had recently completed course work and exams to become a certified general accountant (CGA) while working full time; another had both a Bachelor of Commerce and was a CGA (Table 1). Most of the parents of these women did not have a high school education; neither did they discourage or encourage the education of their daughters. Of the five women who earned \$35,000 or more, all had education beyond high school. Of the six women earning \$26,000 or less, three were receiving a disability pension ranging from \$7800 to \$18,000 per annum, and all had education beyond high school (Table I).

Four of the twelve women described themselves as lesbian, while eight were heterosexual. Two of the lesbians were in a live-in monogamous relationship (with other partners not interviewed in this research). However, since homosexuals cannot marry, nor benefit from the pensions or medical plans of their partners, they are in the eyes of the state that ascribes such labels, considered never-married. The women also identified themselves as never-married.

Eight women lived alone; a ninth woman, living alone at the time of the interview, often shared with a roommate, not a lover. Of the nine who lived alone, seven lived in rental accommodation. One woman lived in a lesbian-run housing cooperative. Four women owned their housing. One lesbian, living with her partner, owns her house. Another lesbian and her partner, own a condominium. Of the two heterosexual women, one owns a duplex while the other owns a condominium (Table II).

TABLE I

Demographic Characteristics of Women Interviewed

AGE	Education	Occupation	Gross Income
41	Technical College	Psych nurse	disability pension \$17,800
41	B.A.	Union exec.	\$53,000
44	Gr. 11	Office mgr.	\$25,000
44	Gr. 12	Admin.asst.	\$24,000
45	2 yrs B.Ed CGA	Accts.Super.	\$35,000
mid- 40s	B.A.	Teacher pt.time	wouldn't say
50	B.Comm CGA	Former Accountant	disability pension \$18,000
52	B. Ed.	Principal	\$54,000
52	Some Univ. Tech.Dipl.	Lab. super.	\$35,000
54	1 yr. B.A.	Childcare Worker	Disability CPP \$7800
55	I yr univ.	Secretary	\$25,000
56	Secretarial College	Journalist	\$50,000

TABLE II

Demographic Characteristics of Women Interviewed

Year of birth	Sexual Orientation	Housing	Living Situation
1932	heterosexual	rent apt.	alone
1932	heterosexual	rent apt.	alone
1934	lesbian	co-op	alone
1936	lesbian	owns house	with partner
1936	lesbian	owns condo	with partner
1938	lesbian	rent apt.	alone
1942*	heterosexual	owns condo	alone
1943	heterosexual	rents suite	alone
1944	heterosexual	rents apt.	alone
1947	heterosexual	owns duplex	alone
1947	heterosexual	rents suite	often shares

* Estimate only, respondent was reluctant to give year of birth.

The Emergent Core Codes

The emergent core codes as discussed in Chapter Four are: a woman's perceptions of midlife and aging; work; and each woman's perception of being never married. Each core code, as illustrated in Figure I on page 70, was fed by categories from the interview guide, and is a synthesis of several overlapping categories and reflects the circular movement of the interviews. As interviews proceeded they shifted among categories and questions. Most questions under each category tended to impinge on one or more of the three core codes.

Perceptions of Midlife and Aging

Most of the women interviewed, regardless of age, were ambivalent about growing older, although the majority were generally content with their present ages. They expressed surprise with the midlife aging process and linked that surprise with physical changes such as grey hair, weight gain, health problems and wrinkles. Several women said they were aware of their age at work with younger colleagues, although as one 55 year old said, "I like being the age I am, oddly enough." A 54-year-old lesbian stated that she is "beginning to feel a little invisible," but that in general, growing older is not making much difference. She commented that she is aware of living in an ageist society and the older she gets, the more she feels in common with all other women.

Physical changes, the most obvious sign of growing older, were difficult for some women:

I hate looking in the mirror sometimes. I think, is that old person me? then other times I don't feel old at all...It sounds so conceited, but I was always kind of cute. I used to get away with lots of things -- good looks and a bikini. I used to have a certain amount of fun with that. That's history, that's gone. It would be nice, not to be a kid all the time, but not have to age or look older sometimes.

I think people like Elizabeth Taylor and Joan Collins are just terrific, but mind you, they've had the odd little tuck here and there. I mean Liz is the same age as I am, but she looks terrific! I think it's great for middle age women. We are not all senile, you know. We are very vibrant people and have a lot to offer life.

I'm surprised to see how different I look from the way I feel. I feel much the same, and physically feel better than I did in my thirties. But when I look in the mirror while I'm getting dressed, I'm not that same person anymore...it's pretty hard to ignore.

Over half the women became acutely aware of aging through health problems such as breast and cervical cancer scares, critical surgery, work injuries, the death of friends..."with this cancer scare I really started to think about life, and dying...I've also changed personally in what I want." Also, three participants were unable to work and were dealing with loss of income. The reasons are not specifically age related. One woman was coping with a work-related injury and expected eventually to

be able to work again. She felt she would have to change careers since she was physically unable to continue in her much-loved job as a psychiatric nurse. Another was disabled by chronic emphysema, while a third had spent one year in hospital after surgery to correct intestinal problems, and would probably not be able to return to the work force. The breakdown of a significant relationship, said one woman, "gave me more food for thought than any passage of time."

All the women had been physically active, and many still were. One 52-year-old woman's awareness of physical aging is when her knees bother her after playing sports. Only two women commented specifically on societal pressures of aging. One remarked:

I think about aging in a society where all around me I see aging not being great from any point of view...old people don't seem welcome and I'll soon be one of them...I'm trying to think about what I can do to interfere with that.

I think it's (aging) a societal thing. We (the lesbian community) can start looking at it because we also make older people invisible.

Several women, while somewhat concerned about the aging process, also seemed philosophical about it:

Each year my life has seemed better...It is exciting to be growing year by year and it is an exciting age.

I don't think there are certain ways you have to be at a certain age...At this age we're getting older at different stages, like little kids...except I'm going through menopause, you've got grey hair...

In general, there was an acceptance regarding the aging process however, several women worried most about their financial and housing situations as they aged. One woman stated that she had "financial worries more than anything, because I'm single and I have had to rely on myself all of my working life. I'm a very independent person and I would not like to have to depend on people." Of the women who lived in rental accommodation, three spent at least half their earnings on rent.

A common theme for most women, was the anticipation of growing old alone. One woman remarked that, "I'm not that old now, but I'm alone and I think, good Lord, what if I died in here one day." Another said that she hoped someone was around to grow old with her.

Most women mentioned that although they realized they were growing older, they did not feel particularly different than they had in their twenties and thirties. They looked forward to new challenges and the older women particularly, seemed to have grown into a self confidence during their late forties and early fifties. Most felt their lives would be much the same in the future, although those close to retirement age appeared to anticipate new challenges.

Perceptions of Work

As noted earlier, the more education a woman has, the greater chance she has of earning higher wages relative to other women. Most of the women with whom I spoke, had some education beyond high school and all of them began earning their living when they were teenagers. Some worked part time when they were as young as twelve and most expected, even when they were younger, that they would be supporting themselves. Several women thought they would be married and therefore, not supporting themselves entirely.

Of the women earning \$35,000 or more, all had been with the same employer for between ten and 32 years. Except for one, they also expected company pensions on retirement, although one woman mentioned that she did not hold out much hope that her pension would actually be there. While most of the women enjoyed their work colleagues, none felt she had had a mentor, or been particularly inspired by another in her field. Overall, most of the women found their work satisfying, although few called it a "career." Some women in their forties still felt they had options regarding changing careers; others found their work dissatisfying, but did not feel able to change. Two women in clerical positions saw no prospects for change. One of these women was 55 years old, had no company pension and little personal savings.

I hope that I will have enough money when I grow old and am no longer working. We do not have a pension plan where I work so I have to save and put it toward an RRSP. I contribute every week, but I won't have a lot when I retire.

I'm a secretary. I think we're a dying race. I have run the gamut from shorthand to computers. Women always try to underestimate their own potential -- which is incredible and just amazing. I think over the years I've gained a tremendous amount of knowledge through all the various firms I've worked for. You really turn out to be quite a capable person but you're never really thought of as being capable.

Although most of the respondents did not feel that age affected their work, one woman mentioned that she was acutely aware of being older among the younger secretaries in her firm.

In contrast to the women in both the Simon and O'Brien studies, few of the women in this study were active in volunteer or community activities outside work.

Several of the women had some savings or were beginning to save, primarily in the form of RRSPs. One 52-year-old considered her house, which she had owned for nearly twenty years, to be her major investment. One 41 year old, earning \$53,000 with a good company pension, had a varied investment portfolio including her own duplex, bonds, RRSPs, and other property. She said: "I am conscious of old age so I'm planning for it." A few women were not concerned about the future. Remarked a 52-year-old:

Money hasn't been one of my concerns. I came from extreme poverty. I've not given much thought to savings or accumulation. The idea of earning has always been so I could spend.

I was determined I wasn't going to depend on a man for money and that I wasn't going to be poor. I've planned to be financially free.

You know something; for the first time I would like to find a rich old man to support me so I could go back to school.

...I have to get into a budget and start saving for my future because I'm the only one who is going to look after me.

I'm security conscious. One thing that concerns me about changing my career is the money, because I've worked my way up to a pretty good wage. I like having that money. Although I'm pretty well off financially, I do worry a bit.

One woman in her late fifties, who had worked in the same job for more than 30 years, felt she had a "total lack of preparation" regarding her financial needs because she always assumed she would get married. She had a work pension which used to be compulsory for men and optional for women. A woman on disability pension does worry about money and says she buys lottery tickets every week. Of the women whose parents are still living, few expected to inherit anything financially substantial. A woman in her mid-forties, who had travelled and worked during her twenties and thirties, felt she was living with the consequences of that decision now. However, she loves her work as an administrative assistant in a university department, despite the fact that it is low-paying. Several women who had travelled a great deal in their younger years,

remarked that it was always easy to get jobs in those days.

For many women, work life and personal life were closely meshed. Many enjoyed their colleagues, and all considered themselves at the top of their respective fields. Overall, they found their work challenging and satisfying. None of the women nearing retirement approached it with dread. They looked forward to travel, writing, kayaking and other sports and more time for volunteer pursuits. The women who could not depend on an adequate pension on retirement were worried about income, but talked of looking forward to more time for their own interests.

Given the grim poverty levels predicted for unattached women living alone, one of the questions was an attempt to elicit the extent of each respondent's awareness of the issue. The responses varied. One 45 year old felt that the older women about whom the statistics were speaking were from a different era, and that things would probably not be that way for her. She said the future had not been a worry for her, but that maybe it should have been.

I just bought my first RRSP...I figure it's time to get my act together, get myself organized to do it. But up til now I've gone skiing, gone to Europe and all those things, and the future was just going on forever. Well, I guess that's changed a bit, but I don't intend to be a worrier. I've got friends that are a lot younger, who are a lot more concerned about their old age...So I think it's maybe your personal outlook.

Three women, two earning \$35,000 or more and one on a disability pension, believed that they would live much the same as they do now. Another was concerned about the statistics and her own aging but was not sure what "I'll be able to do about it." One 44 year old had always believed that "something will happen" to prevent her from poverty as an older woman. A 55 year old expected to live "modestly, probably in one room. Isn't that awful? But then I've never lived in a house before...I've always lived in apartments, so it will probably just get smaller. Maybe my needs won't be as large, hopefully."

Perceptions of Never Married Status

A woman's perception of her aging process and the importance of income appeared to be closely tied to her perceptions of herself as a single person. Although viewed as a distinct category for the purposes of the study, the label "never married" was not, in a woman's life, separate from her relationships with family, lovers and friends, her concept of self, her choices, her work and daily life and it emerged as one of the three core codes. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the women I spoke with chose not to marry despite the fact that almost half thought they would get married or, that it was expected of them by their families.

I am the only woman in the family who hasn't picked up that you have to have a man to be fulfilled, or to be a woman, or to be a happy person.

I thought I would get married one day, and everything would be looked after. That's what people think you know. I've never thought of myself as single. I am a single person...maybe it's something I've lived with for so long that I'm not aware of it any longer.

Marriage was expected. I thought I'd go out and get married and live happily ever after...It was taken for granted when you grew up...you just grew up and got married.

It wasn't a conscious decision not to marry...I wouldn't change it now. At one time I probably thought it was still the thing to do...My mother ran around saying, "It's not that she hasn't been asked." I thought it was something I should do, rather than what I wanted. Now I'm too used to being on my own.

Each of the twelve participants expressed in one way or the other, the value she placed on her independent life. Many chose the word "freedom." Freedom, or a sense of personal autonomy, and the theme of loneliness, are often interwoven.

Being able to do what I want, when I want and not having to answer to anybody. That's the greatest. I can take up and go any time I want.

I love to come in and shut that door and there's nobody here to bug you if you've had a bad day at work. You're free and you can do what you want...I'd like to have a relationship with somebody but if it's not going to add something to my life, why bother.

I have been the old maid in my family since I was 18...of all the women, everyone had married by 18. I value my independence but if someone came along I felt like marrying someday, sure...I know what I want in a relationship and I won't sacrifice for it and that made me end up single for most of my life...that's okay. I like being by myself. There's no way I want to get married just for

the sake of having someone around. I've met no one that I've had the desire to marry and I have no desire to be in a relationship.

I can close the door on the world when I want to. I can pick and choose in a way. (There are) certain plusses about not having to answer to anybody...There are times when I get lonely...not being able to talk with someone right now, when I need to.

I don't miss marriage...don't think I'd be very good in a marriage...would like just now, someone who's a companion, who will give me love and affection in a monogamous situation. I'm tired of people being non-committal...I prefer being single, feel it's the right state for me and I'm more comfortable with it. I was going to get married and it fell through. When that horror passed, I was relieved. I have the freedom to do what I want. I can come home and close the door on the world and don't have to think about anyone else. But that is the other thing, I'm tired of not having anyone else to think about.

Two heterosexual women had regrets about not marrying and about not having children. However, like the others, they were ambivalent about relinquishing their freedom and privacy.

Of the four lesbians interviewed, three had had significant relationships with men in their late teens and early twenties. The fourth had considered marrying for what she termed, "respectability." One lesbian who had had a significant relationship with a man when she was younger and who "came out" when she was 40 years old said:

I don't know how I didn't get married. I didn't know I was a lesbian and didn't know anyone who was. A lot of women believe they need to have a man. I never believed that. Never. I thought I should. A lot of my younger friends are never married and when they heard

you were coming today one said, "Tell her I'm in training." I don't know many women my age (54) who haven't married...in my generation everybody got married.

A 52-year-old lesbian, who had been in a 24-year relationship, said:

I'm basically very happy...I don't know if it's because I've never married. I've been able to do more of what I believe because I've been single. I've never regretted not marrying in the traditional sense, although I wanted a long-term relationship.

The respondents were most often the only never-married women in their families, although one woman mentioned that several cousins of her generation had also not married. One woman said she feels envied by some in her family. She has been told by her niece in Britain that other relatives think, "Auntie is the smartest one of all of them..." because she hasn't married. On the other hand, she has also been told, "You have to get married, you make the family untidy."

Activities such as eating in a restaurant or going to a movie alone were difficult for some women, and several mentioned the difficulty they found in a "world of couples" where single women, more than single men, were often shunned.

I don't regret being never married, but the world is made up of couples. Women aren't included nearly as often as couples or single men (in social situations)...When people find out you've never been married, they almost do a double-take. They assume I'm divorced.

The world is still a couple world. There are a few couples I socialize with when it's okay to have a single person around.

While one participant had not thought of herself as single, another woman related that:

Even when I was living with G. I still considered my self single. I'm a single person...I don't know how people who have been married can go back to calling themselves single again. It seems to me that I've never been anything else.

The above comment was not unique. The afternoon that the request for participants appeared in The Vancouver Sun, I received several calls. One woman told me how moved she was to see that someone was taking an interest in her life. Although she declined to participate, she said that just seeing the announcement lessened what she described as her isolation.

Soon after, another woman called. She was extremely animated and was interested in the study. She was in her mid fifties and hoped to participate. "I should tell you something," she said. "I've been married. It was only for eight years though. Does that count?" Several women who had been married at a young age, and/or for a short time, also expressed an interest in being interviewed because they "felt" never married.

Some of the participants described feeling most single during certain events such as family weddings, holidays and funerals where others seemingly had the support or companionship of an intimate partner. Several women mentioned New Year's Eve as the

time they felt most alone. For most of the respondents, these experiences appeared to be outweighed by the desire to maintain their independence.

Most of the respondents had difficulty discussing or describing themselves. One woman became quite agitated when trying to describe what had been important, or what had stood out for her in the last few years.

Nothing. I feel like I've been on hold for the last few years...I really haven't made any serious changes in the last few years. Nothing is important.

She had always seen herself as more daring and assertive. Now in her mid-forties, she was critical of herself for not having had a plan..."I never knew what I was going to do, so I guess I'm doing it." Reaching midlife, coupled with what she considered a dead-end job, was a major turning point and one that she considered frightening at times. She had always envisioned travelling, which she did extensively during her twenties and early thirties, but as far as what she thought she would like to be when she grew up, she said she had no direction regarding career opportunities. After her father's death when she was 13, she and her sisters were obliged to take secretarial courses in school rather than prepare for university, because there was no money.

Another woman, ten years older than the previous respondent, saw herself as more emotional than when she was as a younger

woman..."I cry at certain pieces of music now...Things people do for one another tend to move me more than they used to. Kindness, generosity, the little things in life." She believed she had wasted a lot of time in her life, and felt she was not a "go-getter". She longed for what she described as "just something completely different from what I have been doing all my life." She wanted to "turn the record over on the other side." She described herself as independent and "quite charming," and said she didn't used to like herself. She did not remember wanting to be anything in particular as she grew up..."As long as I grew up happily married and lived happily ever after."

Each respondent's experience of herself had shifted during midlife. While aging was a significant experience, and was considered a major turning point for most women, one said she now found her world a more comfortable place. Most felt more accepting of themselves and more self-assured. While completing a rigorous Certified General Account program was a significant turning point for one woman, she did not consider that her life had changed in midlife. She described herself as not tending to be introspective and saw herself as "basically very positive in my attitude to things...I don't seem to expect a lot more of life than whatever happens. I seem to kind of roll with it." She considered family and friends to be the most important things in her life. Like other respondents, she remarked that notions of what she wanted to be as an adult changed from her teen years

into young adulthood, but she was not aware of the various options available to her regarding work or career.

I see myself as a fairly strong woman and a good friend. I've had a pretty good life and am a lot more grounded and aware. I feel better about myself...I've had a good time.

I feel I'm going through some really big changes -- like what I'm going to do with my life. I thought I should've had that figured out by now...I'm trying to be easier on myself...feeling more positive...

I think it's a pity I haven't quite liked myself when I was younger because my life could have taken a different turn.

One woman felt that her greatest drawback over the years had been a lack of confidence. Four women had seen, or were still seeing, a therapist and found that the experience had helped them come to terms with personal issues. Other women had been to a career counsellor for assistance in possible career changes.

A major turning point in relation to self was, for two women in the study, the end of a 24 year relationship they had had with one another. As an interviewer, I was struck by the candor and openness with which these women reflected on their lives. At the time of the interview, both had been living with younger women for approximately three years. The woman I interviewed first, mentioned that her former partner might be interested in participating in the study, and contacted her after our interview.

The first participant felt that a remarkable revelation for her, was that she did not have to be perfect. Previously, she said, she could not understand how people left relationships. Then, "when I did leave I couldn't believe I was capable of hurting another person. It gave me a picture of myself that was hard to accept." Her former partner said the end of the relationship came as a "real shock". She was "humbled by the experience" and was angry and resentful at being thrust into "this new role." She was angry at being "jolted into another stage of life I didn't want." Prior to the break-up..."I knew nothing about myself, about being gay. I knew I wasn't ashamed of it but I was uncomfortable because I didn't know what to do." She said she had never really acknowledged her long-term relationship because she did not want anyone to know about it.

Both women described being "closeted" regarding their lesbian relationship. They did not feel there had been opportunities to meet and socialize with other gay couples. They had had an extra bedroom in their home so that others who visited them would not know about their relationship. Since the dissolution of their relationship, both socialize more with lesbian friends and appear to have accepted their lesbianism in a deeper way than in their twenties.

Most of the women discussed their sexual lives and the need for intimacy and companionship with considerable frankness. At the time of the interview, five women described themselves as sexually active; this included two heterosexual women and two

lesbians. Of these five, four were in their fifties. Three women were celibate and three were occasionally sexually active. One woman declined to comment. One heterosexual woman had been celibate by choice since 1982:

I have no desire for a relationship and no desire for sex without a relationship.

A lesbian commented that she never was highly sexual even when she thought she was "straight." Her longest relationship, when she was in her twenties, was with a man. She does not consider herself sexually active, but says she has her intimacy needs met through her friends. She was the only woman who said she masturbated. Women commented that their sexual lives were very different now than when they were younger.

It's not that I grew up in the swinging sixties. I grew up in the period when there was no sex life. Seriously. None. Nice girls did not do that. Then I went right into the single-woman-with-birth-control and the whole thing. Now I'm back to square one. I'm not out there to play.

It's a lot more meaningful. It has a different sort of meaning now. It's a lot more fun, too.

Aside from three of the lesbians who had had long-term relationships of between twelve and 24 years, only three heterosexual women had lived with their sexual partners for more than four years. Most relationships lasted between three and

nine years. Two had never lived with their sexual partners and had gone through periods of celibacy. Of the four heterosexuals who said they were currently in relationships, three women were involved in on-going relationships with married men at the time of the interview, and did not consider themselves particularly sexually active. One woman, currently in a relationship with a married man, indicated that she would like to live with him.

It (the relationship) suits me, but if it was ever possible that he could get out of his relationship, I would love to live with him. I don't care if I ever marry him...it doesn't really bother me. But I think of all the men I've met, I'd just love to live with him.

One woman saw her lover every few months because he lived out of the country, while another had to wait for her lover to contact her because she could not call him at home.

The lesbians tended to have had fewer sexual relationships when they were younger. Of the two women currently in relationships, both lived with younger women and considered themselves very sexually active. Aging does not affect her sex life at all, commented one woman. She considers herself to have a great deal of intimacy, as well as a great sexual relationship. One lesbian mentioned she is comfortable with her sexuality for the first time.

A heterosexual woman commented that she was "a bit of a late starter because you grew up, you got married and then you had sex." In describing the life of a relationship she is in the process of ending, she said:

...as long as it's a two-way street, I'm fine, it doesn't bother me. I enjoy it and it's really fun. But if it comes to the point, which it does every once in awhile, that I feel taken advantage of or taken for granted, then it doesn't work. I just cut it off.

Intimacy appeared to be more important to women than having an active sex life. If intimacy included sex, that was a bonus.

I think I'm more of a romantic person, and I think I get frustrated with B. because he's not romantic enough. I think I should be getting flowers regularly and stuff like that...that doesn't happen. He's a practical, practical person who, after he hasn't seen me for a couple of months, after the hugs and kisses at the airport, says, "Well, okay, that's fine." And I'm going, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, carry on for a few!...I'm huggy and touchy and his idea is a pat on the hand!"

As you get older it's not the sexual side of the relationship so much as the affection and hugs...This is more important than anything, especially when living alone.

Most women experienced their first sexual encounter in their early twenties and described themselves as sexually active during their twenties and thirties. The heterosexual women met men through work, friends, at clubs and while travelling. Several described having "one night stands." Aside from not wanting to engage in casual sexual encounters in the way they did when they were younger, now said one 44 year old, "It's just too crazy out there." Two heterosexual women mentioned AIDS as a major factor in not wanting casual sexual relationships. One lesbian said she "finally did it" (with a man) when she was 23,

because she was curious.

Of the women who discussed children, only two regret not having had a child. One woman thought she might regret it at some point. Four women became pregnant before midlife. Two carried their pregnancies to term and placed the babies for adoption. Both had wanted to have abortions but the pregnancies were considered too far along.

Even when we played house I was the Aunt who came to visit. I was never the mother. I knew I wasn't going to do that one.

One thing I regret is never having children. If I was ten years younger I would probably really consider it. But it wasn't done 15 years ago and then you get too old to do it. Whether or not I would have done it, I don't know, because there are pros and cons...but I really regret not having children.

I guess because I never married, I never had children. I desperately wanted a child and would have had one at 40. Guess it was indicative that time was running out...I tried around that time...That was the only time I wanted a child...maybe because I was in love with the man I was going with.

I've always worked with children and didn't feel I needed one of my own.

I don't regret it. Pregnancy would have been worse than lesbianism to my parents.

As illustrated in the work of Belenky et al. each of the women stressed the importance of relationships in her life. For while independence was valued, friends, lovers, and family were central. Some described their friends as family, and one woman called her closest friends "water" family, as opposed to "blood" relatives. Another woman said she "nurtured" her network of women friends that she had known since high school. There was no pattern to the duration of friendships or as to the types of friends, although most women tended to spend leisure time with single women friends. None of the so-called support networks was extensive, and many women had close friends in other parts of the country. Most women found that relationships that had affected them significantly had been those with sexual partners. Family played an important role in the lives of most women regardless of its positive or negative impact, and each woman's family background was unique. For some women family members were among their most important relationships.

I think family is important...I have kind of extended family as well. I guess over the years I have been adopted by other families...We are not related at all, but it is sort of one big family...I think that it is important that people have family. If you get on with them, so much the better. Maybe because I don't have that many (left in the family), it's important.

Eleven women had siblings, and there was no pattern to the birth order of the participants. Many women mentioned that their relationships with siblings were becoming more intimate as they

aged. Only three women reported feeling close to their mothers. One woman who had not been close to her mother, nonetheless took care of her before she died so that she would not have to be institutionalized. She felt obliged to do this when no one else in the family would, and said that she cared for her mother as a "human being," not because the woman was her mother. Of those with one or more parents still living, several women expected, or intended to be, caregivers.

Most mothers had worked fulltime or part-time at some point during their daughters' lives as clerks, chambermaids, and telephone operators. One was a prostitute. The respondents' fathers had worked as fishermen, shopkeepers, factory workers, farmers, accountants, and career soldiers. Six women lost their fathers through death or desertion when they were children or young teenagers. In addition, the mother of one woman left the marriage and took her daughter to another province; while another woman lost her mother when she was 18.

Women grew up on farms, in small towns, or in urban centres. Many described growing up in poverty or as children of single mothers who had a difficult time financially. While some women described happy, nurturing, or uneventful childhoods, many described a time of disruption. Four women talked about being sexually abused as small children -- one by her father; two by a stepfather or mother's boyfriend, and one by the caretaker of her apartment building. A 50 year-old lesbian said that "she couldn't stand men" after being sexually abused by her

stepfather. Another woman described her feelings nearly 50 years after the abuse:

The first time it happened...I had a dream that night and it's a dream I have never forgotten. It's funny, it's been years and years...A door was closing...I still remember what the tiles were like and there was a door closing...You never forget these things. It's funny because you're so little and I have great empathy because this child abuse is just horrible. It stays with you for the rest of your life, it really does.

Other childhood trauma included a woman's experience during World War II, of being evacuated from London as a small child and separated from her family for five years. One woman said, "I was simply, not raised." She and her siblings were left to their own devices in rural Manitoba when their mother became an alcoholic and prostitute.

Most women seemed to have come to terms with their families. As they aged, a greater understanding and acceptance of their parents emerged. For those women whose parents were still living, many enjoyed the relationship, while others maintained a friendly, but distant alliance.

Regarding the political perspective of the participants, a preconception I had when beginning this study was that most of the respondents would have some analysis of themselves as women within society. Because I was particularly interested in social policy affecting aging women, questions and probes under the major category political views, were an attempt to draw out what

policies specific to aging women, the respondents thought provincial and federal governments should implement.

Nine of the twelve women said they were "left-leaning" and/or voted for the New Democratic Party. This may be another indication of the unrepresentative sample, although the union executive interviewed for the study, mentioned that research she has seen, illustrates that most women tend to be more "left" than men on many issues. However, few of the respondents had political opinions or thoughts regarding the direction and focus of social policy toward women in general, or themselves in particular. Of those women who ventured an opinion, most believed that policies specific to aging women should include wage and pension reform; a major issue for one woman was violence against women.

I would say I am a lightweight in the sense that I don't take politics very seriously. It all depends. I'm much more interested in foreign affairs I guess, because I lived abroad so much, than I am in civil politics. I don't belong to any political party but I think I am a liberal more than anything else. All my friends are NDPers which is interesting.

Women should get the same wage as the average man.

A few months ago I heard of a group...of women in Calgary or Edmonton; they are midlife or older and they are forming together to address to the government, the inequalities that exist between men and women when they retire...I don't know, but I think given the fact that women don't earn as much as men do, it will be on the back burner for a long, long time unless women get organized and bring pressure to bear.

(I'm) strong new Democrat. I've always supported and always worked but I've never joined... I don't know, but there's going to be a group of women pretty soon, and I'm probably going to be one of them...there's just not going to be any need for us anymore. I wonder what we're going to do. (These) jobs have always created other jobs, but they're so specialized...I would be willing to work til 55 and let somebody have my job. Just give me a decent salary so I can plan a decent retirement. That's it. I'm not going to fight this 65 retirement age. I'm going to be long gone. But you know, unless I'm paid something decent in the meantime, that's it, I can't afford it. So maybe I will have to end up fighting for my job.

One woman said she considered herself so ignorant that she couldn't answer a question about policies regarding aging women. "I bury my head in the sand," she replied. Another respondent said she hadn't thought of it (policy) only in terms of women, but more toward the aging population generally. However, she mentioned, "I know women are closer to the poverty line."

One woman with a strong union background noted that:

I've been becoming more aware of women in the power structures. Women in the labor movement are still the same as women elsewhere. It's okay if they want to stay at a certain level, but if they want to get further than that, there's trouble...We're looking at pay equity and have an active women's committee, but we've rarely had much membership input on women's issues.

Although an NDP supporter, one woman said she did not put a lot of time and energy into the party. Her primary policy issue was violence against all women. Another NDP supporter felt that

policies specific to older women should concern themselves with pension reform because pensions were too low. However, she did not expect that a political party would get much support for initiating policies for women. When asked if she belonged to any group that dealt with political issues or causes, one woman laughed and replied, "Weight Watchers!" Only one woman, a lesbian, described herself as feminist. None of the respondents took part in any organized religion, and only two women tended to reflect on what might be called their spiritual or inner lives.

Toward the end of the interview, women were asked why they decided to participate in the study. Two women remarked:

I guess everybody ignores us and here somebody was interested. I was just curious to see what kind of questions you'd ask...and I guess it surprises me that I'm here at this age.

I was interested, and realized that most of the people I know are in relationships. Talking to you, I find myself looking at things I never really questioned.

CHAPTER SIX: Summary and Conclusions

The goal of this current study was to examine the content of the interviews to find patterns or themes in the histories of the women and their movement through midlife. It was also an attempt to determine if these never-married women now in midlife, would possibly have different futures than current unattached old women portrayed by the statistics. Within their own families, most of the respondents were the only women in their generation who did not marry. As mentioned earlier, Simon (1987) believes that the numbers of never-married women are increasing, and hence, that it is important to investigate the experience of women who choose single life.

The exploratory research described in this study focussed on the thoughts and experiences of twelve never-married midlife women between the ages of 41 and 56, both heterosexual and lesbian, living in Vancouver and area. Since little interest has been paid to this group, a qualitative approach, using a semi-structured interview guide enabled the women to talk and reflect about their lives in their own words.

Through the voices of the twelve women interviewed, this study has attempted to increase our knowledge about a neglected population. It illustrates that never-married women in midlife are diverse; that generalizations from studies of men and married midlife women with children are not enough; that

generalizations regarding a woman's marital status and sexual orientation are not enough; that social policies of most importance to never-married midlife women as they age must include wage and pension reforms.

Although I could find no evidence of research specific to never-married midlife women, this study supported many of the findings of two research studies on never-married old women. For example, in O'Brien's study of fifteen old Canadian women, the majority lived alone and nearly all were satisfied with their friendships and with life in general. Most of her respondents had also achieved the highest level of education available in Prince Edward Island at that time, although their career choices were more overtly influenced by their families than the women in this current study who tended to leave the country or area in which they had grown up. O'Brien also asked her respondents why they had not married.

None of them indicated that, at any point in their lives they had made a conscious decision to remain single. Most had the opportunity to marry but it did not seem to be an important goal in any of their lives...The impression that emerges is that, as young women, marriage was considered an acceptable choice by the study participants but that most were reluctant to relinquish their independence and were, in any case, satisfied with their lives as single women (p. 48).

In contrast, 48 out of the 50 old women in Simon's study chose to remain single throughout their lives "for the purpose of preserving their independence or out of commitment to careers"

(p. 34). The old women in both the Simon and O'Brien study worked in traditional female occupations and found work was important as a source of income and self-identity. Old women interviewed by both O'Brien and Simon, were reluctant to discuss their sexual lives, and there was certainly no mention of lesbianism even if some women lived together. In a letter to me Dr. O'Brien wrote: "I did not think at the time to ask about sexual preference and have been asked by others quite often about this" (M. O'Brien, personal communication, September 8, 1988).

While statistics illustrate a terrifying future for female elderly -- 31 percent of women over 65 live at, or below, the poverty line -- the study supports existing research which suggests that education and long-term employment are factors in reducing poverty among women. Because most of the never-married may not have had many interruptions to their labor force participation, they may, depending on economic class, be in less danger of poverty in their old age than divorced or widowed women.

While the study certainly illustrates the diversity even of this small sample, a significant commonality among the participants is how little consideration many of them gave to future income and retirement planning. Although each woman had worked fulltime since she was in her teens, only one had both savings and investments, as well as a pension. While this may not appear to be a startling conclusion, the implications thread

through the literature presented in this study. Being able to support herself and not depend on anyone else was vital, although often difficult. It is of interest then, that while not wanting to depend on anyone else, most of the women in the study seemed not to have done much long-range planning.

Most enjoyed their work and the collegiality it provided. Five women in this study earned between \$10,000 and \$20,000 more than the average earnings outlined for their age group by Statistics Canada. The earnings may reflect the unrepresentative sample of caucasian women who hold more so-called professional jobs. It may also point to the long-term employment with a particular organization by several of the women. The income of the three women in clerical positions is closer to the statistical average for women in their age group. Several participants had worked their way through the ranks of their professions; others had travelled considerably as young women, and had immigrated to Canada after living in different parts of the world.

Even though the women in the study have never married, some of the heterosexual women in particular, do not seem to have escaped the not-so-subtle conditioning of most women -- that of our internalized oppression, coupled with societal or, external oppression. Simon noted that some of the women in her study had "fully and uncritically internalized the notion that normal women marry" (p. 12). They felt the "deviancy" of their marital status. In other words, many of the women seem to have

internalized the external societal stereotypes about "spinsters," and about women in general. As the Simon and O'Brien studies illustrate, by merely being single, women challenge society that has particular roles set aside for them. Perhaps the mothers of single daughters sense their daughters' deviancy, and fear for them. In this study, their admonitions to avoid pregnancy outside legitimate marriage may be stronger than one mother's admonition against lesbianism.

For decades, feminist voices have been raised in support of marital options; marriage however, as noted in the literature still appears to be at the "top of the moral ladder to God." Despite their independence, there is an echo through the interviews, particularly those with heterosexual women, of a tyranny against themselves for not having married, that somehow never-married women are not taken seriously in the world, they are not seen as adults and hence, do not take themselves seriously.

When asked what her advice would be to younger women, for example, one woman mused:

If you talk about a choice and I say I wouldn't necessarily recommend the single life, that's not necessarily to say it's not been right for me. I don't know that it's the ideal way. I would hope for my nieces and god-daughters that they'd get married. Don't ask me why, I just feel it would be better if they did. I'm going to have to think about that afterwards -- why I feel that way. Is it a stereotype, that it just seems a better way of life, a more valued life?

It appears that both men (single or married) and the employers of men, make provisions for their old age through pensions, insurance, and higher income. As one of the women in the study mentioned, her employer used to provide compulsory pensions for men, and optional pensions for women.

O'Brien (1985) remarks that during her research with never-married old women, "some insight was gained into personalities of the study participants and the motivating forces that guided them in their lives" (p. 49). One impression she gained was that the women were not generally self-reflective regarding their own lives. She writes:

Most of the interviewees felt they had, in their lives, let nature take its course...This could have been a very practical philosophy in a social environment where assertive behavior by women may not have been rewarded. Those who felt this way may have underestimated their own influence on the course of their lives (p. 50).

A common thread in this study was that none of the women was particularly encouraged to pursue education after high school and many said they had been unaware of career options. Despite this, nine of the respondents had a university or technical degree, which was above average for most women in their age group. While all the women had worked most of their lives, those with education beyond high school tended to have higher incomes. The study supports the literature which argues that education, occupation and "marital careers" are determinants of women's economic situation.

As the women talked about their early lives, it appears that most of them encountered major disruptions through the death or desertion of their fathers, and through instances of sexual and physical abuse. While most of them seemed to have come to terms with their families and childhood, this is in sharp contrast to the older participants in O'Brien's study whose image of childhood is one of "security, harmonious family life with a clear separation of parental role." Despite this, several women in the current study describe close familial ties and support and consider family relationships -- including parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles -- integral to their lives.

Since the study's focus was never-married midlife women, this issue was central. As in the O'Brien study mentioned above, none of the women indicated that they had made a conscious decision not to marry. Most, including the lesbians, had had opportunities to marry, and many had been engaged. Each woman indicated the central importance of her independence and perhaps, that factor over time, became the choice not to marry. Unless a never-married woman is economically free, her independence is inextricably linked with her ability to work for that independence and hence, to remain single. A woman who does not want to depend on anyone else -- parents, husband, children -- must be able to support herself for her entire life. All of the women interviewed for this study, including those who appeared to regret having never married, valued their

independence above all else. At midlife, none saw herself as a future poverty statistic because she was unattached. This optimism is more realistic for those who were to be the recipient of pension income on retirement, or for the few who had savings.

Interestingly, some women said they were single because they had tended to be attracted to the wrong kind of man, or, they were continually involved with married men. Women wanted personal independence coupled with intimacy which may or may not include sex. Many mentioned that, while they do not regret being single, they also wanted intimacy and companionship.

During the course of this study I participated in two workshops for midlife women and had countless informal discussions with friends and colleagues about midlife. One workshop was specifically termed "Women in Midlife;" the other was for midlife daughters and their aging parents. Both were experiential, not lectures regarding women's lives. The experiences of the women involved in the first workshop parallel the experiences of women outlined in the literature and interview section of this current study. Regarding the aging process, most women were "grieving" the loss of their younger bodies, their energy levels, and coming to terms with the invisibility of older women in society. Many consciously "camouflaged" their age with the use of make-up, hair color, surgery. One woman claimed she was not about to let age get the better of her. Her livelihood depended on being able to work. If

she looked older, she would lose her job. Aging is serious for women because it can mean the loss of independence.

Women in both the workshops and the study, were coming to terms with their own aging through care-taking aging parents. Often old patterns resurfaced, roles were reversed. It is women who care for the aged -- daughters, daughters-in-law. Why do they do this when in many cases, women mention not feeling close to their parents? It appears that there is a subtle family pressure exerted toward single women with no children.

The women in this study were aware of the aging process in their own lives. Aging was considered a challenge by most respondents. Some felt fit and healthy, while others were moving toward greater health after cancer scares, work injuries and life-threatening surgery. Most took part in some physical activities ranging from yoga to kayaking. While menopause was a focus in the literature regarding women in midlife, none of the women who were experiencing it, or considered themselves past menopause, saw it as anything out of the ordinary. Support networks were often small, and none had children. McDaniel (1989) notes:

Aging women of the future may have some distinct advantages over aging women today. There are clear trends suggesting that tomorrow's old women will be better educated, more likely to have worked outside the home for a significant part of their lives, have access to better pensions and health care, perhaps experience menopause as a less salient event in their lives due to compressed childbearing and the decreased centrality of reproduction in their lives, have more

experiences with making transitions from work to home or married to divorced status, have wider "family" circles including more friends and surrogate family members, and perhaps best of all, become more political as they age. Tomorrow's old women may also be more physically fit, more independent, and less willing to be stereotyped, although class differences will no doubt continue to exist.

A few of the trends outlined by McDaniel are certainly applicable to the majority of this study's respondents particularly with regard to higher education, extended labor force participation, menopause as a less salient event, and extended family and friendship ties.

The women in this study, although not particularly focussed on women's issues or policies that might enhance their status, valued their personal autonomy above all. Independence was central to the old women in both the Simon and O'Brien studies as well. Thus, the key findings appear to be: the central importance of a never-married woman's sense of personal autonomy and control of her life; the importance of income either through wages or pension; the general indication of limited future planning to maintain independence throughout old age; some internalization of "deviant" status; and finally, the support for other literature regarding education and long-term employment as determinants of some measure of security for women.

Since the 1970s, the literature concerning the efforts of the social work profession to confront women's issues has continued to expand (Weick and Vandiver, 1982; Solomon, 1982; Hudson, 1985; Van Den Bergh and Cooper, 1986). With respect to social work, this study suggests that women and aging should be a central topic in undergraduate and graduate curriculum. Its importance in the areas of family policy and human development and behavior, as well as in socio-economic policy courses, comes to mind. As Hudson (1985) states:

Social welfare assumptions about the nuclear family (male breadwinner, full time economically dependent housewife and children) do not merely reflect outmoded ideas and expectations...such assumptions also contribute a form of subtle ideological control of the family and particularly of women. Familial ideology constructs and reinforces specific ideas about the most desirable form of gender and family relations (p. 643).

Those of us who consider ourselves feminist social workers are concerned with women's issues and are continually aware of the links between the lack of knowledge of particular groups, and the danger of stereotypes about these groups expanding to fill the void. The importance of research being undertaken to inform social work practice and policy is crucial. Social policy makers, including educators, social workers, administrators, and politicians, should be encouraged to place issues such as access to education, wage and pension reform, housing and social support development near the top of the policy agenda in order

to plan for the needs of female elderly. Given that a large percentage of women end up in poverty, policy makers need to take into account women of varying marital and sexual backgrounds. A move to ensure independent living with adequate social supports as women make the transition from midlife to old age, should be high on social work practice and policy agendas.

The social work profession moves from an ethical base and tradition, and supposedly infuses its students and practitioners with an ability to analyze and criticize societal assumptions. Considering the numbers of social work practitioners, social work students and social service program recipients who are women, social policies still tend to support assumptions about women that are held by men in the larger society.

One possible initiative would be educational workshops for professionals working with midlife women, as well as for midlife women themselves. In addition, education aimed at women in their thirties could emphasize the importance of future planning--not as a "scare" tactic, but as a basic learning skill, a basic provision for women who at some time during their lives, are bound to be single. While this approach is generally used with women in their teens and early twenties, it may not "take" until it is clear that the women may not marry -- perhaps this realization is most evident to women in their late thirties. Social workers familiar with the more "traditionally" understood lifestyles within this age group, such as the divorced or widowed, will be presented with a more heterogeneous portrait of

midlife women.

As mentioned, women in the study treasured their independence above all; and yet, many had not done any long range planning for their futures. Workshops on career development and change, financial planning including stable housing, could be developed. Workshops on the physical and developmental aspects of aging, or informal groups for women to discuss their lives, might be accommodated within various communities. Preventative health programs, housing geared toward sole support women and social support networks for women as they age, are important considerations. There is a trend for work to move back into the home with the advent of computer technology. Although several women expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs, they nonetheless indicated the value of workplace contacts. The importance of education to a woman's future security should be emphasized to girls and women throughout the life span. (See Chapter Four).

Another area in crucial need of examination is that of women and pensions. Wages and pensions for single women must be such that a woman is able to do more than survive after a life of work. Lesbian (and gay male) couples, are unable to take advantage of spousal pensions or employee benefits such as medical and dental plans in order to provide for one another. Perhaps then, social workers could assist in redefining family.

A further recommendation includes continued research into the lives of women as they age, through direct inquiry into their

lifestyles, as well as through longitudinal studies. Comparative studies could include: perceptions of aging, finances, relationships, sexuality, among single, divorced and widowed midlife women; comparisions of never-married and married midlife women; comparisions between lesbian and heterosexual couples in midlife; comparisions of groups of never-married women, for example ten 45, 55, and 65 year olds. Policy emanating from research on midlife women will, it is hoped, reflect a more realistic picture of women.

The social work agenda must be built to examine critically the lives of women, both our commonalities and our diversity. Confronted with government statistics, as well as by the lives of our female clients, and perhaps our own families and friends, social workers should be aware that the progress of women within our society, particularly economically, has been marginal. We have perhaps, not paid enough attention to the inner workings of the economy or to policies that effect income distribution through social programs and transfer payments. We are mandated through our profession, to empower those with whom we work whether it is individuals, groups or communities. While it is important to seek individual solutions and to assist individuals in coping with their environment, we must also attend to the societal structures that maintain and perpetuate gender inequality regardless of marital status.

This exploratory study, despite its small and unrepresentative sample, is an important contribution to the research on women and aging. It points to the need for supports that would allow women to maintain independent lives outside the societal construction of marriage throughout their lives, and it presents a portrait of never-married heterosexual and lesbian women that deflates stereotypes that have haunted independent women for centuries.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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SECTION A Midlife and Aging

In what year were you born?

Tell me what midlife is like for you.

Would you tell me what aging means to you. Challenge?
Dreaded?

Describe your first realization that you were growing older.

What worries do you have about growing older?

What frightens you most about growing older?

What are you most looking forward to as you age?

Who do you see as role models for aging?

How were older people treated in your family? Who cared for them?

Do you expect to, or are you, caring for an aging parent?

Is aging something that you are aware of continually?

How would you describe your overall physical health.

Menopause?

What will you and your life be like in fifteen years from now?

Twenty years from now?

SECTION B Finances and Housing

The following questions concern your housing and your financial situation. If any of the questions seem too intrusive, you need not respond.

When you were in your late teens, how did you think your financial needs would be taken care of? Had you been earning your own money? Did you expect that you would be supported by husband? Someone else?

Do you worry about money?

If employed ask:

What were your earnings last year?

Are you able to save money? How: RRSP, bonds, stocks?

If not working ask:

How are you able to support yourself financially?

Unemployment insurance? Disability pension? Social assistance?

Mention: Statistics portray a grim financial picture for unattached women over 65. Are you aware of that? How do you expect to live as a single older woman?

Have you inherited money or property from family, relatives, friends? Do you expect to?

Can you tell me what financial plans you have for the future?

How would you describe your living situation? What type of dwelling do you live in? Are you satisfied with it? Do you own or share your home with relatives or friends?

How much of your income goes toward housing?

Safety concerns?

SECTION C Education

Could you tell me what expectations your parents had for your education? The education of your siblings?

What does education mean to you?

What were your own educational plans?

Tell me about your education. Job training. Describe any personal development workshops or seminars that had an impact.

SECTION D Work

Are you currently working for wages?

Tell me about your paid work. What types of work have you done in the past?

In thinking about your current work, how satisfied are you?

Does the major satisfaction in your life come from your work?

Do you consider your present position to be a job or a career?

Overall, how committed are you to your job/career?

Is there anyone who has helped to guide or inspire your work?

Could you tell me if your age affects your work? How your employers view you?

If unemployed, what is your usual occupation?

Could you tell me why you are not doing paid work at this time?

Is your age an issue in your unemployment?

What other activities are you involved in? Committee work?

Volunteer work?

SECTION E Self

What stands out for you in your life over the last few years?

What kinds of things have been important? What stays with you?

Tell me something about what your life is like right now.

What do you care about, think about?

How would you describe yourself to yourself?

Is the way you see yourself now different from the way you saw yourself in the past?

Describe your life in your twenties? Thirties? Forties?

What led to the changes?

Have there been any other turning points?

When you were a child what did you think you would like to be or do when you grew up?

How do you see yourself changing in the future?

SECTION F Relationships/Family History

Looking back over your life, what relationships have been really important to you? Why?

How would you describe those relationships?

How do you think the other person would describe the relationship?

Have you had a relationship with someone who helped you shape the person you have become?

Have you had a really important relationship where you were responsible for taking care of another person?

How would you describe that?

How important was that in your life?

Were you ever in a long-term sexual relationship?

How would you define the term "family"?

How would you describe your mother (or primary caregiver)?

What was her usual occupation? Her level of education?

How would you describe your father? His occupation? His level of education?

What is the ethnic background of your family?

How would you describe your religious background as a child?

How would you describe your family's financial situation when you were growing up?

How would you describe your class background?

In what kind of geographical setting were you raised? For example, large urban city, small town, farm?

Who earned the money to support the family?

Are your parents living? If yes, has your view of them been changing over the years?

Do you have brothers or sisters? If so, please tell me the age, sex, and marital status of each sibling and whether each has any children.

Where are you placed in birth order?

In thinking about your parents, siblings and other close relatives, how would you describe your life as a child?

How would you describe your relationship with them now?

One of the things that women are becoming more aware of is that many of us were sexually abused at some time in our lives, even as children. Studies have shown that a large percentage of women have been victims of sexual or physical abuse. Has this ever happened to you?

With whom do you engage in social activities such as dinners, movies, sports?

With whom do you talk about personal worries?

Whose advice do you consider in making important decisions?

From whom would you, or could you, borrow a large sum of money?

How do you celebrate special occasions such as birthdays, holidays? With whom do you celebrate?

Of the friends you have named, how many are also never-married?

Tell me about your leisure/creative activities.

SECTION G Sexual History

I would like to ask questions of a more personal nature now. They concern your sexual history. I want to remind you again about the confidential nature of the interview. If however, any of the questions seem too intimate, you need not answer.

Would you describe yourself as a sexually active woman?

Are you celibate?

At the present time, how would you describe your sexual orientation: Heterosexual? Bisexual? Lesbian?

Are you currently involved in a sexual relationship?

How do you meet sexual partners?

If you are not sexual, how do you satisfy your need for physical contact?

Are you satisfied with your sex life?

How is your sex life different now than when you were younger?

Do you feel that your age has any affect on your sex life?

How would you describe intimacy?

SECTION H Being Never Married

Why didn't you marry? Is a decision you made once and for all?

Could you tell me about other never-married women in your immediate or extended family.

What was the family "gossip" about them?

Do you prefer being single?

Can you tell me what you enjoy most about being single?

Enjoy least?

How do you cope with society's attitudes toward older single

Are you troubled about being alone as you grow older?

Can you describe times you have felt discriminated against because of your marital status.

Any regrets about having never married?

When do you most feel single? Certain occasions?

SECTION I Childlessness

Can you tell me about your reasons for not having children.

Are there other women in your family who have chosen not to have children?

Were you ever pregnant?

Would your family have disapproved of your being a single mother?

Are there things you regret about not having children?

Are there children in your life? Nieces, nephews, children of friends?

SECTION J Political Views

How would you describe your political views?

Are you a member of a political party?

Are you a member of any women's organization or group?

What policies specific to aging women do you think the provincial government/federal government should implement?

SECTION K Spirituality

Can you tell me something about the place of religion or spirituality in your life.

Do you share social activities with religious organizations?

SECTION L Conclusion

Women's lives vary so much that interview questions are unable to adequately portray her life. If there is something else you would like to say about yourself in order to provide a better understanding of never-married women, please do so.

Are there other questions you think I should have asked?

Is there anything you would say to younger women?

Why have you participated in this study?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM: An Exploratory Study of Never-Married
and Childless Women in Midlife

RESEARCHER/INTERVIEWER: Barbara M. Herringer: 876-7487

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I, _____, agree to be interviewed on audio tape for this study of never-married and childless women in midlife. I have been informed that the purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of this age group and that the interview is approximately two hours long.

I understand, that as a participant, my rights will not be jeopardized, that my privacy will be maintained and that the data obtained in this study will be used in a manner to maintain confidentiality and personal rights.

I have been told that the tape containing my interview will be indentifiable by age only, and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. I understand that the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the project.

I understand that I may interrupt the interview at anytime to ask for clarification. I am also aware that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Dated: _____

Signature of Participant

Dated: _____

Signature of Researcher

I have a received a copy of
this consent form.

Initials of Participant